SCHOOL LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT
2026, VOL. 46, NO. 2, 246–270
ISSN: 1363-2434 | E-SSN: 1364-2626

OPEN ACCESS

Leading organisational change in a catholic school community

Sean P. Kearney[a] and Stephen Gough[b]

[a]Faculty of Education and Philosophy & Theology, University of Notre Dame, Sydney Campus, Australia; [b]Edmund Rice College, Wollongong, Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the leadership dynamics of a large-scale amalgamation between two Catholic schools in Australia, using Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model as the primary evaluative framework. Drawing on a mixed-methods case study, which includes stakeholder surveys, principal journals, and meeting minutes, the research explores how school leaders navigated structural reform, cultural integration, and stakeholder resistance within a faith-based context. Findings reveal that while external perceptions of the amalgamation were largely positive, internal challenges such as change fatigue, inconsistent policy enforcement, and unclear role expectations persisted. The study highlights the need to complement Kotter's structured approach with adaptive, distributed leadership models and symbolic strategies that reflect the theological and cultural dimensions of Catholic schooling. The paper critiques the limitations of linear change models through the lens of, Spillane, Lewin, and Bolman & Deal. It underscores the importance of iterative planning, stakeholder empowerment, and professional development in sustaining reform. Recommendations include enhancing communication consistency, aligning structural and cultural goals, and embedding student and teacher voices in change processes. The paper offers practical insights for educational leaders managing faith-based amalgamations, contributing to the broader discourse on organisational change and school leadership within complex, values-driven environments.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 19 May 2025
Accepted 6 February 2026

KEYWORDS
Organisational change; Educational leadership; Catholic education; School amalgamation

Introduction

Educational change is widely recognised as a complex and demanding process, particularly within schools that hold deeply embedded institutional cultures (Elmore 2016; Fullan 2007). Large-scale reform in education is rarely linear,

especially where identity, tradition, and governance intersect. In Catholic school contexts, leaders must reconcile the structural and administrative requirements of reform with the deeper challenges of maintaining charism, equity, and community trust. Amalgamations of Catholic schools bring these tensions to the surface, as they require leaders to unite distinct communities, harmonise policies and practices, and preserve the values and traditions that define each school's identity.

This study examines leadership in a two-school Catholic amalgamation in New South Wales, exploring how direction, culture, and structure were aligned during the first operational year. Kotter's (1996) Eight-Step Model provides a retrospective scaffold for interpreting the sequence of change. Alongside this, the study draws on Fullan's (2001) concept of reculturing, Spillane's (2006) theory of distributed leadership, Lewin's (1947) model of change rhythm, and Bolman and Deal's (2017) multi-frame analysis to illuminate the adaptive, cultural, and symbolic work that accompanied structural reform. The central question is how visible momentum was translated into durable routines and where linear sequencing proved insufficient in a complex, values-based environment.

The study has three main aims. First, it assesses the relevance and limitations of Kotter's model when applied to faith-based school reform. Second, it examines how adaptive and distributed perspectives help to explain variation in the enactment of change across different leadership levels and school sites. Third, it introduces an Iterative Change Cycle (ICC) that emerged during the reform, providing a short, repeating cadence of sense-making, planning, action, and reflection. The ICC offers a practical mechanism for feedback and stabilisation that supports ongoing learning and improvement while maintaining transparency and trust within the community.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives within a single empirical case, the paper contributes to understanding how technical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of leadership interact in Catholic school reform. It also situates faith-based leadership within the broader literature on educational change, showing how the dynamics of meaning, belonging, and identity amplify the universal tensions between innovation and stability, direction and participation, and policy and practice.

Literature

Educational institutions often resist change because traditions, structures, and norms are deeply embedded and slow to shift (Lomba-Portela, López-Íñiguez, and Pozo 2022). Resistance is not only behavioural. It also has emotional and cognitive dimensions that reflect uncertainty and perceived loss (Oreg 2006). In schools, these reactions are often tied to teachers' professional identity and autonomy, especially when reforms are externally driven or misaligned with

pedagogical values (Evans 1996). Even evidence-based initiatives can falter when leaders overlook school culture and educator voice (Datnow and Castellano 2000). Reform is frequently framed as necessary for student outcomes, yet many large programmes struggle because leadership, stakeholder acceptance, and system alignment do not keep pace with the demands of change (Aldridge and McLure 2023; Hallinger 2018). Catholic school amalgamations add further complexity since leaders must integrate structures with faith traditions, community expectations, and distinct cultures across sites (Ni 2009).

Leadership scholarship has shifted from a focus on individual traits to leadership as practice that is relational and shaped by context (Spillane 2012). Within this shift, two approaches continue to dominate discussion in schools. Transformational leadership, articulated by Burns (1978) and applied in education by Leithwood and Duke (1999), emphasises vision, shared commitment, and cultural change. Studies associate it with staff engagement, innovation, and improved outcomes in some settings (Day, Gu, and Sammons 2016; Hamstra et al. 2011; Jensen et al. 2016). It has also been criticised for leaning too heavily on charismatic influence and for being difficult to sustain without firm organisational supports (Hansbrough and Schyns 2018). Transactional leadership focuses on clarity, role expectations, and accountability arrangements that support reliable delivery, which becomes critical during structural transitions such as mergers or campus consolidation (Dartey-Baah 2015; Holten and Brenner 2013). Rather than a binary choice, the Full Range Leadership Model positions these approaches as complementary. Transformational work sets direction and builds commitment. Transactional routines anchor expectations and maintain consistency in daily practice (Bass and Avolio 1994; Carrington et al. 2021; Raelin 2018). In Catholic schools this balance is particularly salient because leaders must hold a spiritual mission together with operational requirements.

Amalgamations heighten that tension. Leaders need to inspire participation while managing logistics, finance, workforce planning, and policy harmonisation across communities that read change through the lens of identity and belonging (Ni 2009; Spillane 2012; Sullivan 2001). Short-term lifts in programmes or communications can help. However, principals who chase near-term gains without corresponding attention to system architecture often end up in reactive cycles that are difficult to exit (Carrington et al. 2021). Claims that most change efforts fail are widespread, but failure is not consistently defined and headline rates are debated (Errida and Lotfi 2021; Hughes 2022; Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd 2013). The debate still points to a consistent lesson. Complex reforms are fragile when direction, culture, and structure are not aligned.

Kotter's (1996) eight-step process remains a common reference point for leading organisational change and is often used to order events, build coalitions, and emphasise communication and visible wins. It continues to

feature in the broader change literature (Mento, Jones, and Dirndorfer 2002; Rune, Lerdahl, and Meistad 2016; Wentworth, Behson, and Kelley 2020). At the same time, scholars caution that school change is rarely linear. Context, culture, and informal power shape trajectories in ways a step sequence can miss (Fullan 2001; Hughes 2022; Kezar 2014; Spillane 2012). In education, reculturing is social and iterative, not simply procedural. Leadership practice is distributed across people, tools, routines, and situations rather than held solely by individuals with formal titles (Fullan 2001; Spillane 2006). Distributed leadership can leverage diverse expertise and strengthen improvement through shared responsibility, which is valuable for inclusive decision making and for building trust in communities that are being brought together (Harris 2004; Timperley 2005). Classic models of organisational transition such as Lewin's three steps still offer a useful language for unfreezing, movement, and refreezing, although they do not by themselves provide operational detail for complex schooling contexts (Lewin 1951).

