

Reframing childhood obesity: The role of local communities in change implementation failure

human relations
2021, Vol. 74(2) 258–285

© The Author(s) 2020

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0018726719899464

journals.sagepub.com/home/hum



James M Vardaman 
Mississippi State University, USA

John M Amis
University of Edinburgh, UK

Paul M Wright
Northern Illinois University, USA

Ben P Dyson
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA

Abstract

Childhood obesity remains one of the defining challenges of our time, with government response around the world being largely ineffective. This has been particularly the case in the USA, which continues to suffer high rates of childhood obesity despite numerous legislative interventions to combat it. In order to develop insight into this ongoing catastrophic change failure, we engaged in a three-year qualitative study of the implementation of policies in the USA designed to reduce childhood obesity through school-based interventions. We found that leaders in schools, as in many organizations, were faced with numerous, often conflicting, pressures from federal, state, and local community stakeholders. The resultant ambivalence led to change failure being reframed as success to in order to fit with locally expressed priorities. In bringing light to an understudied aspect of change implementation, local community pressure, we further theoretical understanding of why large change interventions often fail. We also

Corresponding author:

James M Vardaman, Department of Management and Information Systems, Mississippi State University, Box 9581, Mississippi State, MS 39762, USA.

Email: jvardaman@business.msstate.edu

offer insights more generally into the (re)framing of change and the influence of local communities on organizations. Policy and managerial implications are also discussed.

Keywords

Ambivalence, change implementation, community, framing, leaders

As childhood obesity persists as one of the defining health and social issues of our time, so legislative attempts to address it have proliferated. Many of these have been directed at schools through policies designed to reduce children's caloric intake and increase their levels of exercise. For example, in the USA, a country with some of the highest levels of obesity in the world (OECD, 2017), 717 bills designed to reduce childhood overweight and obesity were introduced at state level between 2003 and 2005 with 123 being subsequently enacted (Boehmer et al., 2008). Despite this high level of interest and action and the length of time that these policies have had to exert an effect, overweight and obesity rates in the USA, as in other countries around the world, continue to remain high. Thus, of pressing societal and theoretical concern is why such change initiatives have failed to realize their intended outcomes.

Although it is widely acknowledged that change initiatives often fail (Amis et al., 2004; Jacquemont et al., 2015; Nag et al., 2007), explanations remain elusive for why some organizations successfully implement change initiatives while others do not. It has been well established that leaders play a defining role in the success or failure of major change implementation processes (Kunisch et al., 2017; Oreg and Berson, 2019). However, it is also known that organizational change creates significant turbulence and uncertainty for organizational leaders (Battilana and Casciaro, 2012; Canato et al., 2013; Huy et al., 2014), especially when change proposals are competing with other initiatives (Kaplan, 2008; Plambeck and Weber, 2009). This points to the importance of understanding how those in leadership positions frame competing demands when implementing change (Giorgi, 2017; Stensaker et al., 2008) and particularly for understanding why change initiatives often fail.

Frames are "schemata of interpretation" that allow users "to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms" (Goffman, 1974: 21). Leaders use frames to organize cues from the environment and give sense to turmoil and fragmented stimuli (Benford and Snow, 2000). Research suggests the ways in which controversial issues are framed influences whether they are able to generate support and become an impetus for change (Furnari, 2018; Gray et al., 2015; Litrico and David, 2017). In their review of the framing and social movements literature, Benford and Snow (2000) suggested framing can be characterized in two ways: core framing tasks that involve interpretation based on existing schema, and the discursive processes that are used to reshape frames over time. The majority of studies that have investigated the framing of change have been of the first type and involve considering how frames become constructed and enacted based on the attributes of the issue and their congruence with decision-makers' values or the organization's existing processes and practices. Much less consideration has been given to the second type, how framing evolves through the

dialectical interaction between organizational leaders and stakeholders. Particularly unclear is how this type of framing influences change success or failure.

Notable in its neglect has been the role that local community stakeholders play in the framing process. This oversight is important because research demonstrates that local communities play a significant role in shaping how leaders approach various issues including organization foundings (Audia et al., 2006), firm consolidations (Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007), corporate social responsibility initiatives (Lee and Lounsbury, 2015; Marquis et al., 2007), and social issues (Lawrence and Dover, 2015). Understanding the local community's influence is particularly important during change because broader institutional pressures frequently run counter to the interests of local stakeholders (Marquis and Battilana, 2009).

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to further our limited understanding of the widespread failure observed in organizational change implementation by examining the ways in which leaders frame competing organizational change initiatives, and particularly how this framing process is influenced by stakeholders in the local community. We followed the implementation of government policies designed to combat childhood obesity in eight public schools in the Southeastern USA. This was a particularly appropriate context because while schools face strong pressures for change from federal and local governments, they are also embedded in their communities. We followed the change implementation process in real time over a three-year period.

Our study contributes to the organizational change and framing literatures in at least three ways. First, we extend theory on change implementation failure by showing how organizational leaders construct frames not only as perceptual lenses through which they view change, but also as mechanisms for redefining change outcomes. Second, we show that the influence of the local community is much more salient during the change process than previously thought. Our data revealed that leaders frame change initiatives in ways that satisfy the interests of the local community over other stakeholders that have traditionally been viewed as more influential, which in turn has significant implications for the implementation process. Finally, we contribute to broader theory on framing by highlighting the role of leader ambivalence in the discursive process of frame construction. Our results suggest leader ambivalence, or seeing an issue simultaneously as positive and negative (Plambeck and Weber, 2009), was influenced by the local community's values and led to the preferencing of the community's priorities during change implementation.

Theory

Change implementation

Field-level change mandates are initiated during a theorization process in which field-level bodies, such as professional associations, trade groups, government agencies, and regulators, address a broad problem and identify a specific solution (Greenwood et al., 2002). Hoffman (1999) suggested this process occurs when salient issues trigger a perceived need for change. Field-level actors respond by creating scripts for action that are operationalized through legislative action, regulatory policy, or the creation or alteration of industry norms (Barley and Tolbert, 1997). For example, the publication of *Silent*

Spring (Carson, 1962) precipitated field-level environmental change in the US chemical industry in the 1960s. Similarly, in the wake of financial scandals in the USA during the early 2000s, prominently demonstrated in the accounting irregularities at Enron, field-level policy-makers responded by theorizing new regulatory initiatives, most notably the Sarbanes-Oxley Act.

The emergent scripts emanating from the field level must be encoded as rules or dictates for action in organizations. This encoding is typically carried out by organization leaders (Wright and Zammuto, 2013). While this process is usually assumed to be unproblematic, the prevalence of implementation failures suggests adoption of field-level mandates cannot be taken for granted. Although regulative bodies and industry norms often promulgate such pressures, evidence suggests that organizations and their leaders will not always adhere to them. This gives rise to a central question posed by Greenwood and Hinings (2006): how and why do some organizations successfully change while others fail? Despite being posed over a decade ago, it is a question that remains highly relevant.

