LEADERSHIP AND THE RISK MANAGEMENT CONUNDRUM IN BOTSWANA'S PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The 21st century school leadership is increasingly challenged by the complex, inherent and residual nature of risks. This paper problematizes school leadership around risk and risk management stewardship. The purpose of the study was to examine school leadership perception of risk, current approaches to risk management, extent of vulnerability to risk, risk response techniques, risk-awareness culture and organisational risk maturity levels. A risk and vulnerability audit for 12 junior secondary school heads in Palapye and a national survey of 34 senior secondary school heads were conducted. Thematic analysis was applied to examine themes and emerging perspectives. From the results, school leadership demonstrated risk vulnerability, lack of a holistic approach, lack of a risk-awareness culture coupled with a risk naïve to risk novice maturity levels. This is in spite of the attempts made so far by the Ministry of Basic Education to manage risks. The paper concludes that, not only is the disposition to overly focus on certain risks too simplistic an abstraction but it is also deficient since it downplays the holistic approach to risk management. Unless checked, this oversight is bound to occasion an irreparable risk trap for the school leadership. The paper recommends a policy that makes provision for a holistic approach to risk management. Such a shift in thinking is envisioned to transform the school leadership and the basic education sector from risk vulnerability to risk resilience. Leadership thereof need to, as a first line of defence, espouse an organisational culture and philosophy which says, "Everybody is a risk manager" (Hopkin, 2012).

Key words

Risk, Risk management, Risk-awareness culture, Risk maturity, Vulnerability

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Introduction

''It is not acceptable to take risks unwittingly, the past practice of silo-based approaches for managing pockets of risk, leads to unclear responsibilities and lack of visibility, thereby exposing the organisation to uncertainty risk.'' – Paul Hopkin. (P. 37)

Global literature on risk and risk management demonstrates that the school leadership and schools themselves are nested with a multiplicity of risks. Presumably, the greatest risk that perhaps befalls the school leadership and the entire education sector in the 21st century is not risk occurrence or risk recurrence per se but rather risk management. Interestingly, Starr (2008) asserts that risk is not only something to be managed because the management of risk is getting increasingly riskier. To not concede to the risk management discourse as an emerging reality in Botswana's education system and relegate the topic to the 'undiscussable' (Starr, 2008) is therefore by no means least a risk in itself. In parallel, and contemporaneous with the risk management discourse, there is but one interesting challenge facing new research in the context of Botswana's basic education system and that is limited/and or lack of literature on risk and risk management.

For a novice, we first have to define risk and risk management as two mutually connected concepts before making an in-depth review of the two constructs. Hopkin (2012) has defined risk as an event with the ability to impact (inhibit/impede, enhance or cause doubt/uncertainty) the mission, strategy, projects, routine operations, objectives, core processes and the delivery of stakeholder expectations. Austega (undated) contextualises risk management as the identification of the school's risks, assessing their significance, and preparing for and treating those that are deemed significant in a measured professional manner.

From a holistic stance, we need not conceive of risks without embedding Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) in the operations of our educational spaces. A similar thought is unsparingly echoed by Kumin (2002) when asserting that since risks are an inescapable part of a school's operations, the challenge for the leadership squarely hinges on how best to manage risk, maximize opportunities and minimize harm. Relatedly, International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2015 (2016) and ISO 21001: 2018 (2018) standards introduce the concept of risk-based thinking as thinking that enables an organisation to determine the factors that could cause its processes and its quality management system to deviate from the planned results, to put in place preventive controls to minimize negative effects and to make maximum use of opportunities as they arise.

Risk management as a topical emerging discourse in many education cycles including Botswana is not without challenges. For example, the untimely occurrence and response to Corona Virus (COVID- 19) perfectly exemplifies that the risk management conundrum is not uncommon even in schools. The pandemic's occurrence signalled a harsh but equally needful message to Botswana's basic education leadership that a proactive, structured and holistic approach for managing current and future uncertainties is a must do. It is for this reason that

Starr (2008) perhaps argues that consideration of 'risk' in schools decades ago is very different from what currently confronts educational leaders. Prichard (2018) maintains a similar line of thinking when he conclusively argue that one armoury that is required by the 21st century leadership that is different from previous generations of leaders is the willingness and ability to embrace a culture of uncertainty.

Attempts have been made by the Ministry of Basic Education to introduce the concept of risk management through corruption risk and more recently through the response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In spite of this fact, this paper observes that responding to risks as and so when the situation demands poses two unintended challenges to the school leadership. First, failure to institutionalise a holistic approach to risk management creates risk vulnerability by exposing the school leadership to other unforeseen risky incidents. Secondly, such an oversight influences the school leadership to aversely focus on the downside of risk (hazard risk) and downplay the opportunities (opportunity risks) inherent in some risks (Kumin, 2002; Hopkin, 2012). Through results of the survey, the audit results and literature review such unintended challenges shall be discussed at length because over a continuum, they have seemingly created an immature and limited philosophy of risk-awareness culture (Hopkin, 2012) and risk-based thinking (ISO 9001:2015, 2016); ISO 21001: 2018, 2018); Beghetto, 2019; Eberts, (undated) in schools.