In Catholic schooling the cultural and symbolic dimensions of change carry particular weight. Amalgamating schools involves not only logistical and administrative consolidation. It also requires discernment about moral purpose, shared rituals, theological identity, and how these inform daily practice (Grace 2002; Sullivan 2001). Leaders are asked to reconcile market and accountability pressures with the mission of Catholic education, which places formation, service, and community at its centre. Grace (2002) warns that market-oriented reforms can erode or distort faith-based purposes if not calibrated carefully. The leadership task, therefore, extends beyond technical implementation to decisions about what should change, what must remain, and how those decisions are communicated in ways that honour both continuity and renewal.

Taken together, this work suggests that leaders of Catholic school amalgamations need both direction and cadence. Vision and narrative can help people commit to a shared future. Clear roles, routines, and accountability support consistent enactment across sites. Where reforms recognise identity and meaning, and where structures are designed to iterate, adaptation becomes more likely and gains are easier to stabilise. This study builds on that insight by applying Kotter as a retrospective scaffold while reading enactment through adaptive and distributed perspectives. It also introduces a short iterative cycle that operationalises feedback, bounded adjustment, and stabilisation across terms. The next section sets out the conceptual framework that integrates these perspectives and shows how they inform the analysis.

Conceptual framework

In Catholic education, leadership is shaped by specific theological commitments that are translated into practice. Stewardship refers to the management and reinvestment of resources and institutional assets in support of community

needs. Subsidiarity directs decision-making to the people closest to the issue, which legitimises working groups and site-level consultation in periods of change. Formation orients professional learning toward the whole person, enabling leaders to integrate technical training with spiritual and communal practices. The common good requires equitable policy settings across merged entities and attention to those most affected by change. Charism provides the narrative and ritual language that connects structural decisions with mission identity. We use these commitments as a lens for reading leadership choices in coalition design, policy harmonisation, and symbolic refounding, and indicate where they align with specific steps in the change process (Table 1).

Together, these commitments provide the conceptual foundation for interpreting leadership practice during the amalgamation. They link the moral and theological dimensions of Catholic education to practical leadership actions such as coalition design, policy harmonisation, and symbolic refounding. We return to these commitments in the Discussion when analysing how structure, culture, and people interacted throughout the change process. Guided by these frameworks, the following section outlines the mixed-methods case study used to examine leadership practice before, during, and after the amalgamation.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to provide statistical patterns of stakeholder perceptions (quantitative surveys) and deeper narrative

Table 1. Catholic leadership commitments mapped to enacted practices and Kotter Steps.

Catholic Leadership Commitment	Enacted Practice in the Amalgamation	Corresponding Kotter Step(s)
Stewardship	Transparent reporting of financial planning, facility upgrades, and resource allocations to staff and parents through newsletters and community briefings.	*Step 1 – Establishing a sense of urgency* (through transparency) and *Step 4 – Communicating the vision.*
Subsidiarity	Empowering middle leaders and teacher teams to co-design discipline and curriculum policies; introducing year-level wellbeing committees to localise decision-making.	*Step 2 – Building the guiding coalition* and St *5 – Empowering broad-based action.*
Formation (Personal and Professional)	Faith-based professional learning, shared staff retreats, and leadership formation workshops emphasising mission alignment and reflective practice.	*Step 3 – Developing a vision and strategy* and *Step 6 – Generating short-term wins.*
Common Good	Policy harmonisation around student welfare and inclusion; joint initiatives for cross-campus equity in subject offerings and student support services.	*Step 7 – Consolidating gains and producing more change.*
Ritual and Charism Renewal	Integrating Patrician and Josephite symbols in new rituals; joint liturgies and ceremonies to express the re-founded shared identity of the new college.	*Step 8 – Anchoring new approaches in the culture.*

insights (qualitative reflections and document analysis). Combining these methods, through a pragmatic lens, enhances the validity of findings by triangulating multiple perspectives (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018). This approach is particularly relevant for leadership research, where both statistical trends and personal experiences shape organisational change processes (Yin 2017).

Survey participants were recruited using purposive sampling, ensuring representation from key stakeholder groups (staff, students, and parents). All staff members ($n = 85$) were invited to participate, with a response rate of 72% ($n = 61$). Student surveys were distributed to Years 7–12 ($n = 816$), achieving a response rate of 63% ($n = 514$). Parent surveys ($n = 259$) were conducted online, with a participation rate of 58% ($n = 150$). Qualitative reflections from leadership meeting notes and principal journal entries were analysed to supplement survey data to capture leadership decision-making processes over time. The data was collected before and during the school amalgamation.

Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The process followed six iterative phases: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, constructing candidate themes, reviewing and refining themes against the dataset, defining and naming themes, and producing the final narrative analysis. Coding was conducted inductively, guided by the research aims and leadership frameworks but without forcing data into pre-determined categories. Reflexivity was central to this process; the researcher maintained analytic memos, engaged in regular critique of assumptions, and considered the influence of positionality as a Catholic educational researcher. Rather than seeking coder agreement, the reflexive approach prioritised depth, coherence, and transparency in theme development. Anonymised excerpts are presented to illustrate core patterns in policy consistency, role clarity, and identity formation.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Notre Dame Australia (Approval No. 018134S). Permission to conduct research within Catholic systemic schools was obtained from the Sydney Catholic Schools Office. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all adult participants. Parents and guardians provided written consent for student participation, and students gave age-appropriate assent prior to completing the survey. All data were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was retained.

A member of the research team held a leadership role within the participating school during the amalgamation. This dual role positioned the researcher as both practitioner and investigator. Reflexivity was maintained through ongoing journaling, triangulation of data sources (survey, minutes, and journals), and peer debriefing with colleagues outside the research site. These strategies aimed to mitigate bias, ensure ethical sensitivity given the researcher's positional authority, and strengthen the trustworthiness and transparency of the analysis.

Timeline of data collection

Data were gathered over a three-year period encompassing the decision, consultation, transition, and early operational stages of the amalgamation (see Table 2).

Table 2. Data collection relative to key amalgamation phases.

Amalgamation Phase	Key Data Sources	Description
Decision & Consultation	Planning minutes; principal journals	Feasibility studies, diocesan approval, stakeholder engagement
Transition Preparation	Staff, student, and parent pre-amalgamation surveys	Baseline perceptions of readiness and leadership effectiveness
Implementation & Transition	Leadership journals; committee minutes	Documentation of policy harmonisation and structural change
Operational Year 1	Follow-up reflections; survey excerpts	Evaluation of leadership cohesion, culture alignment, wellbeing

To enhance the reliability of the survey instruments, a pilot study was conducted with a small subset of staff ($n = 10$) and parents ($n = 15$) to refine question clarity and ensure alignment with the research objectives. Internal consistency was examined for each multi-item construct within the stakeholder surveys. Scale-specific Cronbach's α coefficients indicated satisfactory reliability across all dimensions: *Leadership and Administration* ($\alpha = .89$), *Catholic School Life and Culture* ($\alpha = .86$), *Student Wellbeing* ($\alpha = .84$), *Physical Learning Environment* ($\alpha = .88$), *Communication with Parents* ($\alpha = .83$), and *Student Learning and Engagement* ($\alpha = .82$). Example items included: 'The leadership team is available to staff members as needed' (Staff), 'Parents are kept informed about important dates and events' (Parents), and 'I feel safe at this school' (Students). All items were positively keyed; no reverse-coded items were included. These values fall within the acceptable-to-high reliability range for perception surveys in educational settings (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). For qualitative validity, data triangulation was applied, comparing survey responses, leadership reflections, and meeting minutes to identify converging themes.

Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency analysis) in SPSS to identify stakeholder perceptions of leadership effectiveness. The surveys included an average of 40 category-based questions, most of which had 3–5 sub-questions in each category, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The categories included Catholic School Life and Culture, Student Learning and Well-being, the Physical Learning Environment, and Leadership and Administration. Open-ended survey responses and leadership reflections were examined using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), where emerging themes were coded and categorised. A deductive-inductive approach was used: initial themes were derived from Kotter's Eight-Step Model, while additional themes emerged from the data. The findings were then analysed against theoretical perspectives from

Fullan's Change Theory and Spillane's Distributed Leadership Model to provide deeper insights into leadership effectiveness.

While the authors note in-depth insights into leadership strategies during school amalgamation, certain limitations should be noted. First, using a single case study limits the generalisability of findings beyond this specific school context. However, the richness of qualitative data and multi-stakeholder perspectives enhances transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Second, potential response bias may have affected survey results, as staff members may have been reluctant to critique leadership decisions. To mitigate this, anonymous surveys were used to encourage candid responses. Finally, while Kotter's model provided a structured framework for evaluation, alternative models could offer additional insights.

Application of Kotter's framework

This section critically evaluates each step of Kotter's model, where it was effective, and where limitations emerged. It also juxtaposes insights from alternative leadership models (Fullan's Change Theory, Spillane's Distributed Leadership, and Lewin's Change Model) to provide a nuanced perspective.

Step 1: Establishing a Sense of Urgency (Figure 1).

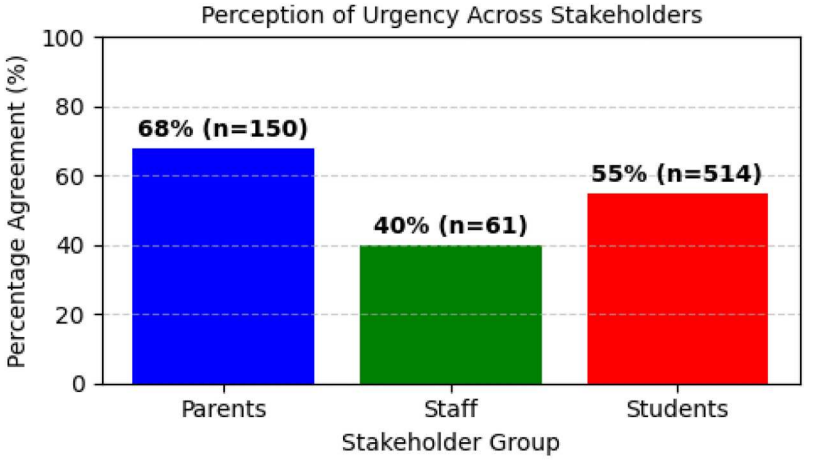


Figure 1. Perception of urgency across stakeholders.

Kotter's model emphasises the importance of creating urgency to build momentum for change. In this case, urgency was communicated through leadership briefings, stakeholder meetings, and parent newsletters. However, the decision to amalgamate was driven by demographic shifts, including population growth in surrounding suburbs and a lack of coeducational Catholic school options. Stakeholder responses revealed that instead of a sense of

urgency, anxiety was the predominant emotional response, particularly among staff and students. The two-year consultation process did not fully mitigate resistance, with students and staff feeling excluded from the decision-making process.

Parent surveys indicate 68% felt the rationale for the amalgamation was clear. Their overwhelming support was due to improved infrastructure and curriculum opportunities. However, concerns were raised about the transition's impact on student well-being. Only 40% of staff felt prepared for the change, suggesting that urgency was more effectively conveyed externally than internally. Concerns for staff centred on job security, department restructuring, and unclear policies. Students had mixed perceptions, with slightly more than half reporting a sense of urgency. While some students were excited about new facilities, many were confused about rule changes and policy inconsistencies.

Lewin's (1951) Unfreezing Stage suggests that people need psychological readiness before accepting change. The data suggests staff needed more time and structured dialogue before embracing the urgency of the amalgamation. Although the data are not entirely clear, the students may also have needed more time to adjust to merging with another school and the implications of that amalgamation, considering that the surveys were conducted during and after the amalgamation. Parents, however, as indirect stakeholders, were more positive about perceived improvements.

Step 2: Creating a Guiding Coalition.

A leadership team was established early in the developmental stage to manage the transition and its perception. The challenge that emerged from the findings was how this group had to balance a large-scale transformation with addressing situational and daily operational requirements, including a capital works school building programme, the induction of new middle-leader positions, and a student population that would double. Despite the effort that went into leading the change from the outset, findings revealed disparities in leadership effectiveness across different groups (Table 3).

Table 3. Leadership cohesion ratings by stakeholder group.

Stakeholder Group	Positive Perception (%)	Negative Perception (%)
Parents	78% ($n = 117$)	22% ($n = 23$)
Staff	52% ($n = 32$)	48% ($n = 29$)
Students	45% (n = 231)	55% ($n = 283$)

The perception of leadership cohesion varied significantly across stakeholder groups, with parents (78%) expressing the highest confidence in leadership, primarily due to clear communication and visible engagement. In contrast, staff reported mixed perceptions, with 48% citing concerns over unclear policies, role transitions, and exclusion from decision-making. Students had the lowest cohesion ratings (45%), highlighting issues with inconsistent rule enforcement

and a lack of transparency in policy shifts. These findings suggest that while leadership effectively communicated with parents and staff, students required more targeted engagement strategies to foster a stronger sense of inclusion and clarity. This disparity underscores the partial success of creating a guiding coalition and the need for a more distributed leadership approach to ensure alignment across all stakeholder groups.

Kotter's model assumes that a small, unified leadership team will guide change, but Spillane (2006) argues that leadership is most effective when distributed across multiple levels of an organisation. The resistance observed among staff suggests that relying on a top-down leadership coalition may have limited broader buy-in. A distributed leadership approach, involving middle leaders and teacher-led committees, could have helped strengthen alignment and engagement across the school.

Step 3: Developing a Vision and Strategy (Figure 2).

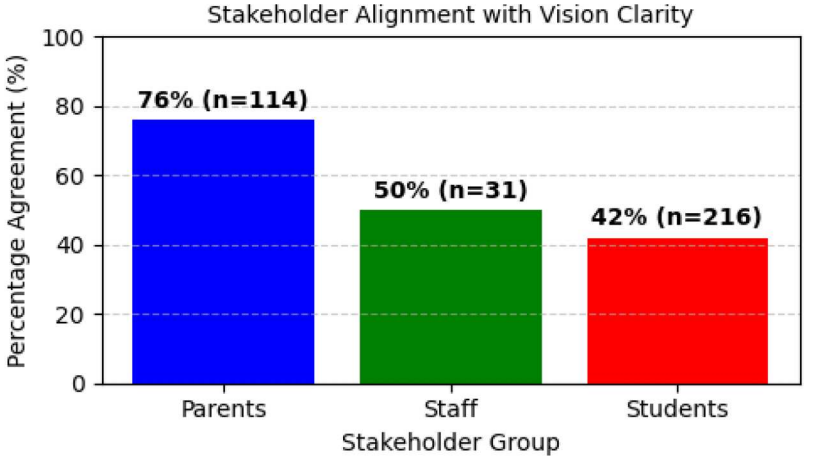


Figure 2. Stakeholder alignment with vision clarity.