Framing and local communities

Although framing has received considerable attention in the change literature, the role of leader framing in change implementation remains unclear. Research suggests leaders have interpretive schemes, “intermittently articulated as values and interests” (Ranson et al., 1980: 4) that help determine how they make sense of change. In this way, interpretive schemes facilitate the framing of organizational issues in ways that subsequently serve as guides for decision making and action (Furnari, 2018; Litrico and David, 2017). Framing also occurs via dialectical interactions between leaders and local stakeholders (Benford and Snow, 2000; Pazzaglia et al., 2018). This process is particularly important when leaders are ambivalent toward change, usually because of pressure from multiple, often competing stakeholders. Ambivalence, while understudied, has received some attention in the change literature (e.g. Ashforth et al., 2014; Oreg and Sverdlik, 2011; Plambeck and Weber, 2009, 2010). Leaders are particularly susceptible to, and impacted by, ambivalence, as they are required to make decisions while processing often contradictory information (Simon, 2006). Framing research has often used binary classifications, such as changes being opportunities versus threats, controllable by change recipients versus uncontrollable, or positive versus negative (e.g. Gioia and Thomas, 1996; Van Burg et al., 2014; Vardaman et al., 2012). However, such clear distinctions are often not reflective of reality. Leaders regularly confront issues that simultaneously evoke both positive and negative attitudes, at which point local stakeholder pressures can become more salient (Lawrence and Dover, 2015). However, we have little understanding of how local pressures influence the framing of change, particularly when leaders are ambivalent.

This oversight is problematic given the limited research indicating the influence the local community can have on change. For example, Marquis et al. (2013) found that regional identity impacts the founding of non-profit organizations, while Marquis and Lounsbury’s (2007) study of community banks found that resistance to change may emerge directly from local communities. More recently, Lee and Lounsbury (2015: 862)

showed that community-level institutional logics “filtered how organizations perceived and reacted to the demands and requirements stemming from field-level logics”. Further, Lawrence and Dover (2015) demonstrated the significance of place in understanding how local pressures shaped efforts to house the homeless and those living with HIV/AIDS. The role of the community in the framing of change is clearly important yet remains unspecified with regard to change implementation. As such, the dialectical frame construction process that involves local communities and organization leaders may be central to understanding how change takes place, and indeed why it often fails.

Methods

Change context

Media attention and public health warnings have drawn attention to the obesity crisis that is afflicting numerous countries around the world. The situation in the USA is particularly worrying with latest available statistics indicating that 39.8% of adults and 18.5% of children are considered to be obese (Hales et al., 2017). Rural areas of the USA have been particularly hard hit, with Mississippi and Tennessee, the focus of our work, perennially having among the highest rates of adult and childhood obesity in the country (Warren et al., 2018). In response, state legislatures in both states took similar steps to those taken elsewhere in the country by enacting new policies that sought to increase children’s activity levels in schools while reducing their access to unhealthy drinks and snacks. In so doing, legislators were adopting the deeply embedded logic that schools, with their captive population of children, are the most appropriate places through which to address many of society’s most pressing concerns. The Mississippi Healthy Students Act of 2007 (MHSA) made Physical Education (PE) a required course for graduation, stipulated that children in grades K-8 should have 150 minutes of physical activity per week, and required schools to remove high-sugar snacks and soft drinks from vending machines. In Tennessee, the Coordinated School Health Extension Act of 2006 (CSHEA) similarly called for 90 minutes of physical activity per week for all students and required schools to stop selling unhealthy snacks and drinks in vending machines.

These policies took place in the wake of another broad policy change, local enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, a policy intended to increase academic accountability for schools via standardized testing. While NCLB was not the first attempt made by federal policy-makers to address differential levels of student attainment—see, for example, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report *A nation at risk*—it was to be one of the most far-reaching and controversial. The NCLB Act dictated that state governments must give standardized assessments in English, reading, and mathematics to all students at particular grade levels. Although NCLB provisions did not assert a national achievement standard—these were left to individual states—it did ensure that schools, teachers, and principals would be held much more directly accountable for their students’ performances. In Mississippi, the Mississippi Accountability System assigned each school a rating from one (low) to five (high) based upon student performance on mandated standardized tests. In Tennessee, a similar

Table 1. School locations and demographic information.

School name	State	Locale	Total students	White (%)	African American (%)	Other* (%)	Economically disadvantaged† (%)
Franklin	MS	Suburban	1845	73	25	2	17
Gold Coast	MS	Rural	268	57	40	3	83
Pine Woods	MS	Rural	642	100	0	0	57
Rogers	MS	Suburban	1885	72	22	5	17
Adams	TN	Inner city	1402	16	80	4	46
Jefferson	TN	Inner city	578	0	100	0	91
Montlake	TN	Rural	1048	74	23	2	36
Smith	TN	Rural	1351	80	18	1	28

*Includes Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander.

†Based on standard criteria of qualification for partially or completely subsidized school meals.

system was developed that provided a rating of schools by subject area. It was in this context that school leaders were required to implement the childhood obesity polices.

Our investigation centered on eight public schools: four in Mississippi—Franklin, Gold Coast, Pine Woods, and Rogers—and four in Tennessee—Adams, Jefferson, Montlake, and Smith.¹ These schools were purposively selected to ensure that we had a balance of leaders from schools that varied by size, racial composition, socio-economic status, and levels of academic performance. Information about each school is summarized in Table 1. Our research commenced as the new policies were being introduced into schools and was completed following three full academic years of real-time data collection.

Data

The data used here were part of a larger project studying obesity policy implementation in US public schools. We were accorded unfettered access to all of the schools in our study allowing us to collect data from three sources: semi-structured interviews; direct observations; and documents. We particularly relied upon the semi-structured interviews we carried out with organization leaders including school Principals (*n* = 29; eight participants) and Curriculum Directors (*n* = 8; six participants; see Table 2). Principals were chosen because they are the most senior leaders in their organizations, have broad authority, and are vital to school success (Engels et al., 2008; Weick, 1976). Curriculum Directors were selected because they are members of the top management team and played a leading role in adjusting school curricula in response to both NCLB and the obesity policies. We ended the interviews when we no longer gained new insights into why decisions were being made or what was influencing the change implementation process.

Interviews were carried out with one individual at a time and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes; most were approximately one hour in duration. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although each interview instrument was specifically crafted for the individual being interviewed, our questions were designed to elicit insight into the

Table 2. Participant interviews.

School	Leader participants	Number of interviews
Franklin, MS	Principal	2
	Curriculum Director	1
Gold Coast, MS	Principal	5
	Curriculum Director	1
Pine Woods, MS	Principal	7
	Curriculum Director	2
Rogers, MS	Principal	4
	Curriculum Director	2
Adams, TN	Principal	2
	Principal	2
Jefferson, TN	Principal	4
	Curriculum Director	1
Montlake, TN	Principal	3
	Curriculum Director	1
Smith, TN		
Total		37

participant’s tenure with the organization, awareness of the new policy, the flow of information from state to school-level individuals, how the new policy might influence daily activities, what future changes were being anticipated, and other competing pressures that leaders faced. From this basis, conversations developed around issues identified as salient to the ongoing processes of change implementation. Whenever possible, two members of the research team carried out each interview. Following Eisenhardt (1989), interviewers discussed initial interpretations and wrote up field notes within 24 hours of each interview.