Seisa consultants (undated) have in relation to the education sector identified major risks affecting school heads in Botswana as governance (non-implementation of policies and directives), regulatory (non-compliance with statutory duties), financial (e.g payment after standard set time period, breach of procurement rules), people risk (recruitment, retention, mismatch) and educational negligence. Related to the latter, by utilizing the accountability model through a mixed approach methodology, Maphorisa (2019) introduces the concept of reputational risk as a phenomenon subtly occasioned by the continued declining school results in Botswana thus requiring some form of accountability by the school leadership. Hazard risks in the form of fire, disease outbreak and effects of climate change such as floods which are increasingly on the rise are also indicators of vulnerability that potentially put the school leadership and the learning spaces at risk in this age of uncertainty.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This paper draws on Hopkins (2012) risk management conceptual framework of Leadership, Involvement, Learning, Accountability and Communication (LILAC). First, commitment by leadership is very crucial since leadership is bestowed with the oversight role by providing strategic direction and tone setting in risk management. Hopkin (2012) and Kumin (2002) maintain that leadership can either be risk aggressive (upside of risk) by deliberately pursuing risks or risk averse (downside of risk) by presenting a low risk appetite. Secondly, there is need to involve the rest of the team for ownership purposes hence the organisational culture and philosophy which says "everybody is a risk manager" (Hopkin, 2012; Starr, 2008; Grosslight, 2010; Young (2000) in Spikin (2013). In the words of Zainudin et al. (2019), engaging employees to solicit their buy-in is critical as well as in

developing a positive risk culture. Thirdly, Hopkin's framework appreciates that learning by all involved is a cornerstone for managing risks and organisational growth. When all are involved and have learnt the processes, then all become accountable. This is what Hopkin (2012) has described as a no blame shift culture. It is only through a culture of accountability, in which it's clearly understood that risk identification and management is everyone's responsibility, can an organization truly meet its risk management and compliance commitments and deliver for its customers and shareholders (Grosslight, 2010)

Finally, the framework suggests that the efficacy of risk management depends much on communication that is equally effective, vertical and horizontal. When we are risk aware at work, we all attempt to minimize risk by communicating with each other, complying with applicable policies and procedures, and making decisions that avoid negative consequences (Minnesota Management and Budget, 2014). By embracing LILAC as a guidepost, embedding a risk-aware culture which enhances the risk maturity level of an organisation becomes a reality that we all envision.

Parallel to the LILAC framework, multiple theories surround perceptions and approaches to risk and risk management. In economics or the neoclassic economy, for example, people tend to be more risk averse if the magnitude of the risks would be large (Friedman and Savage, 1948 in Spikin, 2013). From a sociological perspective, risk is socially constructed and considered as a social problem hence its linkage with culture and society. This behavioural approach thus makes risk to be perceived as negative consequences of unwanted events (Beck, 1992 in Spikin, 2013; Kumin, 2002). Bialostok (2015) similarly argues that the social sciences assume a socio-cultural paradigm that examines how risks are socially constructed (as values, beliefs and perceptions) while natural sciences explain risk from an objectivist view point. Douglas (1982) in Bialostock (2015), Pidgeon et al. (1992) in Bodemer and Gaissmaier (2015) and Kasperson et al., (2003) in Bodemer and Gaissmaier (2015), emphasise the cultural theory by asserting that, what is culturally perceived as dangerous, and how much risk to accept, is a function of one's cultural adherence and social learning.

Purpose & Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine school leadership perception of risk in relation to existing theoretical frameworks, current approaches to risk management, extent of vulnerability to risk, risk response techniques, extent of embedding a risk-awareness culture and level of risk maturity within a school setup. The paper also demonstrates that a disposition that limits risk management to certain prescribed risks thwarts the intensions espoused by the holistic approach to risk management.

The results of the study could be used by the Ministry of Basic Education authorities to review the currently used piece meal approach to risk management. This would inform the ministry to develop a risk management policy (as defined by the risk appetite) which is more

holistic and proactive than reactive, with the latter compromising continuity in driving strategic objectives. In this way, a more transformative praxis in which leadership vulnerability is turned into a risk resilient leadership with a strong risk quality culture will be fully actualised.

Literature Review

A community of scholars understand and approach risk and risk management from different dimensions. Lam, (2003) in Spikin (2013) identifies two main approaches to risk management as the traditional or "silo" based approach and the comprehensive (holistic) or Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) approach. The former, according to Lam (2003) in Spikin (2013), focuses more on controlling or treating pockets of risks that seem to threaten particular units thus neglecting all types of risk that an organisation might face hence a "defensive" approach than a proactive approach. Interestingly and in the view of the researcher, the tendency to focus on the "silo' based approach is observable in Botswana's basic education system's approach. Literature available has not substantively provided empirical evidence to expand our knowledge base on this discourse. Pavodani and Tugnoli (2005) in Spikin, (2013) have concluded that the traditional approach to risk management is fragmented, reactive, focused on threats, discontinuous, functional and based on costs, while the comprehensive approach is integrated, proactive, focused on threats and opportunities, continuous and characterized by a logic process. The response to Covid-19 pandemic is quite indicative of this traditional approach in the basic education system since its occurrence further downplayed the holistic approach.

Kapoor (2019) states that another integral part of how to approach risks lies in a good or effective business continuity management programme. With the closure of schools in Botswana during the Covid-19 pandemic, school administrators were receiving significant pressure from all stakeholders to continue business as usual (Unicef for every child, 2020). It is the view of the researcher that, deeply rooted as it is, the silo based approach continues to downplay the holistic approach regardless of lessons learnt from COVID-19 hence this study. Responding to risk occurrence is very critical in risk management. Hopkin (2012), Knight (2005) in Spikin (2013) and Beasly et al. (2012), outline risk response options as tolerance/retention, treat/reduce, transfer and terminate/avoid which mainly apply to hazard risks. The school leadership lacks full understanding of how to apply these risk response techniques and this can further create other unintended risks.