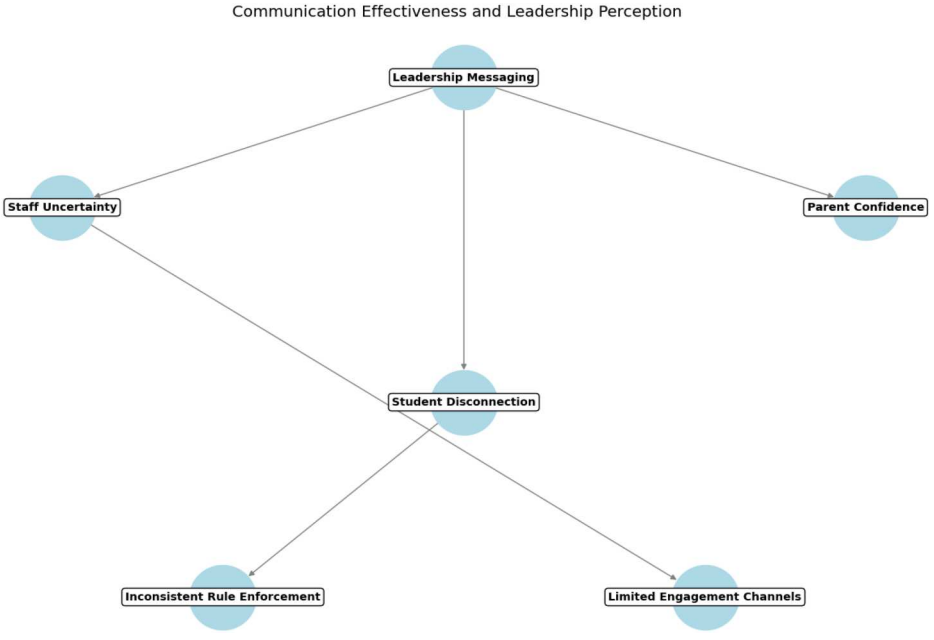
The leadership team articulated a vision centred on enhancing student learning and well-being, aligning with Catholic education principles. However, execution challenges emerged as students and staff reported difficulties adapting to the new policies.

Stakeholder perceptions of the school's vision revealed apparent differences, with parents (76%) demonstrating the most substantial alignment, likely due to effective communication through structured updates and engagement initiatives. Staff (50%) showed more uncertainty, with many expressing concerns about vague messaging and inconsistent implementation of policies, making it difficult to fully grasp the long-term vision. Students (42%) had the weakest alignment, as unclear rule changes and limited opportunities for direct involvement left many feeling disconnected from the transition process. While leadership successfully conveyed the vision to parents, the findings suggest that staff

and students needed more inclusive communication strategies and structured dialogue to enhance their understanding and buy-in.

While Kotter emphasises crafting a clear vision and strategic direction, Fullan (2001) stresses that deep, sustainable change emerges from continuous collaboration and adaptability. The challenge of staff uncertainty around their roles suggests that vision development should have been a more iterative process, incorporating ongoing feedback loops to refine implementation based on real-time stakeholder concerns.

Step 4: Communicating the Change Vision (Thematic Map 1).



Thematic Map 1. Communication effectiveness and leadership perception.

Leadership communication played a crucial role in shaping stakeholder perceptions of the amalgamation, although its effectiveness was uneven. Parents (76%) received the clearest messaging through newsletters, forums, and direct engagement, reinforcing their confidence in the transition. Staff (50%) were less certain, citing inconsistencies in internal communication that left many feeling uninformed about policy and role changes. Students (42%) had the weakest connection to the school's vision due to inconsistent enforcement of rules and limited opportunities to engage with leadership.

The data suggests that while external communication was strong, internal messaging lacked clarity and consistency, particularly for staff and students, which is a trend across the first four steps. Improving communication strategies, such as structured staff briefings, interactive Q&A sessions, and student advisory panels, could have fostered greater alignment across all stakeholder groups, reducing uncertainty and strengthening leadership cohesion.

Kotter assumes that effective communication is primarily informational, but Bolman and Deal's (2017) Symbolic Frame suggests that rituals, traditions, and cultural messaging are equally crucial in reinforcing a vision. While parents understood the transition, staff and students may have struggled due to a lack of symbolic reinforcement, such as ceremonies, shared traditions, or visual markers of the new identity, which could have strengthened the emotional and cultural connection to the change.

Step 5: Empowering Employees for Broad-Based Action (Table 4).

Table 4. Staff perceptions of empowerment.

Category	Positive (%)	Negative (%)
Role Clarity	52% ($n = 32$)	48% ($n = 29$)
Autonomy in Decision-Making	47% ($n = 29$)	53% ($n = 32$)
Access to Leadership Support	55% ($n = 33$)	45% ($n = 28$)
Confidence in New Leadership Roles	50% ($n = 30$)	50% ($n = 30$)

Leadership efforts to empower staff during the transition yielded mixed results, with some staff members feeling supported while others struggled with unclear role expectations and structural barriers. New leadership roles were introduced, but 48% of staff reported uncertainty about their responsibilities, leading to hesitation in decision-making. While some staff embraced the opportunity for professional growth, others expressed frustration over limited autonomy and inconsistent delegation of authority.

Survey responses revealed that staff empowerment was strongest among those in clearly defined leadership positions, whereas teachers and support staff felt less equipped to contribute meaningfully to the change process. The lack of structured training and professional learning opportunities further exacerbated concerns. A more intentional approach to role clarity, decision-making structures, and leadership support mechanisms would have helped strengthen staff agency, ensuring broader participation in the change process.

Kotter's approach to empowerment assumes that removing structural barriers will naturally lead to action. A new staff room offered a space to help the new staff integrate into the culture more quickly. However, Spillane (2006) and Fullan (2001) emphasise that empowerment requires ongoing leadership development and collaboration. The lack of clear professional trajectory opportunities for staff suggests that true empowerment would have required more significant investment in role clarity, capacity-building, and shared leadership structures to foster a sense of agency among employees.

Step 6: Generating Short-Term Wins (Figure 3).

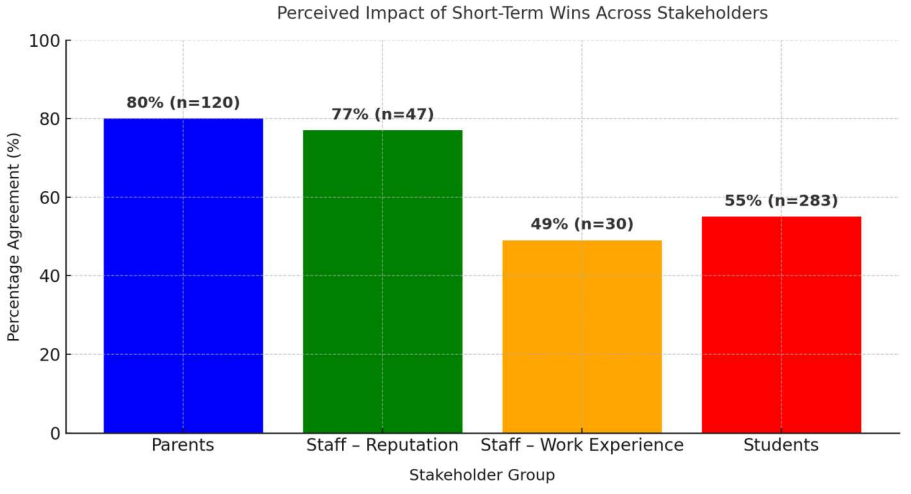


Figure 3. Perceived impact of short-term wins across stakeholders.