We also engaged in over 200 hours of direct observation, including leaders’ interactions in their schools, PE classes, and recess activities. Observing day-to-day activities allowed us to see change implementation in real time. These observations occurred on a regular basis throughout the course of the study. Our third source of data comprised electronic and paper documents related to policy development and implementation. These included internal documents such as memoranda, and external documents such as state and federal policy documents and reports, and popular press articles about the obesity epidemic in general and school-based responses in particular. Articles from the national press were a useful source of data for understanding evolving societal pressures to

address obesity in schools; items in local newspapers were particularly helpful in providing insight into what concerns were being manifest locally.

Data analysis

Our analysis technique comprised traveling between the data and its emerging structure. We drew upon the ‘Gioia approach’ (Gioia et al., 2013; Langley and Abdallah, 2011) to uncover the data structure, and in particular to move from the extensive amount of qualitative data that we gathered through to our theoretical inferences. This analysis took place in three steps. It was during this process that the value of our multidisciplinary team, comprising researchers experienced in organization studies and education, became most apparent as we were able to develop insights and challenge emergent findings from multiple, informed perspectives.

First-order concepts. We began by assessing the initial emergent themes in our data. Given the focus of our work, some of these themes included statements regarding participants’ views of the obesity issue, the implementation of MHSA or CSHEA, accountability ratings, and school sporting performances. Throughout this process of open coding, we combined common statements into provisional categories in an iterative fashion. We continually revisited the data and discussed the emerging categories within the research team. This led us to abandon misfitting categories and statements, and to recategorize others. The emerging structure also led to revisions in the interview and observation protocols throughout the three-year period.

Creating theoretical categories. Following open coding, we moved to axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Here we grouped the concepts that emerged in step one into logically cohering categories. For instance, statements about the parental pressure for, community pride in, and media interest in, high scores on the accountability tests, along with artifacts that demonstrated school academic performance, were grouped under ‘Community academic rating pressure’.

Creating aggregate theoretical dimensions. Once we generated second-order themes, we sought to identify the undergirding theoretical dimensions that connected them together. This process allowed us to gain a greater understanding of the factors that influenced decision making in schools. For instance, we found that there was significant perceived pressure from the community for high academic ratings and varsity sport success, both of which informed the framing of organization leaders. As we progressed, we continually (re)considered how the emergent findings fit with our theoretical understanding of change implementation in an abductive process. Figure 1 demonstrates the three steps of our analysis and shows the first-order codes, theoretical categories, and aggregate theoretical dimensions.

Data robustness. The confidence that we have in our data and analyses stems from several factors. First, within the research team we had a rich, varied, and sustained engagement with the sites in which we were collecting data. We thus had an excellent understanding

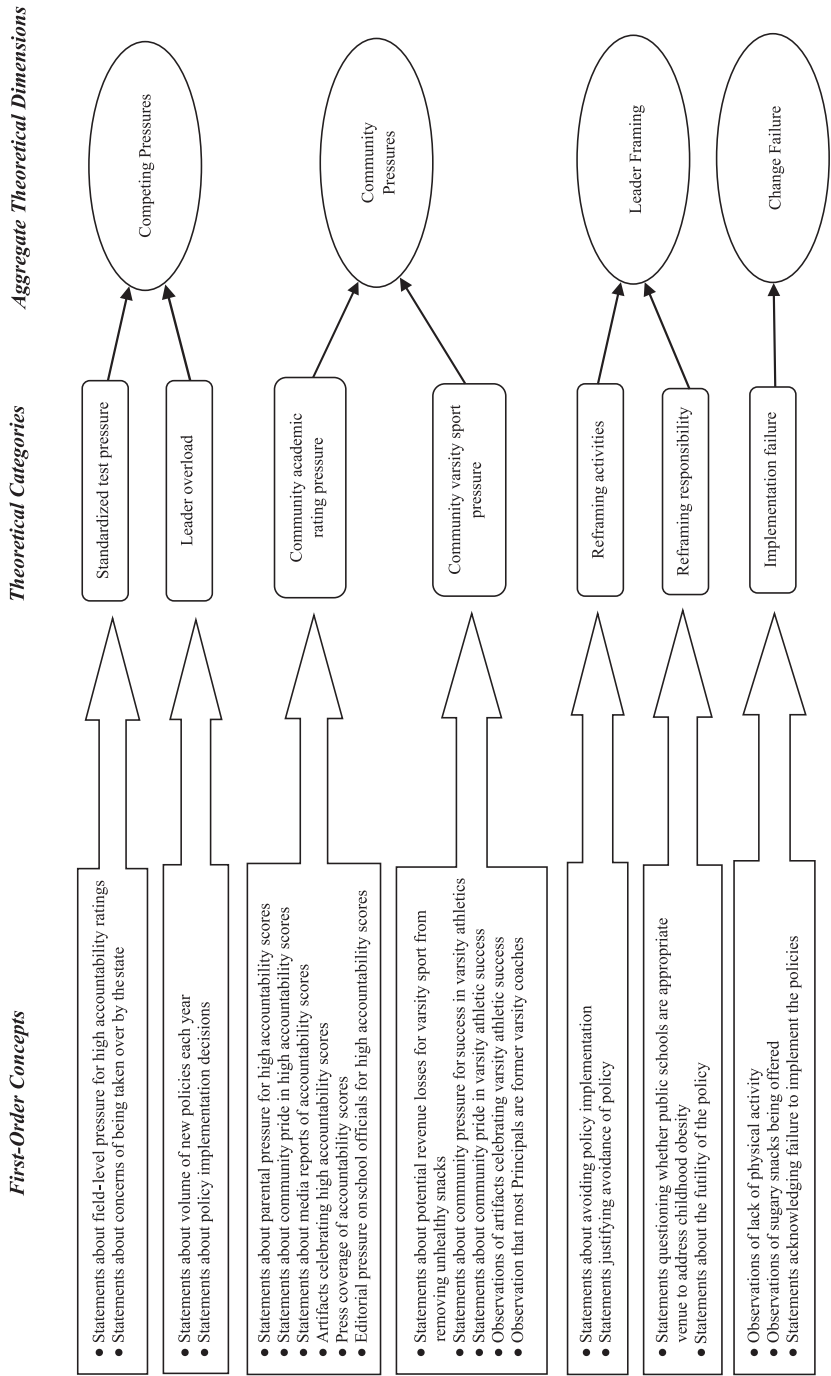


Figure 1. Data structure.

of what happened in the schools, and why, over the course of the study. Such immersion gave us confidence that we were being given uncensored accounts of what was occurring as opposed to sanitized versions intended for public consumption. Second, the research team held monthly meetings throughout the study in which we discussed emergent understandings and challenged each other's assumptions and conclusions. Third, we described our emergent findings to several educational insiders to see if our interpretations were in line with how others viewed the change implementation process. Finally, we laid out our theoretical inferences to a colleague who, while an experienced qualitative scholar, was not involved in the research project and was able to challenge our assumptions and conclusions.

Findings

As we examined our data, four things emerged as particularly significant (see Figure 1). First, leaders were pulled in several directions by competing pressures that originated at field level. Second, pressures at the local level held significant sway when leaders were considering change initiatives. Third, leaders continually sought to frame the obesity policies in ways that were aligned with the interests of the local communities in which they were situated. Fourth, there was widespread change failure across the study, as schools failed to increase levels of student physical activity and continued to make high-calorie snacks and drinks available to students. The notion of ambivalence was also a meta-theme that underpinned the findings, as leaders were torn about the value of the childhood obesity policies and how they fit with other priorities. It is worth pointing out that these findings were consistent for leaders across the schools over the duration of our study, irrespective of the socio-economic characteristics or academic performance of the schools they led. In addition to the data presented in the narrative below, additional evidence is presented in Table 3.