According to *Glatfelter Public Practice* (2018), **s**chool administrators continue to view risk management as an ancillary activity to the strategic management of a school district. Beasley et al. (2012) assert that organizations still find it difficult to understand and differentiate ERM from the traditional approach, let alone what an effective ERM entails. The logic put forth here is that such organisations, with their ad hoc risk management practices, do not fully appreciate the value proposition inherent in ERM until a major risk event occurs. Such a wait and see attitude is suicidal to the achievement of strategic objectives hence the study puts the leader at the prime position in cultivating a culture of

quality risk management. It is the view of the researcher that In-service training for school leadership is not sufficient for an emerging discourse like risk management; what matters most is the inclusion of risk management modules in leadership and management courses.
Invariably, recent literature is awash with the fact that risks can either be hazard, opportunity or uncertainty. Proponents of the holistic approach argue that the risk management process should be approached from both "upside" and "downside" risk, and considering risk in the context of strategy (Kumin, 2002; Chapman and Wiley, 2003; Morphy, 2008; Guide to Risk Assessment and Response, 2012; Victorian Department of Education and Training/DET, 2016; BOS ISO 9001:2015, 2016). The downside of risk, which has perhaps dominated the organisational culture, is closely linked with hazard risks and low risk appetite thus perpetuating risk averse tendencies while the upside of risk augers well with opportunity risk and high risk appetite hence risk aggressive attitude (Kumin, 2002; Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; Hopkins, 2012). There is still an unexplored area in research to show how the school leadership approaches risk given the social and technical contexts of risk. Whether the school leadership is risk averse or risk aggressive remains a challenge and this area is of particular interest to the researcher. A number of factors contribute to low risk appetite and/or risk tolerance by school principals. Barth (200) in Starr (2008) has described such a situation not only as a pervasive 'culture of 'caution' but also as a "pathological" culture that is being exercised to unreasonable lengths.

People's perceptions about risk are different depending on context. For example, Slovic (1987) in Bodemer and Gaissmaier (2015) has introduced what he terms the psychometric paradigm in which psychophysical scaling and multivariate techniques were applied to explain people's reactions to hazards. While Slovic (1987) in Schmidt, (2004) describes the psychometric paradigm as the most influential model in risk perception on the assumption that risks are quantifiable, predictable and judged similarly by different people, he concludes that risks should not only be perceived from a technical approach but also from our psychological, social and cultural context. Through this paradigm, Slovic (1993) in Schmidt (2004) observed that, from a qualitative perspective, people tend to accept risks that are voluntarily chosen even if those risks are approximately 1000 times as risky as accepted involuntary risks. Of particular interest in these findings is the fact that Slovic (1993) in Schmidt (2004) argues that risks perceived to be under one`s own control are more acceptable than risks perceived to be controlled by others. Because of the silo based approach, the researcher assumes that risk management in basic education is external than internal to the institution. Such a stance however should not be taken advantage of by the school leadership as a scapegoat for failure to take and manage risks internally. Risk perception is closely tied to risk tolerance and risk appetite. In this connection, eliminating risks completely and assuming a "zero risk" approach would be practically impossible (Kumin, 2002; Habegger, 2008 in Spikin, 2013; Hopkin, 2012). As correctly put by Drennan and McConnell, (2007) and Habegger, (2008) in Spikin (2013), eliminating all risks may not even be desirable, as risks often incorporate an (undetected) opportunity and to take risks might be an important driver of innovation, economic growth, and social progress.

Sources of risk vulnerability are varied in terms of literature. Bialostock (2015) for example asserts that re-embedding the analysis of risk into education is crucial since the discourses of risk are produced by and woven into the fabric of schools. In his view, risk lives in and through educators, students, and the policies that govern them at local and national levels. From corporate governance, the greatest risk factor according to Borgelt and Falk (2007) facing business today is not financial or credit risk but rather one of *reputational* risk: that is, any threat of an event that could damage a company's reputation. In educational contexts, and as a point of departure, it is the author's view that the greatest risk is not risk occurrence but rather risk management simply because risks cannot be avoided completely. This stance should however not be misconstrued to mean that institutional reputation is not at stake; as long as we are proactive the severity of the impact can be reduced to best tolerable levels.

Starr (2008) demonstrates school leadership vulnerability to risk by attributing a failing school to a failing principal. Such a situation has been referred to by Ball (2005) in Starr (2008) as being a symptom of a culture of 'performativity'; a situation in which performance is derailed by the anxiety of measurement or judgement. Interestingly, Starr (2008) has massively contributed to the world of scholarship with a provoking but topical discourse in what she calls the 'undiscussable' with regards to school leadership and the risk management conundrum. Starr (2008) problematises the school leadership around the notion of 'risk' by arguing that while it is quite evident that the school principals are at risk, leaders themselves are in fact a risk too. Labelling a school leader as a risk (when the "dark side" of leadership prevails) according to Starr (2008) is an undiscussable issue to date or is a new kind of 'trait theory' in the field of leadership simply because it appears to be a less common topic for discussion though it exacerbates risks in education. If leadership is the source of risk, it is risky then for a risk to manage another risk. On the whole, it would be of interest to demonstrate leadership vulnerability qualitatively or quantitatively by means of a risk matrix.