Leadership sought to build momentum for the transition by highlighting early successes, particularly in student enrolment growth, new co-curricular programmes, and infrastructure upgrades. Parent satisfaction increased as these wins became visible; however, staff and students remained cautious, as these initial successes did not address deeper concerns about curriculum integration, workload distribution, and shifts in school culture.

Early successes in the transition were well-received by some stakeholders, particularly parents, who reported high levels of satisfaction (80%) with the school's operation. Parents noted that their children were enjoying the new environment and that the school maintained a strong reputation in the community (79%). This external confidence in leadership suggested that visible structural improvements, such as enhanced facilities and expanded co-curricular offerings, helped establish momentum.

Staff perceptions were more divided. While 77% acknowledged the school's strong reputation, only 49% felt these short-term wins translated into meaningful daily work improvements. Many remained concerned about workload distribution, curriculum integration, and leadership clarity, indicating that internal challenges persisted despite outward success. Students (55%) also expressed a mixed response. They expressed excitement about new opportunities but uncertainty regarding school culture and inconsistencies in rule enforcement.

From a Change Theory perspective (Fullan 2001), leadership effectively created early wins to sustain momentum; however, lasting change required a deeper investment in staff cohesion and policy consistency. Strengthening internal communication and ensuring that staff and students saw tangible benefits in their roles would have reinforced those early achievements, preventing a perception of surface-level gains, rather than meaningful progress.

Step 7: Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change (Table 5).

Table 5. Staff vs. student perspectives on cultural integration.

Aspect	Staff Agreement (%)	Student Agreement (%)
Confidence in Long-Term Stability	62% ($n = 38$)	58% ($n = 298$)
Consistency in Rule Enforcement	50% ($n = 31$)	42% ($n = 216$)
Sense of Unified School Identity	49% ($n = 30$)	68% ($n = 350$)
Staff Cohesion Post-Amalgamation	48% ($n = 29$)	N/A

While early successes provided momentum, the consolidation phase revealed deeper challenges. Survey data showed 62% of staff acknowledged long-term stability, yet concerns lingered around policy implementation, cultural integration, and staff cohesion. Many reported experiencing what Fullan (2001) describes as the 'implementation dip,' where uncertainty and adaptation challenges temporarily disrupted confidence in the change process.

For students, responses reflected a mix of optimism and resistance. Many embraced the expanded learning and social opportunities, yet some struggled with inconsistencies in policy enforcement and lingering divides between former school identities. The transition to a unified school culture was still in progress, with student engagement levels varying across year groups.

This stage required a structural to cultural consolidation shift from an organisational leadership perspective. Bolman and Deal's (2017) Symbolic and Human Resource frames emphasise the importance of leaders in reinforcing a shared identity and sense of belonging, while ensuring staff have clear expectations, access to professional learning opportunities, and input into decision-making processes.

Step 8: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture (Table 6).

Table 6. Final stakeholder perceptions of long-term integration.

Stakeholder Group	Perceived Success (%)	Lingering Concerns (%)
Staff	72% ($n = 44$)	28% ($n = 17$)
Parents	74% ($n = 111$)	26% ($n = 39$)
Students	65% ($n = 334$)	35% ($n = 180$)

The final stage of Kotter's framework involves embedding the changes into the school's culture to ensure long-term success. Survey results showed that 72% of staff, 74% of parents, and 65% of students believed the school had successfully established a unified identity post-amalgamation. However, students had the highest lingering concerns (35%), suggesting that some still struggled adapting to the new school culture. Staff concerns (28%) primarily related to workplace identity and cohesion, while parents (74%) were the most confident in the transition's success.

Parents overwhelmingly supported the long-term vision, with 79% ($n = 119$) stating that the school had a good reputation in the wider community, reinforcing the idea that external perceptions of the change were largely positive.

However, staff perspectives on internal operations were more divided, as some teachers noted that workplace structures still reflected legacy divisions between the former individual schools.

From a Fullan and Spillane leadership perspective, this phase required a continued focus on distributed leadership, ensuring that all staff levels had a voice in shaping the future school culture. Leaders needed to reinforce shared norms through professional learning communities, mentorship programmes, and visible alignment in decision-making processes.

The analysis of the amalgamation, conducted through Kotter's change model, highlighted strong external confidence but internal challenges in terms of policy consistency, staff cohesion, and student adaptation. Strategic leadership and clear external messaging drove short-term wins, yet inconsistent enforcement, role uncertainty, and change fatigue hindered full cultural integration. While the leadership provided the framework and structure for the amalgamation, greater staff empowerment, student engagement, and distributed leadership were needed for lasting change. The following section explores broader leadership frameworks to address these gaps and strengthen long-term consolidation.

Qualitative analysis and thematic development

The qualitative dataset comprised leadership journals, planning committee minutes, and open-ended survey responses collected throughout the amalgamation process. Analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis, an inductive, semantic approach. Data were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity, then coded manually. Codes were developed to capture recurring patterns of meaning, which were progressively grouped into candidate themes through constant comparison and analytic memoing. Reflexivity was maintained through ongoing researcher journaling and peer debriefing with two colleagues familiar with Catholic school leadership contexts.

Coding was iterative rather than consensus-based, consistent with Braun and Clarke's reflexive model, which emphasises researcher subjectivity as an analytic resource rather than bias. Nevertheless, a second coder reviewed a subset of excerpts to confirm transparency and coherence of interpretation.

Table 7 presents exemplar excerpts illustrating the three core themes reported in the findings: policy inconsistency, role ambiguity, and identity shifts.

The combined quantitative and qualitative results reveal a pattern of visible external success paired with internal variability in cohesion and clarity. Across stakeholder groups, parents consistently reported the highest confidence in leadership and the school's direction, reflecting effective communication and symbolic reinforcement. Staff responses were more ambivalent, highlighting policy inconsistency, workload pressures, and uncertainty around new leadership

Table 7. Sample excerpts illustrating core themes.

Theme	Data Source	Excerpt (anonymised)	Interpretation
Policy Inconsistency	Staff Journal	'Different rules seem to apply across campuses – it confuses students and makes discipline feel unfair.'	Inconsistency in rule enforcement undermined perceived legitimacy of leadership decisions.
Role Ambiguity	Meeting Minutes	'Teachers are unsure who to go to now – leadership titles have changed, but the responsibilities haven't been explained.'	Structural reorganisation created uncertainty about reporting lines and decision authority.
Identity Shifts	Student Survey (open-ended)	'It doesn't feel like our old school anymore. Everything's changed, even the uniforms and traditions.'	Students expressed loss of belonging during cultural integration of the amalgamated school.

structures. Students, while largely positive about new opportunities, expressed ongoing identity tension as legacy traditions merged. Together, these data suggest that while Kotter's steps helped structure the transition, the process of cultural integration and distributed ownership remained uneven. These patterns form the foundation for the following Discussion, which interprets them through the lenses of Kotter, Fullan, Spillane, Lewin, and Bolman & Deal.