Competing pressures

Leaders at each school were forced to accommodate multiple, and sometimes competing, field-level policy edicts. There were two points in this respect that proved particularly important to the implementation of the new childhood obesity policies: the overwhelming number of new policies that Principals were expected to accommodate and the pressure to perform well on standardized tests.

Leader overload. Leaders reported dealing with numerous new policies each year, making focusing on the CSHEA and MHSA problematic. The Principal from Pine Woods explained: "I'd say there are at least 60 new policies put in place every single year. It's a lot to deal with." The Principal at Rogers, similarly overwhelmed, suggested: "It's like drinking from a water hose . . . I'm just trying to keep my head above water . . . we've got so much to deal with I'm just doing the best I can." The Principal at Montlake spoke of the difficulty in dealing with the CSHEA while balancing other new policies: "You've already got your plate and it's full and rather than giving you another plate, they are just putting more on the plate, so [CSHEA] will fall off when it's overloaded." He added:

Table 3. Data supporting thematic interpretations.

Theme	Representative quotations
Leader overload	<p><i>Competing pressures</i></p> <p>Sometimes I just think I can't take any more. They are planning to redesign the curriculum again. I've said it for years. The state just tries to do too much. (Principal, Pine Woods)</p> <p>As you talk with teachers when they know every year we will implement something. The reason we implement different strategies is you identify your needs, the needs don't always stay identical. If they would stay identical then you could keep your interventions identical. But they don't and, ah, they would say that you know we don't actually change our systemic approach but it's got a lot of diversity within our systemic approach. (Principal, Montlake)</p> <p>I think [fighting obesity] is a good thing like I said. With that going through, pressure of course that comes relates back to the test scores and meeting your average yearly progress and all that. (Principal, Gold Coast)</p> <p>Test scores, test scores, test scores. That's what it's all about. (Curriculum Director, Smith)</p>
Standardized test pressure	<p><i>Community pressures</i></p> <p>Accountability ratings are the thing the community is going to hold your feet to the fire on. (Principal, Gold Coast)</p> <p>People in a small community still know what everybody is doing. Joe knows what Tom is doing, Tom knows what Suzy is doing, and then rumors spread. They say, "I hear that such and such happened", and I'll say, "well now that didn't happen". So they know what we are doing academically. (Principal, Pine Woods)</p> <p>I had a parent come in within the last week. She was concerned because her daughter was not achieving . . . and she says not one child is to be left behind. (Principal, Pine Woods)</p> <p>When I got here it was like in an instant, like light speed the bad news [about low ratings] . . . spread all over the community before I could turn around. (Principal, Smith)</p>
Community academic rating pressure	<p>The kids don't go on the [gymnasium] floor on gamedays. We don't want the court getting dirty. (Principal, Franklin)</p> <p>We can't go out on the football field [for PE class] because they don't want anybody messing up the grass [for varsity sport contests]. (Principal, Adams)</p>
Community varsity sport pressure	<p><i>Leader framing</i></p> <p>The thing about it is, we were already doing it . . . our kids get exercise right now. (Principal, Gold Coast)</p> <p>Our challenge for 90 minutes of physical activity is that we didn't know how to define physical activity. We think walking to and from classes gives them 90 minutes a week of exercise. (Curriculum Coordinator, Montlake)</p> <p>We've got 90 players out there for football and we've got 20 players for boys basketball, 30 for girls basketball and you know the other kids play soccer and we have a rugby club outside of school. Our kids already get physical activity. (Principal, Montlake)</p> <p>The students have been very angry about the diet sodas [in school vending machines], and when students are unhappy their [academic] performance drops. (Principal, Franklin)</p> <p>We can't keep kids in at recess anymore to do remedial work. That really hurts us at test time. (Principal, Pine Woods)</p>
Reframing activities	<p><i>Change failure</i></p> <p>I do [want to increase activity] but a lot of it depends on my staffing formula, and I have to make sure the content area is covered first. (Principal, Jefferson)</p> <p>As far as pure physical education, our football and basketball meet during school . . . band meets during school too and they probably do physical exercise. (Curriculum Director, Smith)</p>
Reframing responsibility	
Implementation failure	

“We’ll get to [student] cardiovascular activity, if we can keep afloat.” Rogers’ Principal offered the following: “It’s been tough this year. We’ve had a lot going on. We haven’t done much to get ready for [MHSA].” Pine Woods’ Curriculum Director suggested the number of policies was overwhelming: “A lot of the school systems are really throwing their hands up in the air and asking how are they going to meet all of these requirements.” Rogers’ Curriculum Director summed up the frustration felt by many leaders in our study:

The people who are making the laws and things, they’ve not been in the school. Even sometimes people in the State Department [of Education] and others, until you’ve been there, you don’t know. It sounds good. I just don’t think that it’s been good, and you know they just keep raising the number [of policies].

Standardized test score pressures. Leaders felt pressured to prioritize concerns about the NCLB-based academic ratings above other mandates for change. Each Principal mentioned the importance of standardized test performance before we reached a question about it in our interview protocol, indicating its salience. For example, the Principal at Gold Coast summarized his overarching focus: “I’d say the main pressure of course in all schools in Mississippi is the emphasis on the [standardized] test scores.” The Principal at Pine Woods expressed a similar comment: “The biggest thing [we care about] is our level five rating.” Smith’s Principal stated: “Our major success the last five years is we have made tremendous gains in all of our academic indicators. That’s been real exciting to see. We’re now at the top, number one in algebra.”

Pressure for higher academic performance came in punitive forms as well, with schools with low accountability ratings or poor graduation rates coming under additional scrutiny with the potential censure of being taken over by the state government. The NCLB legislation allowed state officials to take administrative control from local school officials if standardized test performance was consistently low for a period of years:

Right now, we’re considered a target school, because the year before we had a good standing, we didn’t make adequate yearly progress, so we’re a target school. . . we have to make sure teachers know that those exams will keep us on the [target takeover] list or off the list. (Principal, Jefferson)

In addition to Jefferson’s Principal, this concern created pressure for the Principal at Smith, who described fears of a state takeover and his efforts to prevent it:

You’ve got to stay off that [takeover] list. If you don’t get off the list, you know, schools can be taken over, administrations can be changed, teachers can be reassigned. There’s all kinds of nightmares out there . . . Our socio-economically disadvantaged students did not perform well. So we had to do whatever we could, that is when we added labs for those kids in English.

The Principal at Adams was dealing with being on the state takeover list due to a low graduation rate:

Graduation rate is a real challenge for most high schools, and for mine it’s a real challenge. Graduation rate is determined by the ninth graders who are projected to attend your school, and

who actually graduated four years and a summer later. . . . We are on the [target takeover] list because of graduation rate.

Montlake's Principal confirmed the impact of NCLB: "If I'd quit being the Principal [years ago], I wouldn't have any idea how much the role of the Principal has changed with the accountability ratings."