Risk awareness culture is the pinnacle of any organisational risk maturity level. A risk awareness culture mirrors Hopkin's (2012) LILAC conceptual framework which forms the basis of this study notwithstanding other multiple theories of risk discussed therewith. Beasley et al. (2012) and Hopkin (2012) maintain that the cultivation of an appropriate, "risk-aware" culture is paramount to effective ERM practices. To build a risk aware organisation, there is need to invest in risk awareness and management programmes and work toward creating a transparent culture (Kapoor, 2019). The researcher argues that such awareness should be complemented with understanding so that non-conformities are detected and eliminated proactively in a more structured manner. The fundamental responsibility of leadership is the creation of a strong effective and proactive quality culture of risk management in the organization (Richter, 2015). Correspondingly, Ashby et al. (2018) argues that an organisation's culture shapes the way people within the organisation behave and communicate with each other. Parallel to this understanding, Grosslight (2010), maintains that a culture of accountability is a critical step for ensuring that every employee understands the potential risks that cross their desk and how best to manage them.

A qualitative study by Stroh (2005) in Zainudin et al. (2019) conducted for his healthcare company for example, revealed that top management; risk ownership; risk-aware culture; and, communication are the main factors that support risk management. Zainudin et al. (2019) conclude that determinants factors of risk-aware culture are top management support (involvement), Culture (accountability, communication, involvement and a common risk language), training (knowledge) and strategy, that is, policy and processes. Senior leadership is not just accountable for risk management decisions but also for approving an appropriate communication plan for reporting of risk, both vertically and horizontally across the organization (Richter, 2015). Farrar (2017) argues that communication is a risk mitigation strategy or control that can avoid many-many of the risks and incidents that organisations face. While Oznacar (2018) observes that headmasters and their deputies are aware of risk management, this particular study posits that the description of awareness sounds relative and misleading in that even immature cultures see themselves having 'awareness' on risk management. Hence awareness may sometimes be used loosely in principle while in praxis tangible implementation of the risk management program is lacking.

Risk maturity level according to Hopkin (2012) is about managing risks as opposed to the size of the organisation. Hence, risk maturity level is not directly dependent on the size of the organization. In an immature organisation, informal risk management practices will take place and there is likely to be a blame culture as well as a potential lack of accountability for risk (Hopkin, 2012). Organisations which are at their embryonic stage with regards to risk-awareness culture and their level of maturity are risk naive. At this stage, organisations are unaware of the need for the management of risk, have unstructured approaches to dealing with uncertainty and are reactive with insufficient attempt to learn from the past or to prepare for future threats or uncertainties (Hopkin, 2012). At level two, organisations are risk novice and they are aware of the potential benefits of managing risks, but have not implemented risk processes effectively (Hopkin, 2012). According to Hopkin (2012) when organisations have embedded risk management practices into routine business processes and are able to implement risk management throughout the organisation they are risk normalised. At level four, organisations have a risk-aware culture with a proactive approach to risk management in all activities and they are risk natural (Hopkin, 2012). Risk information is actively used and communicated to improve processes and gain competitive advantage.

Beasley et al. (2012) point out that many organisations' risk management processes remain fairly immature and lack structure and formality. On the basis of a company case study focusing on how to evaluate risk management maturity, Beasly et al. (2012) observed that those organisations in the "Just Getting Started" stage of ERM should be encouraged to start their journey to maturity by focusing on "Risk Culture" to ensure that senior management's support of ERM is in place. In this study, a quantitative technique has been employed by means of a survey to determine the level of risk maturity for the schools within the risk maturity lifecycle or continuum.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed method-design, (quantitative and qualitative approaches to research) with the latter being more descriptive in nature using both primary and secondary data sources. A mixed method-design according to Maimela and Monyatsi (2016) allows the researcher to triangulate data and draw consistency of findings. The population was surveyed by means of a questionnaire through telephone and email. A self-completion questionnaire was developed and distributed using purposive sampling technique to senior secondary school heads in Botswana to determine their perceptions on risk management. Two parallel but contextually related studies configure this paper. First, a risk and vulnerability audit conducted in 2018 for twelve (12) junior secondary school heads in Palapye out of 209 nationally provides baseline data on risk and risk management. Secondly, and in the main, the paper utilizes descriptive survey conducted for thirty four (34) senior secondary school heads in Botswana in 2020 for 9 out of 10 regions thus providing a spatially broader lens on risk management. Self-completion questionnaires were developed from six sub themes namely leadership perception of risk, leadership approach to risk management, leadership vulnerability to risk, risk response, risk awareness culture and risk maturity. From a quantitative and evaluative stance, the results of the paper shall deduce if the two sets of studies were little or highly correlated. Literature was reviewed including school inspection reports from 2014 to 2019 which were randomly sampled from junior and senior secondary schools (19 in total) and analysed to check if risk management policies, plans and registers were in place.

Research Design

This particular study is a combination of three different research designs: survey design, case study design and comparative design (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010). The 2020 national survey was preceded by the 2018 case study audit to provide a comparative analysis of risk management in secondary schools.

The Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised all the thirty four (34) school heads from senior secondary schools nationally. For purposes of comparative analysis, the study is also guided by utilizing the results of an audit conducted for twelve (12) junior secondary schools in 2018 in Palapye.

Sampling Technique

The sampling procedure technically and purposively targeted 34 school heads so that the sample size covers all the senior schools in Botswana. The sampling technique was informed by the fact that school heads as leaders of institutions directly provide oversight and strategic direction in risk management. Preceding this survey was an audit targeting all the 12 junior secondary school heads in Palapye. Technically, the approach on sampling was meant to establish any positive correlation between the two studies. The survey study used non

probability sampling technique while the audit study used probability sampling technique. It was not possible to conduct non probability sampling for the junior secondary schools considering the number, time, accessibility and effort needed to do the sample (Daniel and Bernyuy, 2010) while non-probability sampling sufficed for senior secondary schools because they are only 34 nationally.