Discussion

The findings portray an amalgamation that progressed visibly while continuing to consolidate beneath the surface. External markers, such as facility upgrades, a broadened curriculum, stabilising enrolment, and coherent public messaging, sustained community confidence. Internally, however, the routine work of policy alignment, role clarity, and building a shared identity unfolded unevenly. Kotter's (1996) eight steps are analytically practical as a retrospective scaffold, yet the observed dynamics are better characterised by overlapping cycles than by a linear sequence. What moved practice forward was not the completion of successive steps but repeated loops of sense-making, trial, reinforcement, and revision. Interpreting this pattern through reculturing (Fullan 2001), distributed leadership (Spillane 2006), attention to change cadence (Lewin 1951), and multi-frame analysis (Bolman and Deal 2017) clarifies why some gains stabilised quickly while others remained fragile; equally, it indicates how leadership can translate early momentum into durable routines without mistaking signal for noise or speed for traction.

The variability evident in initial enactment is consistent with reculturing as a social learning process rather than a technical deployment problem (Fullan 2001). Confidence in the amalgamation's direction did not yield certainty about day-to-day expectations, and it was in the conversion from philosophical vision statements to local procedures that much of the turbulence resided. Staff and students required repeated opportunities to test and refine how policies would manifest in practice. Where professional learning was organised as a continuing inquiry, with iterative cycles of trial, feedback, and adjustment,

alignment improved between policy and classroom practice. However, when it was delivered as a one-off, ambiguity persisted, and local workarounds became informal norms that later proved difficult to displace. Therefore, early variability in the data should not be interpreted as opposition, but rather as the first stage of normalisation, which is a predictable property of cultural change where shared meaning, time, and visible reinforcement are prerequisites, not superfluous (Fullan 2016).

A distributed perspective further explains the uneven pace. Decision rights were clustered at senior levels during the first year, which, given the complexity of the operational transition, was a defensible choice; however, this left middle leaders carrying substantial work without matched authority, time, or professional learning (Harris 2004; Spillane 2006). Teachers were more likely to experience change as something received rather than co-constructed. In teams that were afforded the space to try out and revise practices, resistance declined and ownership increased. This pattern aligns with research suggesting that improvement stems not from the determination of the leadership group, but from the interdependence of routine, feedback, and professional community (Bass and Avolio 1994; Timperley 2005). The implication is that distributed leadership requires more than invitations to contribute. It requires a formal mechanism that allocates decision-making rights, protects time for collaborative diagnosis, and provides professional learning (Harris 2004; Spillane 2006).

Attention to the timing of the change proved consequential. Structural adjustments to operational processes required deliberate 'mini-refreezes' so that new practices could become established over time (Lewin 1951). Premature expectations risked entrenching workarounds that later undermined coherence, producing ambiguity, aimlessness, and a sense of change fatigue. What mattered, therefore, was not moving faster or slower, but establishing a rhythm that safeguarded progress and prevented loss of direction. Seeing balance as provisional rather than final, and as a platform for the next cycle of improvement, is especially important in Catholic schooling. Expectations are both moral and operational, and perceived unfairness can quickly erode trust and cultural capital. Multi-frame interpretation is useful here. For many parents, structural and political cues such as visible investment, coherent direction, and community reputation carried the most weight. For staff and students, legitimacy depended more on human and symbolic cues, including consistent enforcement, clear narratives and rituals that made the meaning of change explicit (Bolman and Deal 2017).

The differences between stakeholder groups align with this framing and require further analysis. Parents, who were more distant from daily operations, tended to report higher confidence in leadership cohesion and the school's trajectory. Staff and students, who experienced the daily translation of policy into practice, were more sensitive to inconsistent enforcement, unclear or shifting role expectations, and identity signals that implied legacy hierarchies. The

pattern of parents at the highest level, staff in the middle and students at the lowest held across several constructs, albeit with improvement over time as conventions consolidated (see Table 8). This generalisation is not to smooth these differences away in pursuit of consensus, but rather to treat their engagement as distinct forms of expertise: parents as readers of whole-community messaging and institutional reputation; staff as expert diagnosticians of policy-practice gaps and workload effects; and, students as credible witnesses of whether rules and rituals feel clear and fair in the classroom and around the school.

Comparing stakeholder perspectives

Symbolic reinforcement was not merely decorative; instead, it was a primary mode of coordination in a values-driven context. Public acknowledgement of joint ceremonies that honoured the two legacy charisms while narrating a new identity did not stand apart from operational decisions. Instead, they made the changes understandable and perceived as fair. This is where a Catholic leadership lens clarifies rather than merely labels. Stewardship, subsidiarity, formation, the common good, and charism are not add-ons; they are the leadership rationale through which choices are authorised, interpreted, and sustained (see Table 9). Stewardship treats resources as a trust, demonstrated through transparent and fair allocation; subsidiarity places decisions close to practice and mandates middle leaders; formation links professional learning with spiritual and communal development; the common good provides explicit equity criteria; charism supplies the narrative and ritual language that connects structure with mission. Framed as a shared language of change, these commitments allowed actions such as closing enforcement gaps to be justified and communicated in terms that aligned community meaning with system efficiency.

Applied retrospectively, Kotter (1996) offered clarity, yet the data show variation rather than distinct sequential phases. Staff moving back and forth between confidence and fatigue was common as routines were

Table 8. Key discrepancies between stakeholder groups.

Theme	Staff Perspective	Student Perspective	Parent Perspective
Confidence in Leadership	72% ($n = 44$) agreement, but concerns over role clarity and decision-making	65% ($n = 334$) agreement, but uncertainty about school identity	74% ($n = 111$) confidence, primarily due to external communication
Cultural Integration	49% ($n = 30$) felt a unified school identity had been established	68% ($n = 350$) believed the school was successfully re-cultured	79% ($n = 118$) believed the school had a strong community presence
Policy Consistency	50% ($n = 31$) noted inconsistencies in policy enforcement	42% ($n = 216$) dissatisfaction with inconsistent discipline and expectations	81% ($n = 121$) satisfaction with school policies
Emotional Adjustment	Change fatigue and resistance due to workload increases	35% ($n = 180$) still felt divided by past school identities	Minimal resistance, largely supportive of the transition

Table 9. Catholic leadership commitments mapped to enacted practices and Kotter.