Balancing these pressures with obesity prevention was difficult for leaders:

There's a lot of pressure for [high accountability scores], so we're a little bit resistant, a little reluctant to give up any time for [physical] activity . . . we are pressed for time and the accountability pressures are very, very real. (Principal, Smith)

Montlake's Principal was similarly concerned:

We're so under-the-gun academically to get the time-on-task for kids to perform for No Child Left Behind . . . there is a strain there, it puts a strain on time. Time is your greatest resource. You know, difficult to take [out] a math algebra class, and [give] time out for [physical activity].

Adams' Principal expressed ambivalence about implementing the obesity changes, and suggested they were not as salient in this environment: "With No Child Left Behind, your Principals want more English, Math, and Science emphasis to pass the tests. So, what's being phased out is music, art, and PE." This focus on NCLB was also shared by Gold Coast's Curriculum Director: "You can't stray from the test. You've got to stick to the test curriculum to make sure students pass it." Thus, the pressures for student standardized test performance weighed heavily at the time the CSHEA and MHSA were introduced.

Community pressures

Clear from our findings was that the interests of local communities in which the schools were situated had a significant influence on how leaders prioritized and positioned courses of action. This pressure came from local actors, most notably the media and parents, and coalesced around two themes: academic accountability ratings and varsity sport success.

Community academic rating pressure. The pressure to maintain or improve academic ratings from stakeholders in the local community was explained by Smith's Principal:

When I became Principal, those [standardized test] issues became, very much the major consideration, in terms of pressure. Before then, you know, accountability was not an issue. You know, kids failing, no one in the community ever found out. Wasn't much of an accountability issue. Now, the biggest pressure is for our students, they need to perform. They need to perform well on their exit exams. You know, core classes [those assessed via standardized tests], they also need to graduate on time, because if they don't, it's [a] reflection on the school.

The Principal at Pine Woods reflected on how community interests created ambivalence about implementing the MHSA. He acknowledged the importance of the obesity problem:

It has definitely gotten worse. I will tell you up front that my grandchildren are part of the problem. We let them eat whatever we want. I'm worried that my generation and your generation will be the first to live longer than the younger generation.

Subsequently, however, he highlighted the difficulty of balancing the community pressure to maintain high accountability scores with implementing changes to prevent childhood obesity:

Of course the problem is the community puts so much emphasis on academics, you know? There needs to be a balance but we put so much emphasis on academics and our accreditation rating which we currently are a level 5 and we want to remain a 5, so we don't pull kids out of classrooms to get physical activity.

The accountability ratings are very transparent, with school performance publicly available. This allowed actors in the local community to exert significant pressure on organization leaders. Smith's Principal explained how the pressure comes to bear: "Word gets around about [accountability ratings] . . . People love to talk in these communities. I guess that's the only way I can explain [the pressure]." Pine Woods' Curriculum Director offered another source of community pressure:

You have other schools in the district, and they are not a level 5. They've been level 4 and I think they are going to drop back to level 3 this year. So you have a lot of people when they look to move to this County they want to move into our area because of the school . . . parents who are looking to move and enroll their kids in a school look at the accreditation levels.

High performance on standardized exams and the associated high accountability rating was thus explicitly valued by the communities in which the schools were anchored, and overtly celebrated by schools that performed well. Franklin, for example, displayed a large external sign celebrating its level 5 accountability rating; its Principal stated "[the community] would run me out of here if we didn't have a 5 [rating]". Pine Woods had a similarly large sign prominently located at its entrance that celebrated the school's achievement of a level 5 accountability rating for four consecutive years.

Accommodating this community pressure was clearly important: "Everything I do is about relationships in the community" (Principal, Adams). This was also apparent for the Principal at Smith:

We all need to have common vision, common goals. We try to get as much input from those [local] stakeholders as possible. Because it's not my school, it's their school. It's you know, it's the community's school. So we try and make sure that we're here to develop what their desires are.

Montlake's Curriculum Director shared the importance of managing community relations regarding accountability ratings: "The thing that we've identified in the [accountability rating] improvement plan that we've focused a lot on is communication. Between us and parents, between us and the community."

Smith's Principal, formerly the school's head football coach, explained how community pressure forced him to balance accountability ratings with other policies, such as CSHEA:

You have to have support from the community to be successful . . . it can't be an us versus them mentality. . . . We're trying to create that environment as much as we can. Trust is a big factor . . . as far as the trust factor, that is always something that is delicate. You can lose it as quickly, and their perception of you, can change in just one conversation. You have to work on it constantly, maintain that type of relationship with the people you're working with in the community. So you know losing [on accountability rating], that could hurt us The pressure for test performance is there. It's kind of like football. I thought I was going to get out of that pressure to win when I got out of the football business, but it's the same. Actually it's probably more in this position, because you're not winning on the field, you're winning academically.

Montlake's Curriculum Director also noted why the community failed to exert pressure to implement the CSHEA:

Most people are just concerned with their kids graduating from school and going to college or doing whatever, so their concern is more with them academically. With physical education, you know they probably don't even think about it even if their child is a little bit overweight, they probably say, 'well, I am too'. I have certainly seen people do that.

A similar statement was offered by the Curriculum Director at Gold Coast: "I don't think a lot of parents are on board with [obesity prevention]."

Negative publicity in the local media was also a significant pressure for organization leaders. Because of the transparent nature of accountability ratings, local media reported them as they were made public. As Gold Coast's Principal noted, pressure to maintain high accountability ratings was strong from local media outlets:

I guess the worst thing is the negative publicity . . . the negative side would be the public perception of it if you go down [on the 5 point scale] When I say that negative publicity, I put it this way, one school that had been a 3 in the district the last couple of times, any chance, any opportunity the local paper had to mention that, it would always be in there. Nothing malicious or anything, but anytime they had an opportunity to put it in there, it was in there. If we were the only school to drop down to a 3, they would cover it.

A review of accountability scores in local news coverage supported this perception. For instance, the local newspaper in the Gold Coast and Pine Woods region ran a series of editorials promoting the value of the Mississippi Accountability System. One editorial stated "School children are the ones harmed when schools fail. The embarrassment of school trustees is of secondary concern. Failure is not acceptable." Another editorial stated "we believe the accountability system, with strong community support, can help overcome even [financial] impediments as schools make progress toward successfully educating students". Later headlines celebrated the program, "Let the testing begin!", and other coverage lamented a lack of improvement: "The majority of Northeast Mississippi schools are near or better than the average in state test scores released today, but results don't show much improvement." Our review of news coverage also yielded multiple articles highlighting schools with low or declining performance on accountability ratings. Each of these articles identified the Principal of the school by name.

Community varsity sport pressure. Pressure for varsity sport success was also prominent in each of the communities in our study as the Gold Coast Principal noted:

We won the state [basketball] title in 1980.² Those guys are still known around town. That one thing is what they'll be known for around here the rest of their lives . . . basketball is a big deal in this community.

Pine Woods' Principal echoed this sentiment, "We do have good community support as far as parental involvement. We have good support. Athletics is important here at this school. This is a basketball school." The value that members of the schools and the local communities place on high-level varsity performances was also evidenced by signs in schools celebrating varsity sport championships, and by a surprising observation that we made in five of the schools in our study, as we next explain.