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected from the thirty four (34) senior secondary schools by means of a questionnaire in 2020. Due to the vastness of the country, the researcher first contacted respondents telephonically to make arrangements of emailing the questionnaire. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to cover a wider space within a short time without incurring transport and other logistical costs. Documentary study was another data collection method used by referring to sampled inspection reports. An audit using a self-administered questionnaire was also conducted in 2018 for the same study targeting twelve (12) junior secondary school heads within the Palapye Inspectoral area to gauge their understanding of risk management processes. Both close ended and open ended questions were used.

Data Analysis

Following the survey, quantitative data was cleaned (Tabulawa et al. 2013) and a spreadsheet with coded items was created to facilitate the entry of data. The research process was validated by means of triangulating the survey data and the audit data.

Validity & Reliability of Instruments

The validity and reliability of data collection instruments (questionnaires) was pre-tested in 2018 through a random sampling of six school heads (3 junior and 3 senior secondary schools). Sample questions used were responded to with relative ease. It was for this reason that this study depended on the same sample questions with minor modifications.

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics were followed to the latter in this paper. Data collection instruments were designed and tested before they were dispatched to respondents. The procedure followed was that permission to conduct research was sought through the regional directors in the nine regions having senior secondary schools. The researcher then engaged school heads telephonically before emailing them copies of the permission letter and the questionnaire. Respondents were assured of the aspect for confidentiality in the whole exercise.

Findings and Discussions

Findings of this paper are substantively and directly informed by the results of the 2018 risk and vulnerability audit conducted for twelve (12) junior secondary school heads falling within one Inspectoral area in Palapye coupled with the twenty four (24) of the thirty

four (34) senior secondary school heads from the 2020 national survey. The 2018 audit findings and the outcome of the 2020 survey were highly correlated since the sampling techniques similarly and purposively targeted the school heads though at different levels. Sampled inspection reports and literature review have also provided objective evidence to buttress the position of this paper.

Leadership perception of risk

From the 2020 survey, 17 out of 24 (70.8%) senior secondary school heads perceived risks as hazard, 15 (62.5%) saw them as an opportunity and 14 (58.3%) saw them as uncertainty. In parallel, 13 school heads (54.2%) showed a high risk appetite or willingness to take risks while 11 (45.8%) either showed a low risk appetite or were uncertain of their risk appetite. The 2018 Audit findings revealed that 12 out of 12 (100%) junior secondary school heads perceived risks as purely a hazard. This buttresses the point that from a behavioural approach, since schools operate as social learning spaces, risks are socially constructed as negative (Beck, 1992 in Spikin, 2013; Kumin, 2002). Because they are not taken voluntarily and are perceived as external to the school leadership in terms of control, they are not tolerated or lowly accounted for. Despite these varying perceptions on risk, the knowledge possessed by the school leadership however does not directly correlate with the understanding of how best to manage risks, maximise opportunities and minimize harm as observed by Kumin (2002) and ISO 9001:2015 (2016). Creating a culture of risk-based thinking (ISO 9001: 2016); Harper, 2018; Beghetto, 2018; Eberts, undated) is therefore important in education.

Leadership approach to risk management

The findings of the 2020 survey have revealed that 11 out of 24 (45.8%) of the school heads did not manage risks holistically in their schools, 7 (29.2%) were uncertain while 6 (25%) confirmed that their approach was holistic. Results of the 2018 audit of 12 junior secondary schools also revealed the same trend since all the 12 (100%) school heads had an approach limited to corruption risk management. In praxis, if embraced, the approach employed was piecemeal, prescriptive, immature, unstructured, reactive, limited in scope and accidentally implemented in the wake of multiple risks and uncertainties. Pavodani and Tugnoli (2005) in Spikin, (2013) concur with this observation. In fact the approach dictated that in the case of hazard risks, ‘hazards only became hazards’ because they have occurred, otherwise they were not proactively and holistically managed.

When asked if they would propose a holistic approach to risk management, 91.7% of the senior school heads and 100% of the junior school heads confirmed so. Such feedback confirms that the school leadership appreciate the challenges presented by the silo based approach which is limited to pockets of risks. According to Kumin (2002), Chapman and Wiley (2003) and Morphy (2008), without diminishing the importance of hazards and uncertainties, school leaders should not lose sight of the full spectrum of risk, including the