Catholic commitment	Enacted leadership practices in this amalgamation	Kotter
Stewardship	Pooled legacy resources for equity upgrades across sites; protected funds for transition supports; transparent reporting to community on re-investment decisions	Step 2 Guiding coalition sets fair resourcing rules; Step 4 Vision communication emphasises care of shared assets; Step 8 Finance norms embedded in culture
Subsidiarity	Working groups at campus level with defined decision rights; consultation cycles that routed issues to those closest to practice; middle leader charters clarified	Step 2 Coalition includes site-level leaders; Step 4 Two-way communication channels; Step 8 Decision rights codified in policy
Formation	Professional learning paired technical sessions with mission formation; leader retreats used prayer and discernment to frame choices; mentoring for new middle leaders	Step 4 Vision narrated through formation; Step 8 Ritualised PL calendars and induction
Common good	Policy harmonisation prioritised equity for most affected students; timetable and staffing allocations redistributed to reduce disadvantage	Step 2 Coalition uses equity criteria; Step 4 Messaging foregrounds fairness; Step 8 Equity rules normalised
Charism	Symbols, stories, and rituals from both schools curated into new identity; co-designed liturgies and launch ceremonies; narrative used to explain policy choices	Step 4 Vision communicated through shared story; Step 8 Rituals anchor the new culture

tested and revised. Fullan (2001) helps us to see that oscillation, as reculturing, not a management failure. Spillane (2006) warns against treating leadership as the property of individuals or roles; instead, it should be viewed as a practice distributed across people and situations. Lewin (1951) reminds us that stabilisation is constructed and provisional. Bolman and Deal (2017) illustrate that symbolic and human frames do not follow a predetermined structure; instead, they co-create it. Kotter's model is neither dismissed as too linear nor treated as a complete explanation. Instead, it helps set direction and communication, but cannot, on its own, guide the emergent learning required for complex, values-based change (Hughes 2022; Kezar 2014).

Translating that critique into practice, rather than simply acknowledging it, required a planned sequence of activities capable of converting adaptive, distributed, and symbolic insights into repeatable routines. The Iterative Change Cycle (ICC) provided a practical framework for learning through short, repeating sequences of Sense, Plan, Act, and Reflect. Sense used staff and student observations to understand how policies and rituals were experienced. Plan co-designed targeted adjustments with middle leaders, focusing on pilots that could be trialled within clear boundaries. Act implemented these changes with visible symbolic reinforcement so that people saw both the new procedure and its purpose. Reflect reviewed outcomes, decided what to continue, adapt, or stop, and documented results to maintain transparency and trust. Clear rules kept the cycle disciplined: scale only when middle leaders report role clarity and students can explain expectations; simplify if workload rises beyond limits; pause technical change when identity gaps widen and focus

on re-connection before progressing (see Table 10). These checks translate principles such as subsidiarity, fairness, and well-being into practical decision criteria that sustain progress without eroding the culture that supports it.

The Catholic leadership commitments strengthened, rather than complicated, these cycles. Stewardship framed communication about resources as a mutual obligation rather than managerial control; subsidiarity structured work around local expertise; formation legitimised professional and spiritual learning as integral to the role; the common good, anchored decisions in equity; and charism provided a shared vocabulary for rituals that made identity visible. Together, these commitments and the ICC reduced the risk that achievements would remain superficial and helped prevent the fatigue that occurs when people cannot link new expectations to past experience. They reveal a complementary pattern of leadership enactment that warrants closer study.

Comparative effects on stakeholder resistance

A comparative analysis of leadership practices during the amalgamation reveals that transformational and transactional approaches coexisted. Transformational leadership was most effective in addressing emotional and identity-based resistance, particularly among parents and community members. Vision-casting, ritual renewal, and symbolic storytelling re-anchored the merged school's sense of purpose and mitigated anxiety over loss of legacy. These meaning-making practices aligned with Catholic leadership traditions that emphasise shared mission and communal discernment, which helped to sustain external confidence in the reform.

Table 10. Iterative Change Cycle (ICC): indicators, thresholds, and leadership actions.

Domain	Indicator (pulse/ measure)	Threshold (go/ no-go)	Leadership action if threshold not met	Evidence source & cadence
Role clarity & distributed remit	Middle-leader role clarity index (brief pulse)	≥ 70% 'clear/ very clear' before scaling	Pause scaling; publish/ clarify reporting lines; provide micro-coaching; re-test in 2 weeks	Fortnightly pulse; termly 1:1 check-ins
Staff workload & wellbeing	Proportion reporting 'unsustainable workload'	≤ 20% before adding initiatives	Simplify next cycle; retire/ merge low-impact tasks; re-sequence changes	Fortnightly pulse + HR absence data
Student rule comprehension	% students who can restate core expectations accurately	≥ 80% across sampled cohorts	Re-teach expectations; targeted assemblies; delay technical changes; reinforce symbolically	Termly student panels + short quizzes
Policy enforcement consistency	Variation across sites/ years in key behaviours	Std. dev. below pre-set band	Focused walkthroughs; calibrate responses; publish quick-reference guides	Weekly admin walk-throughs; incident logs
Identity integration	Identity-gap signals (legacy affiliation cues)	≤ 25% high-salience cues	Ritual/charism engagement; mixed-cohort events; pause new technical change	Student focus groups; event participation data

By contrast, transactional leadership proved essential in confronting operational and procedural resistance within staff and student groups. Clear decision rights, consistent policy enforcement, and visible accountability structures reduced ambiguity and perceptions of inequity. In phases where transactional clarity lagged, especially around workload distribution and communication lines, resistance resurfaced despite continued transformational messaging. The evidence therefore supports a sequential, complementary pattern: transformational leadership created buy-in through shared identity, while transactional leadership stabilised implementation through structure and predictability.

Together, these approaches reveal that durable change in Catholic school amalgamations depends not on choosing between inspiration and control but on sequencing them appropriately, beginning with meaning and concluding with method. This synthesis underscores the importance of balanced leadership repertoires capable of moving fluidly between symbolic and procedural domains as the change matures.

Conclusion

This study finds that Kotter's model was most useful for setting direction, coalition, and communication, but insufficient on its own for the emergent, values-laden work of integration; instead, the ICC supplied that adaptive cadence. Comparatively, transformational leadership secured external confidence through narrative and ritual, while transactional leadership reduced internal resistance by clarifying roles, policies, and enforcement; durable progress depended on sequencing the two.

While this paper offers valuable insights into the leadership of Catholic school amalgamations, it also highlights limitations that warrant emphasis. First, the data concentrate on the decision, transition, and the first operational year. Claims about durability and cultural embedding are provisional and should be revisited in a multi-year follow-up to determine whether variability declines as cycles accumulate. Second, the primary evaluative lens was Kotter; alternative framings would weight different features of the same events and could further illuminate path dependencies in governance or in the interplay between diocesan policy and school-level agency (Appelbaum et al. 2012; Kezar 2014). These limits mark a future agenda focused on wellbeing, belonging, and achievement trajectories as distributed structures mature and as the ICC is used to routinise additional domains.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer important implications for large-scale organisational change in education. One notable concern highlighted in this study was the limited involvement of students in the planning and implementation phases. Although student perspectives were captured, their participation in shaping policy or contributing to the design of the amalgamation was minimal. Future school amalgamations should prioritise student agency by embedding formal consultation mechanisms, such as student

advisory panels or co-designed projects, to promote ownership, reduce alienation, and foster a stronger sense of belonging. Allowing students to contribute to the formation of school rituals, policies, and leadership initiatives may also strengthen cultural integration during transition periods.

Beyond enhancing student agency, several structural and cultural practices emerged as critical for sustaining large-scale change:

- Establishing short ICC cycles with transparent change logs helps stakeholders understand what is being trialled, continued or discontinued, and prevents uncertainty from eroding trust.
- Ongoing, role-specific professional learning and coaching for middle leaders and teacher teams ensures that expertise, rather than top-down directives, drives improvement.
- Formalising distributed teams and decision-making enables responsiveness without sacrificing accountability.
- Policy coherence is strengthened when changes are assessed against explicit criteria and are paired with rituals and narratives that reinforce shared identity and purpose.
- Consistent messaging and efforts to close enforcement gaps, tested through staff and student panels, help ensure policies are experienced as transparent and fair in practice.