During a tour of Franklin, the Principal pointed out that all unhealthy snacks were removed from the vending machines, as per the legislative requirements. However, at recess, we observed school personnel setting up a table and selling the banned snacks and drinks. The Principal explained that revenue from these snacks funded travel for varsity athletic teams, and that it was too important to be forfeited. The Curriculum Director at Smith similarly noted, "We have to do fundraising to support [varsity sports]. We sell candy . . . it pays for our travel [to games against schools in other cities]." Principals at Gold Coast and Pine Woods also reported that revenue from the sale of high-sugar snacks and drinks supported varsity athletics. As Montlake's Principal summed up, "We still have candies and things like that . . . and to be honest with you, that's a big fund raiser for our school."

The pressure from local communities for varsity sport success was also manifest in other ways. For example, Franklin had recently constructed an athletic training facility that was funded by a \$250,000 donation from a local business owner. Despite the need for additional facilities to cope with the requirements of the MHSA, the PE staff and Principal insisted that this facility be used only by varsity athletes because of worries that it would be damaged if used for PE classes. Our observations at Franklin also revealed that students enrolled in PE classes were not allowed on the gymnasium floor on days in which varsity basketball games were taking place. On such days, students spent the class sitting idle in the arena seating. Demonstrating the prioritization of varsity sport over the MHSA's activity component, the explanation offered by the PE instructor was a fear that the floor would be scuffed or dirtied ahead of the contest, and the community might think they "weren't serious" about winning. This pressure was particularly salient to Principals because seven of the eight in our study were former varsity sport coaches, a phenomenon we discovered was common in schools across the USA.

Leader framing

It became clear during the course of the study that leaders framed their reactions to the obesity policies in ways that emphasized the interests of the local community. This framing came in two forms. On the one hand, existing school activities were reframed such that they met the requirements of the new policies; on the other hand, their responsibility

for the aims of the new policies were extensively challenged, which allowed Principals to justify their emphasis on standardized test performance and varsity sport.

Reframing activities. Several Principals explained to us how they framed the changes required by the new policies in ways that allowed them to justify avoiding their implementation. For example, while the MHSA mandated that all students have access to PE courses, Gold Coast's Principal outlined a path to enactment that reframed the new policy by labeling varsity basketball practice as PE:

The policy says we have to offer everyone an opportunity for PE. We have varsity basketball practices going on all day in our gym . . . for those that make the team, they get activity every day . . . [everyone] can try out for the team, so we are giving everyone a chance to get PE. We'll be in compliance.

The Curriculum Director at Rogers made a similar case, in this case with football practice:

We have to offer PE . . . Now, the kids can choose to participate or not. It is through the athletic program . . . because football for instance, anyone can do it. . . . [our] sports people can do [it], so it is available if they want to do it.

While the CSHEA called for 90 minutes of activity per week via structured PE courses, the Principal at Jefferson also suggested her school had no need to change:

I think we have a lot of kids participating in football, basketball, track, and a lot of them walk home. We have a lot of students who get 90 minutes a week already. So I think everybody gets about 90 minutes, walking up and down the steps, walking in the halls. They have about five minutes between classes so each time they have to move, so I truly believe they get at least 90 minutes a week of activity.

Montlake's Curriculum Director offered a similar thought about how to meet the 90 minutes per week of activity component of the change:

Right now, do we have a percentage that don't do anything except for walk from one end of our building to the other? We've got some of those students. Of course if you walked from one end of the building to the other, you've walked a long way, so that might get the 90 minutes.

Reframing responsibility. Many leaders questioned the role of the public school as a conduit for addressing childhood obesity. This view was offered by Pine Woods' Principal: "The responsibility at some point in some aspect of something has got to fall on parents, however [with MHSA] it doesn't . . . At some point, it is their kids. You know, we can't do everything from a school standpoint." Smith's Principal felt a similar frustration: "They go home and you have no control over what's on their table. You know, to eat . . . I mean it is, it has a lot to do with that, family." The Principal at Rogers recognized the importance of the issue, telling us that: "Childhood obesity is so important. So important. We've got to work on it." However, he also shared the view that schools were not the appropriate context in which to address the problem:

Personally, I don't believe schools are making kids fat. I think a large part of it is from the home and parents and I think sometimes there are some people who think it is [school], but I don't think so.

The Principal at Pine Woods also expressed a lack of concern about the program: "When the State tells us to do something they give us enough time and then, they'll say 'ok, we're going to come over and check on this and make sure that you have it'. That's when we'll do it."

Still other leaders framed their responses in terms of the futility of attempting to address obesity through the school setting. For example, Franklin's Curriculum Director stated: "I don't think [MHSA] is going to affect students because they are going to have the same bad habits at home." Adams' Principal suggested, "Schools have always been the place to do things like this. It is completely legitimate to help kids with [obesity] here." However, he went on to point to why he felt it was futile to try to address childhood obesity in schools:

We take deep fryers out, so parents now come around and bring McDonald's for kids to eat for lunch. So I'm going to tell mom, 'No, you can't bring her McDonald's.' And mom says, 'Well she doesn't like the school food, and I want her to have something to eat. I wasn't going to go home and cook to bring her anything.' You know, that's just the kind of argument we get into. If it's your mom, and she wants to bring you McDonald's, the most I'll say is, 'Well, she can't eat it in the cafeteria.'

Franklin's Principal likewise suggested the onus should be placed on the parents: "The parents have to take more responsibility for this. We can only do so much here."

Change failure

As the findings about reframing suggest, there was a widespread failure to implement the policies designed to address childhood obesity across the study. Each state's policy consisted of a curriculum change, an activity requirement, and a nutrition change. Franklin did not require (or often even allow) physical activity during PE class time, despite having excellent facilities and space for activity. Unhealthy snacks were removed from vending machines, but the same snacks were sold on snack carts set up in hallways between class periods. Gold Coast did not alter course offerings nor did the administration ensure children received activity. In fact, we observed that students were often held inside during recess periods to prepare for upcoming standardized tests, as the Principal reframed the status quo as meeting the change mandate: "The change really hasn't affected us much anyway because we were already offering [physical activity] to start with." At Pine Woods, no efforts were made to increase student activity; banned snacks were removed from vending machines but were offered for sale at snack tables between class periods. Rogers also failed to increase activity and used snack carts to sell high-sugar snacks and drinks. Rogers' Principal acknowledged the lack of physical activity: "The PE program hasn't gone well as far as what the kids have done . . . there have been a lot of days where there hasn't been a whole lot of activity."

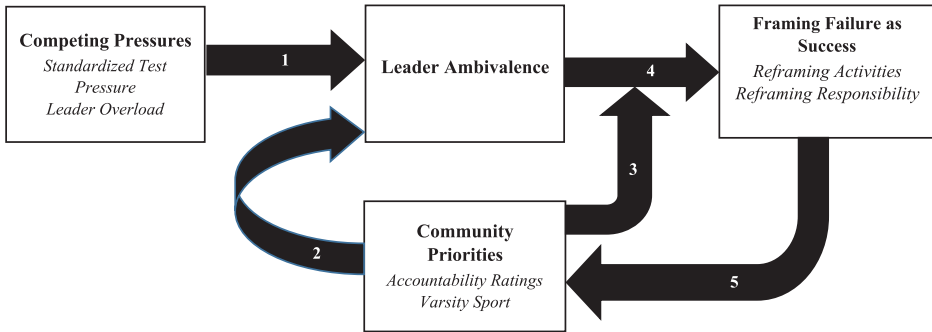


Figure 2. Interplay of ambivalence and community in reframing change implementation.