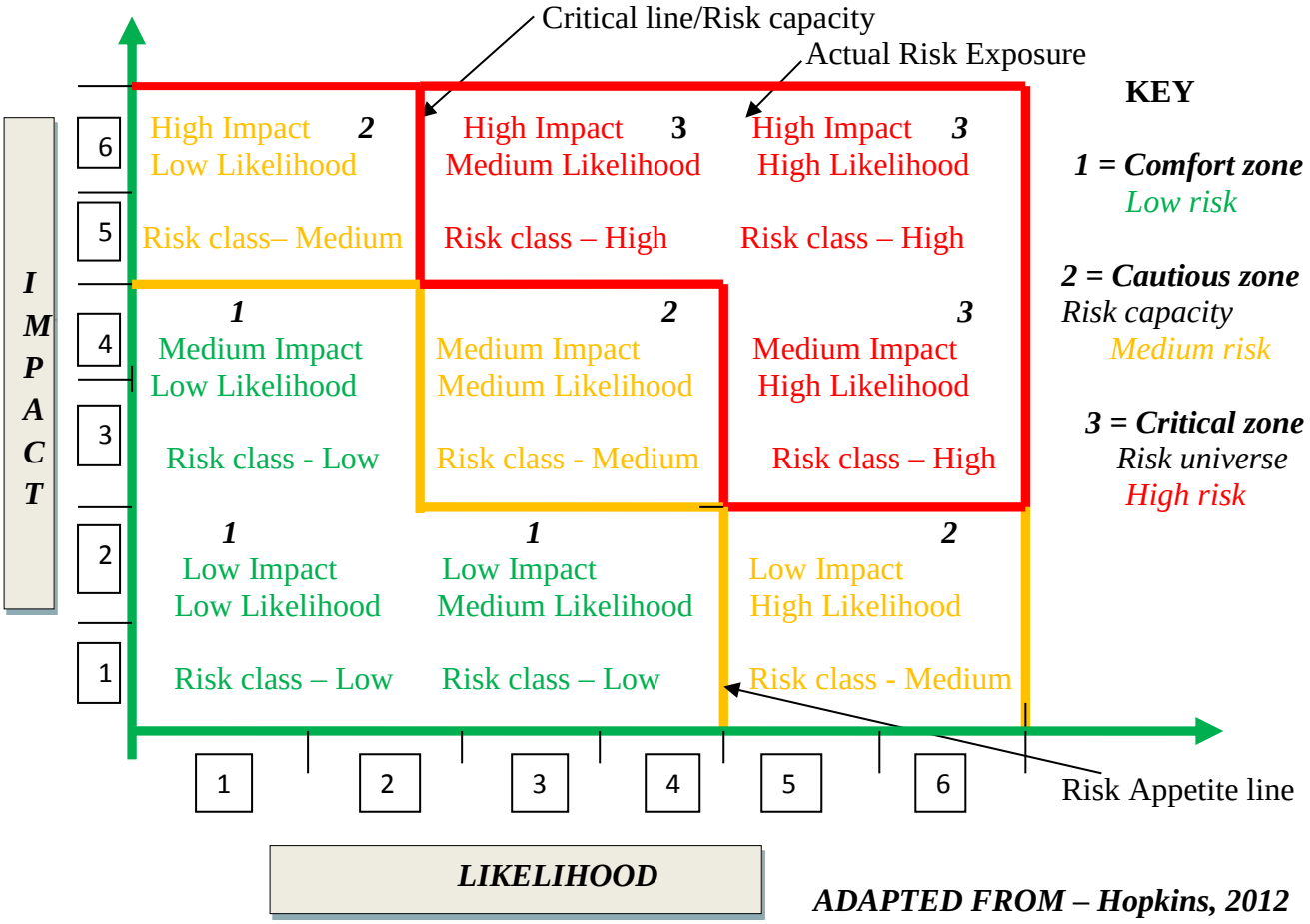
opportunities that risk presents and the benefits of accepting certain risks in a well-managed program. If leadership cannot understand risks beyond what the system prescribes, then the approach is deficient.

Leadership Vulnerability & Risk Response

This section of the paper attempts to demonstrate the extent at which the school leadership is vulnerable to risks and how the same leadership is able to control those risks using appropriate risk response techniques. Furthermore, the section shall show whether the leadership of the schools subscribe to the notion that leaders can themselves be a risk to the schools thus compromising intensions of risk management from a strategic stance.

Vulnerability refers to the level of exposure to the impact of hazard risks. The vulnerability of organisations to risk can be established qualitatively or quantitatively through a department's risk assessment methodology (Hopkin, 2012). According to Hopkin, hazard risks are measured in terms of likelihood (probability of occurrence) and impact (magnitude/severity) using a risk matrix. This particular study used the qualitative technique to determine the school leadership vulnerability to risk.

Fig. 1 - A risk matrix showing risk classification and leadership vulnerability



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From the 2020 national survey, 87.5% of the school heads were of the view that they were highly vulnerable to risks. For example, 79.2% indicated their exposure to chemical hazards caused by the presence of expired chemicals. Furthermore, 62.5% had not developed and documented a chemical management plan while only 20.8% had done so and the remaining 16.7% were uncertain. The results of the 2018 risk and vulnerability audit for 12 junior schools further validated the results of this study. From the findings, 91.6% confirmed their vulnerability to hazard risks as evidenced by the presence of chemicals while only 1 8.3% did not show indication of exposure to the impact of hazards. Thus, duty of care that is bestowed with the school leadership was lacking and this highly compromised learner safety.

The level of vulnerability was also heightened by the fact that chemicals in laboratories were not sorted according to type, packaged and disposed through proper disposal methods. All the 12 junior schools (100%) confirmed that there were no chemical management plans and inventories developed, documented, implemented and maintained for continual improvement. In spite of the looming hazard in the form of fire outbreaks, the schools had not established, documented and implemented evacuation procedures to either mitigate the severity of the impact of the disaster risk or limit their vulnerability to the same. Surprisingly, management of these chemicals was within the control of the leadership except for disposal but still the leadership adopted the wait and see attitude.

From a different dimension, nineteen (19) sampled secondary school inspection reports covering nine (9) out of the ten (10) Ministry of Basic education regions were analysed. From this total, 12 of the reports were for junior secondary schools and 7 were for senior secondary schools. An analysis of these reports showed that Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) programmes were 100% highly ineffective since no procedure was established, documented, implemented and maintained for continual improvement (Inspection Reports, 2014 – 2019). This situation left schools vulnerable to health and safety challenges. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, issues of health and safety seem to have taken a different path in the education sector as evidenced by operational guidelines developed in 2020 to track compliance (Unicef for every child, 2020) and appointment of temporary SHE officers. Nevertheless, whether lessons learnt will activate a continuity plan for the same or not remains a future topical discourse.