Together, these routines align governance, culture and people, allowing early gains to mature into embedded norms while reducing the fatigue often associated with complex reform. The amalgamation progressed in ways that linear change models can describe, but not fully account for. Short, transparent cycles translated direction into local practice and stabilised it over time, and Catholic commitments supplied the meaning and legitimacy that converted momentum into maturity. Together, they reduced variability and the fatigue that complex reform invites.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Sean P. Kearney is a professor of education at the School of Education, Faculty of Education, Philosophy & Theology at the University of Notre Dame Australia (Sydney Campus). He lectures in educational psychology and general pedagogical methods. He has received multiple national citations for his work in service-learning and assessment reform in higher education.

Dr. Stephen Gough is the Principal at Edmund Rice College, Wollongong. Before taking up that role, he served in Sydney Catholic Schools for over 25 years, with his last role as Head: People and Culture in School Leadership Development.

References

Aldridge, J. M., and F. I. McLure. 2023. "Sustaining Reform Implementation: A Systematic Literature Review." *School Leadership & Management* 43 (1): 70–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2171012.

Appelbaum, S. H., S. Habashy, J. L. Malo, and H. Shafiq. 2012. "Back to the Future: Revisiting Kotter's 1996 Change Model." *Journal of Management Development* 31 (8): 764–782. https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211253231.

Bass, B. M., and B. J. Avolio. 1994. *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Bolman, L. G., and T. E. Deal. 2017. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119281856.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2019. "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11 (4): 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806.

Burns, J. M. 1978. *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Carrington, S., N. Spina, M. Kimber, and R. Spooner-Lane. 2021. "Leadership Attributes That Support School Improvement: A Realist Approach." *School Leadership & Management* 42 (1): 151–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.2016686.

Creswell, J. W., and V. L. Plano Clark. 2018. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Dartey-Baah, K. D. 2015. "Resilient Leadership: A Transformational-Transactional Leadership mix." *Journal of Global Responsibility* 6 (1): 99–112. https://doi.org/10.1108/jgr-07-2014-0026.

Datnow, A., and M. Castellano. 2000. "Teachers' Responses to Success for All: How Beliefs, Experiences, and Adaptations Shape Implementation." *American Educational Research Journal* 37 (3): 775–799. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037003775.

Day, C., Q. Gu, and P. Sammons. 2016. "The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: How Successful School Leaders use Transformational and Instructional Strategies to Make a Difference." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 52 (2): 221–258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863.

Elmore, R. F. 2016. "Getting to Scale … " It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time." *Journal of Educational Change* 17:529–537. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-016-9290-8.

Errida, A., and B. Lotfi. 2021. "The Determinants of Organizational Change Management Success: Literature Review and Case Study." *International Journal of Engineering Business Management* 13:1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/18479790211016273.

Evans, R. 1996. *The Human Side of School Change: Reform, Resistance, and the Real-Life Problems of Innovation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. 2001. *Leading in a Culture of Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. 2007. *The new Meaning of Educational Change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. 2016. *The new Meaning of Educational Change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Grace, G. 2002. *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets, and Morality*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203471272.

Hallinger, P. 2018. "Bringing Context out of the Shadows of Leadership." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 46 (1): 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652.

Hamstra, M. R. W., N. W. Van Yperen, B. Wisse, and K. Sassenberg. 2011. "Transformational-transactional Leadership Styles and Followers' Regulatory Focus: Fit Reduces Followers' Turnover Intentions." *Journal of Personnel Psychology* 10 (4): 182–186. https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000043.

Hansbrough, T. K., and B. Schyns. 2018. "The Appeal of Transformational Leadership." *Journal of Leadership Studies* 12 (3): 19–32. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21571.

Harris, A. 2004. "Distributed Leadership and School Improvement: Leading or Misleading?" *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 32 (1): 11–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143204039297.

Holten, A. L., and S. O. Brenner. 2013. "Leadership Style and the Process of Organizational Change." *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 36 (1): 2–16. https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-11-2012-0155.

Hughes, M. 2022. "Reflections: How Studying Organizational Change Lost Its way." *Journal of Change Management* 22 (1): 8–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2022.2030980.

Jensen, B., J. Sonnemann, K. Roberts-Hull, and A. Hunter. 2016. Beyond PD: Teacher professional learning in high-performing systems. Australian Edition. *The National Center on Education and the Economy*.

Jones, S. M., S. M. Bouffard, and R. Weissbourd. 2013. "Educator's Social and Emotional Skills Vital to Learning." *Phi Delta Kappan* 94 (8): 62–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171309400815.

Kezar, A. 2014. *How Colleges Change: Understanding, Leading, and Enacting Change*. New York: Routledge.

Kotter, J. P. 1996. *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Leithwood, K., and D. L. Duke. 1999. "A Century's Quest to Understand School Leadership." In *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, edited by J. Murphy and K. S. Louis, 45–72. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewin, K. 1947. "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Social Equilibria and Social Change." *Human Relations* 1 (1): 5–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872674700100103.

Lewin, K. 1951. *Field Theory in Social Science*. New York: Harper & Row.

Lincoln, Y. S., and E. G. Guba. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

Lomba-Portela, A., G. López-Íñiguez, and J. I. Pozo. 2022. "Resistances to Educational Change: Teacher's Perceptions." *Education Sciences* 12 (5): 359. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12050359.

Mento, A. J., R. M. Jones, and W. Dirndorfer. 2002. "A Change Management Process: Grounded in Both Theory and Practice." *Journal of Change Management* 3 (1): 45–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/714042520.

Ni, Y. 2009. "The Impact of Charter Schools on the Efficiency of Traditional Public Schools: Evidence from Michigan." *Economics of Education Review* 28 (5): 571–584. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2009.01.003.

Nunnally, J. C., and I. H. Bernstein. 1994. *Psychometric Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Oreg, S. 2006. "Personality, Context, and Resistance to Organizational Change." *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 15 (1): 73–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320500451247.

Raelin, J. A. 2018. "What Are You Afraid of? Collective Leadership and Its Learning Implications." *Management Learning* 49 (1): 59–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507617729974.

Rune, T., E. Lerdahl, and T. Meistad. 2016. "A Comparative Study of Change Implementation in Schools." *Journal of Educational Change* 17:367–393. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-015-9265-y.

Spillane, J. P. 2006. *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Spillane, J. P. 2012. "Data in Practice: Conceptualizing the Data-based Decision-Making Phenomena." *American Journal of Education* 118 (2): 113–141. https://doi.org/10.1086/663283.

Sullivan, J. 2001. *Catholic Education: Distinctive and Inclusive*. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-2861-6.

Timperley, H. 2005. "Distributed Leadership: Developing Theory from Practice." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 37 (4): 395–420. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270500038545.

Wentworth, D. K., S. J. Behson, and C. A. Kelley. 2020. "Implementing Strategic Organizational Change: A Project Management Perspective." *Business Horizons* 63 (6): 757–767. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.06.003.

Yin, R. K. 2017. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.