The implementation effort at Adams lacked any curriculum change and our observations found no additional student activity. The effort at Jefferson was similarly muted, as the Principal reframed the physical activity mandate as students walking between classes. Montlake, despite having excellent athletic facilities, did not expand course offerings for PE and made no efforts to ensure 90 minutes per week of physical activity for students. Unhealthy snacks were removed from school vending machines but were offered to students through roving snack carts stationed in hallways between class periods. Smith similarly did not increase physical activity and offered high-sugar snacks and drinks for sale between periods. We thus found widespread change failure, as leaders failed to take action consistent with the policies' intent and often failed to enact any changes at all. This is summed up by the Principal at Adams: "I have not made any changes in what we do." Leaders instead reframed the meaning of what constituted successful change.

Reframing change failure

To help make sense of the various concepts and their relationships in our data, we constructed a model of how the leaders in our study engaged in framing the required changes (see Figure 2). This allowed us to develop overarching theoretical inferences from our study.

As our data and past research demonstrate, organizational leaders often face conflicting pressures that compete for time, resources, and attention (e.g. Hobfoll, 2001; Reay and Hinings, 2009). Our findings suggest that when these pressures conflict or compete, they often create ambivalence among organizational leaders (arrow 1). This ambivalence is at least in part due to leaders feeling pressure to conserve limited resources in the face of myriad demands (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Although they demonstrated an awareness of the need to address childhood obesity, the leaders in our study felt either unmotivated to implement the changes or questioned their validity in the context of competing change pressures. This finding is notable because research has shown that change recipients who understand that rationale for change tend to be more receptive (Lau and Woodman, 1995; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1999). Our data further suggest that the community played a prominent role in creating this ambivalence. Community pressure to create high levels of

academic achievement and varsity sport success took such primacy that organizational leaders devalued the obesity initiatives even though they recognized childhood obesity as a very serious problem (arrow 2).

During this condition of ambivalence, community pressure also came to the fore in shaping the ways in which organizational leaders framed their responses to change initiatives. Our analysis suggests ambivalent leaders looked to community priorities in making sense of each change initiative (arrow 3), and indeed crafted frames based on the priorities of the community. Perhaps more importantly, our findings demonstrated how the community both created ambivalence in the presence of competing field-level change initiatives, and also shaped the way leaders framed the change when they experienced ambivalence.

The community's priorities also became manifest inside the organization and guided the way leaders defined their implementation of the obesity policies. The framing of the issue influenced its subsequent implementation via the reframing tactics put into place by Principals and Curriculum Coordinators. For example, framing the issue within the dominant interests of the community led to the conflation of varsity sport with efforts to combat childhood obesity. The void created by leader ambivalence was filled by the priorities of the community (arrow 3), as leaders framed the changes to fit those priorities (arrow 4). As such, organizational leaders reframed their failure to implement change as success. Our analysis also suggests the relationship between the community and organizational leaders is mutually reinforcing, as communities created dominant frames for ambivalent leaders, and leaders placed change initiatives within those frames and reflected them back to the community (arrow 5). Leader framing in this way served to reinforce the very community values that underpinned the frames. Because organization leaders prioritized community interests in reframing notions of change success and failure, those interests were reinforced when reflected back to the community.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to investigate the implementation of field-level childhood obesity policies in public schools. As the study progressed, we realized that a key component of determining whether change was deemed a failure was not down to metrics associated with change progress but rather the ways in which change was framed by organizational leaders, particularly in response to what was valued by the local communities in which the schools were located. In so doing, we offer three main contributions to developing theories of change implementation processes, the role of the local community in organizational life, and the impact of leader ambivalence on change outcomes.

Theoretical implications

Our study has implications for the broader theory of change implementation. While it is clear that change is difficult to accomplish (e.g. Amis et al., 2004; Beer and Nohria, 2000; Jacquemont et al., 2015), findings remain relatively scarce about the precise processual mechanisms through which implementation failure occurs. Our

analysis offers a new perspective on change failure by demonstrating that change success or failure may ultimately depend on the way it is framed by organizational leaders. Although meaning making has been a frequent topic of investigation (e.g. Purdy et al., 2019), its specific effects on change implementation are not apparent. Our findings show how leaders ascribe meaning to redefine the very notion of change failure.

Framing research has predominantly taken two forms. First, investigations of core framing tasks, in which decision-makers use existing values and schema to interpret issues, and second, investigations of frame construction through dialectical interactions with stakeholders (Benford and Snow, 2000). Sparse as it is, research on the second form has found that frames evolve to become mutually reinforcing via social relationships, and in so doing constrain action (Pazzaglia et al., 2018). We build upon this insight by showing how leaders use frames to redefine the meaning of implementation success or failure, and indeed reflect those frames back to stakeholders in the community in which their organization is embedded. In so doing, our article builds upon work suggesting discourse is used to signal failure (Schwarz et al., 2011) by suggesting discursive interactions may also reframe the meaning of failure. In this way, our analysis opens up a new theoretical pathway for understanding change implementation. Thus, this study goes beyond the binary notion of success and failure, and, instead builds theory on how leaders redefine failure via framing.

Our findings also offer insight into the mechanisms through which frames are constructed via interactions with stakeholders by explicating the influence of the local community in which organizations, and their leaders, are situated. Our model suggests local priorities come to the fore both in creating ambivalence among organizational leaders about competing change initiatives, and in the frame-making process of these leaders. The importance of local priorities also suggests that despite technological advances that have seemingly reduced their influence, local communities often hold sway over the organizations embedded within them (Marquis and Battilana, 2009). Our findings support this contention and extend it by identifying leaders as the primary pressure point where community influence comes to bear. Leaders are normally embedded in their communities, and although field-level pressures often cannot be ignored, attention can be directed toward those initiatives that align with community priorities, and away from those pressures that come into conflict with them.

There are two theoretical corollaries to this point. First, the sensitivity to community pressures will be particularly acute when leaders feel overwhelmed with other requirements and consequently search for ways to justify not implementing a new change requirement. Second, the more embedded a leader is with the local community, the more likely they will be to accede to community demands. In our case, the Principals were almost all former varsity coaches who, because of the importance of high school sport to local communities in the USA, will have had to work closely with local stakeholders, particularly prominent donors and members of the local media. Such local ties will result in a continued reinforcement of what is prioritized by the local community. As Figure 2 suggests, leader change implementation frames serve to reinforce the values and interests of the community. This mutually reinforcing process serves to concretize outcomes such that the status quo is redefined as successful change.

Our findings address Marquis et al.'s (2011) call to investigate the role of boundary conditions in community influences on organizations by showing that community priorities shape the framing processes of organizational leaders, both by contributing to leader ambivalence and by filling the sense-making void created by that ambivalence. Leaders faced with multiple and often competing change initiatives felt ambivalence toward obesity policies because they were not in line with community priorities, a common issue in complex environments (Plambeck and Weber, 2010). Community priorities gave sense in this ambiguous situation and structured the frames leaders developed around the issue. The influence of community priorities suggests communities are more than a container or backdrop for organizations, but instead underpin cultural life inside the organization (Lawrence and Dover, 2015). In this sense, local sensitivities become imbued in the psyche of organizational leaders.