Because of this exposure to high risk, school leadership can therefore be classified in what is known as a critical zone as per the provided risk matrix (**Fig.1**). Any risk above the risk capacity is not within tolerable levels hence it requires proactive, timely and emergency response strategies. The dominant response for this critical zone according to Hopkin (2012) will be to take preventive than corrective measures to terminate or circumvent the risk since both the likelihood of occurrence and the potential impact of the risk are high. From the results of the 2020 survey, 66.7% of the 24 school heads indicated that they accepted or tolerated risks, 50% said they preferred transferring risks while 50% said they would prefer

avoiding/eliminating risks. In principle, the school leadership demonstrated risk tolerance though in practice the tendency was usually that risks were mainly transferred to the third party hence externalising them. Thus, schools sometimes sit on risks not because they tolerate them but because they lack risk control techniques since they don't know whether to be preventive (terminate), corrective (treat), detective (tolerate) or directive (transfer), (Hopkin, 2012).

Results have also indicated that 83.3% of the school heads were reactive than proactive to risks. Preventive action is action taken to eliminate the cause of a potential nonconformity or other potentially undesirable situation while corrective action is action taken to eliminate the cause of a detected nonconformity or other undesirable situation (ISO 9001:2008, 2009; ISO 21001: 2018, 2018). Given the above scenario, the greatest risk to the school leadership seems not to be risk occurrence, which is unavoidable, but rather risk management. On whether the school leadership can itself be a risk, Starr (2008) provokes a deliberate discourse in what she calls the 'undiscussable', that is when the leadership itself proves to be a risk but we deliberately remain coy about the same. Starr argues that in the wake of the 'undiscussable' practices, there is a high possibility of the unintended risks arising. Asked about this 'undiscussable', 79.2% of the school heads said the leadership itself can be a risk to the organisation. Given this observation, the big question is, if leaders are a risk themselves how possible can a risk manage another risk? Unless the 'undiscussable' becomes discussable, risk management cannot be well embraced in schools since leadership is necessary for driving the strategic objectives.

Risk awareness culture

According to Cunliffe (2006) in Buchanan and Huczynski (2010), Organisational culture shapes the image that the public has of an organization, influences organizational performance, provides direction for the company and helps attract and retain motivated staff. In principle 83.3% of the school heads from the survey indicated that they knew what risk management was though in praxis failure to implement the same not only presented a risk management conundrum but also presented a risk management paradox. Creating an internal culture that promotes risk management can however be quite challenging as demonstrated by schools failing to implement inspection recommendations on developing risk management plans in the context of Botswana. Thus, embedding a risk-aware culture is not only about what people think and say but also about what people do, their "behaviour" and attitude in relation to risk (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010).

Measuring risk culture can be difficult for an organisation. Two commonly used methods according to Hopkin (2012) are the use of audits to evaluate the level of risk assurance and considering the level of risk maturity. For this particular study, the two approaches were also used to measure the institutional risk-awareness culture as evidenced by the 2018 audit of 12 junior schools, sampling of inspection reports for both junior and senior

secondary schools from 2014 to 2019 and an evaluation of the risk maturity levels of schools through the survey. Regardless of the school audits conducted since 2014 with recommendations for schools to improve on their risk management programmes, little or no impact has been made to change organisational culture. Similarly, Hopkin (2012) argues that a more aggressive internal audit programme may improve compliance to standards, but that does not guarantee that the risk culture of the organisation has been enhanced.

A risk-awareness culture is achieved through Leadership, Involvement, Learning, Accountability and Communication as captured by this paper's conceptual framework. Making a culture shift to risk awareness begins first with the words and actions of top management. Leaders must show a true commitment and passion for good risk management. At the strategic level, the school's leadership sets expectations for how risk fits into the school's mission and goals (Kumin, 2002).

On the question of whether everybody played their role in managing risks at senior secondary school level, 58.3% of the school heads confirmed to the contrary while only 16.7% confirmed to the affirmative with the remaining 25% being uncertain. The 2018 audit observed almost the same trend since 100% of the school heads could not confirm involvement by all in managing institutional risks. This situation compromised the Hopkin (2012) philosophy that everybody is a risk manager as espoused by the LILAC conceptual framework. Adequate risk training will enhance the risk aware-culture of the organisation. For the 2018 audit study, 100% of the school heads lacked training and could not confirm that their schools were fully aware of risk management holistically. For the 2020 survey, 79.2% of the senior school heads did not receive any training on risk management and 20.8% had received a limited dose on risk management as part of their leadership and management training. Asked if risk management should be mainstreamed in leadership and management courses, 100% of the school heads across confirmed to the same. On justifying as to why they thought risk management should be integrated into leadership and management courses, responses from some school heads were as follows;

"Where there is life there are risks so risk management need to become an inherent and integral part of management".

"Leaders need necessary skills to avoid being reactive and costing the department a lot of money in trying to correct the mistakes that could have been avoided".

"To enhance the capacity of management team to be able to identify potential hazards and take appropriate steps to control levels of risks"

Accountability according to Hopkin (2012) means absence of an automatic blame culture, but appropriate accountability for actions. From the 2020 survey results, 75% of the school heads confirmed that they were accounting officers for risk management while 83.3% of the school heads for the 2018 audit confirmed the same though nothing substantive was available. Inspection reports revealed the contrary. Furthermore, 8.3% indicated that the school community was fully aware of risk management holistically, 29.2% were uncertain

while 62.5% did not confirm such awareness thus communication on risk management was not effective. At the heart of communication lies the leadership. These results clearly indicate that the leadership did not have any risk communication plans to allow the flow of information either vertically or horizontally for proactive identification, assessment and management of risks. The absence of the right quality culture of risk management was hence a concern and as Ashby et al. (2018) put it, an organisation's culture shapes the way people within the organisation behave and communicate with each other. On the whole, LILAC was not evident since 100% of the school leadership was not implementing the framework hence lack of a risk-awareness culture.

Risk Maturity

According to Hopkin (2012), organisations undergo four stages of growth in their risk maturity life cycle namely risk naïve, risk novice, risk normalised, risk natural. From the 2020 survey, 100%) of the school heads confirmed an unstructured and reactive approach to risk management hence their maturity level was risk naïve. Similarly, 100% of the junior schools showed a risk naïve culture. From the two sets of studies, it came out clearly that all the schools (100%) lacked a sound risk management policy, risk management plan, risk register, risk management committee and/or a business continuity Plan (Hopkin, 2012). For example, 95.8% of the 24 school heads for the 2020 survey indicated that there was no evidence of a documented risk management policy, 75% could not confirm if risk assessment was regularly conducted for the identification of risks, 70.8% had not developed risk registers, 83.3% indicated that risk reporting was not part of the school's culture for review and planning for the future, 87.5% didn't have any documented risk management plan in place and as such risk management plan was neither implemented nor maintained for continual improvement.

The School inspection reports (2014 – 2019) also indicated that 100% of the secondary schools sampled had not developed risk management policies, plans and registers in spite of their exposure to a number of risks. While 58.3% at senior school level confirmed that in case of risk occurrence they could continue with their normal operations, it was quite evident that their capacity to respond would not meet the demands of risk reduction. Only 12.5% indicated their failure to continue with their normal operations while 29.2% were uncertain with what would happen thus adopting the wait and see attitude. The researcher concludes that school leadership was moving towards risk novice in the risk maturity continuum since majority of them were aware of risks though processes of risk management were not effectively implemented. Beasly et al. (2012 advises that those organisations at the initial stage in the risk maturity continuum should start off by focusing on building the right culture to enhance their maturity levels. Such culture however requires commitment and training of top management.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2018 audit study, 2020 national survey and inspection reports (2014-2029) indicate that risk management is not so well embraced from a holistic stance by the school leadership, let alone the education sector as a whole. The little knowledge is only limited to corruption risk which has seemingly been misconstrued to substitute the holistic approach to risk management. In praxis, if embraced, the approach employed has proved to be piecemeal, prescriptive, immature, unstructured, reactive, limited in scope and accidentally implemented in the wake of multiple risks and uncertainties. This has and continues to perpetuate some leadership and management gaps. Thus, the greatest risk facing the school leadership is not risk occurrence but rather risk management. It is observable that risk is socially constructed since it is mainly perceived from the downside and evidence indicates that the level of exposure of school leadership to vulnerability is high due to a number of factors identified by this study.

Invariably, risk-based thinking (ISO 9001:2015, 2016; ISO 21001: 2018, 2018; Beghetto, 2019; Eberts, undated) is lacking in schools. While the school leadership fairly appreciates risks from both dimensions, that is the upside and downside, there is virtually nothing to show that the same leadership has so far deliberately and aggressively pursued risks to enhance the achievement of strategic objectives. It is also evident from the study that existing school cultures lack total risk-awareness and a sound philosophy that says everybody is a risk manager. This has defined and relegated the school leadership to the status of risk naive to risk novice in terms of their risk maturity level (Hopkin, 2012). Failure to effectively embed such a risk-aware culture has been attributed to a larger extent to lack of a holistic risk management policy and relevant training.

In terms of risk response, the leadership is so far corrective than preventive in its approach thus escalating the level of vulnerability and compromising resilience. A self-assessment and external assessment of the school leadership on whether they are at risk or they are a potential risk themselves is a must do. To not do so and relegate this topic to the 'undiscussable' appears to be a risky strategy as put by Starr (2008). On the whole, Hopkin (2012) conceptual framework of Leadership, Involvement, Learning, Accountability and Communication is not yet fully mainstreamed in the education sector though it is needful to operationalize and actualise its maturity in the not so distant future.

On the basis of the foregoing, it is recommended that the Ministry review its risk management policy which is limited to corruption risk management. A holistic policy which gives provision for the embedding of a holistic risk-aware culture to promote a risk resilient school leadership should thereto be drawn. Risk management as a cross cutting issue requires that a training module be included in leadership and management courses for purposes of up-scaling or retooling the school leadership.

Limitations

The only major limitation experienced was that responses were delayed and the occurrence of COVID-19 further derailed respondents from giving timely feedback. The researcher had to make repeated calls to track respondents. The researcher would have also loved to conduct face to face interview as a way of triangulating data and establish consistency but could not due to time constraints and observation of COVID-19 protocols in particular the clause limiting unnecessary movements between the gazetted zones. Questionnaires were designed and sent to respondents long before the occurrence of Covid-19 pandemic, otherwise it would have been interesting to collect data in the middle of this risk to appreciate the type of responses. While all the 12 (100%) school heads responded for the audit study only 24 out of 34 school heads (70.6%) responded to the questionnaire for the 2020 survey. The results of the two sampling techniques were highly correlated although there was an element of overgeneralization in the audit study due to a very small sample size.

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