Our next contribution comes by integrating the role of ambivalence into the change implementation process. Competing demands often force leaders to conserve resources to preserve what is most valued (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Given the pluralistic environments faced by most organizations, and the constant drumbeat of change brought on by field-level entities, ambivalence about change initiatives is becoming increasingly common among organizational leaders, especially in the public sector (Hoggett, 2006). Our findings suggest this ambivalence creates a frame-making process in which organizational leaders may redefine success or failure of change initiatives to suit the contextual reality in their organizations. Although the literature on ambivalence in organizations is in a nascent state, we build upon Ashforth et al.'s (2014) framework by identifying the community as a source of ambivalence, and by specifying at least one of ambivalence's roles in change implementation: creating a framing void that can be filled by community priorities.

Practical implications

This study demonstrates, that those formulating change initiatives should consider the communities and networks in which organizations and their leaders are embedded. The leaders in our study were not involved in formulating the changes they were asked to implement and nor were the values and interests of the local community considered. This effectively hindered any effort to address childhood obesity. Our findings also have specific policy implications. As standardized testing becomes more prevalent in many countries, notably the USA and the UK, it is apparent that policies that seek to address societal issues through school-based interventions, while imbued with an inherent logic and historical precedent, are unlikely to succeed if policy-makers follow a traditional centralized format. Rather, political leaders must either find other ways to address social ills or rethink the mechanisms by which schools are expected to play a role in their solution. It is apparent that change, even legislated change, will fail unless it is championed by a school Principal. Thus, understanding the pressures to which leaders are exposed, particularly those stemming from the lightly considered local community, is vitally important for policy-makers. It would also be advisable to consider what steps are necessary—perhaps through education or inducements—to gain local support. There may also be the need to define penalties and accountability measures even if, as in our case, holding people accountable may be difficult because of personal sensitivities.

Scope conditions

Our study took place in public sector organizations. Although we acknowledge that there are many differences between public and private sector organizations, not least because of the often greater levels of bureaucracy and job security in public sector organizations, tremendous insight on change has been developed through studies in public sector organizations from around the world. These have included the National Health Service in Britain (e.g. Battilana, 2011), government bodies in the UK and Finland (e.g. Kaltiainen et al., 2017), and Canadian National Sport Organizations (e.g. Amis et al., 2004; Hinings et al., 1996). There has also been a great deal of ground breaking work in schools (e.g. Amis et al., 2012; Currie et al., 2009) which has also been transferrable to other settings. With that said, the possibility exists that our findings may be bound to organizations that share a strong connection with local communities and stakeholders and thus, as with all research, extrapolating findings to disparate contexts should be made with care.

Directions for future research

Our work provides a foundation for researchers to reconsider that what constitutes 'successful' implementation may vary from formulation to implementation, and also from the perspective of different stakeholders. Although it is known that there are multiple perspectives on planned change (Bartunek et al., 2011), the notion that change success or failure may simply be reframed could yield new insights into implementation studies. As we noted, community influence specifically filled a sense-making void created by leader ambivalence. We believe additional research into how leader ambivalence becomes manifest and how the community influences leaders and their organizations is warranted. Although studies of community influence are accumulating (e.g. Audia et al., 2006; Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Lee and Lounsbury, 2015), the literature is at a nascent state. Future research should therefore examine the ways in which communities influence organization leaders, especially during periods of change implementation.

Concluding remarks

As childhood obesity continues to be a public health issue that washes across the globe, initiatives designed to combat it remain largely unsuccessful in stemming the tide. Our work offers insight into the implementation failures that have plagued this effort. By integrating theories of framing and ambivalence with community influence, we have developed a new theoretical pathway for understanding change processes in general and change failure in particular. We look forward to future work that further develops our nascent understanding of how we can implement changes designed to not only alleviate some of our most pressing societal concerns but also more mundane organizational problems.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge Ken Ward for assistance with study design, Hugh Ferry for assistance with data collection, and Maria Gondo, Stan Harris, Paul Hirsch, Bryant Hudson, and Tom Lawrence for comments on prior drafts.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: this research was supported by funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Active Living Research (RWJF 57758).

ORCID iD

James M Vardaman  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9259-7497>

Notes

- 1 All school names are pseudonyms.
- 2 The year has been changed to maintain the anonymity of the school.

References

- Amis JM, Slack T and Hinings CR (2004) The pace, sequence, and linearity of radical change. *Academy of Management Journal* 47(1): 15–38.
- Amis JM, Wright PM, Dyson B, et al. (2012) Implementing childhood obesity policy in a new educational environment: The cases of Mississippi and Tennessee. *American Journal of Public Health* 102(7): 1406–1413.
- Ashforth BE, Rogers KM, Pratt MG, et al. (2014) Ambivalence in organizations: A multilevel approach. *Organization Science* 25(5): 1453–1478.
- Audia PG, Freeman JH and Reynolds PD (2006) Organizational foundings in community context: Instruments manufacturers and their interrelationship with other organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 51(3): 381–419.
- Barley SR and Tolbert PS (1997) Institutionalization and structuration: Studying the links between action and institution. *Organization Studies* 18(1): 93–117.
- Bartunek JM, Balogun J and Do B (2011) Considering planned change anew: Stretching large group interventions strategically, emotionally, and meaningfully. *Academy of Management Annals* 5(1): 1–52.
- Battilana J (2011) The enabling role of social position in diverging from the institutional status quo: Evidence from the UK National Health Service. *Organization Science* 22(4): 817–834.
- Battilana J and Casciaro T (2012) Change agents, networks, and institutions: A contingency theory of organizational change. *Academy of Management Journal* 55(2): 381–398.
- Beer M and Nohria N (2000) Cracking the code of change. *Harvard Business Review* 78(3): 133–141.
- Benford RD and Snow DA (2000) Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26(2000): 611–639.
- Boehmer TK, Luke DA, Haire-Joshu DL, et al. (2008) Preventing childhood obesity through state policy: Predictors of bill enactment. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 34(4): 333–340.
- Canato A, Ravasi D and Phillips N (2013) Coerced practice implementation in cases of low cultural fit: Cultural change and practice adaptation during the implementation of Six Sigma at 3M. *Academy of Management Journal* 56(6): 1724–1753.
- Carson R (1962) *Silent Spring*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Currie G, Lockett A and Suhomlinova O (2009) Leadership and institutional change in the public sector: The case of secondary schools in England. *Leadership Quarterly* 20(5): 664–679.
- Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theory from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532–550.

- Engels N, Hotton G, Devos G, et al. (2008) Principals in schools with a positive school culture. *Educational Studies* 34(3): 159–174.
- Furnari S (2018) When does an issue trigger change in a field? A comparative approach to issue frames, field structures and types of field change. *Human Relations* 71(3): 321–348.
- Gioia DA and Thomas JB (1996) Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41(3): 370–403.
- Gioia DA, Corley KG and Hamilton AL (2013) Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods* 16(1): 15–31.
- Giorgi S (2017) The mind and heart of resonance: The role of cognition and emotions in frame effectiveness. *Journal of Management Studies* 54(5): 711–738.
- Goffman E (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gray B, Purdy JM and Ansari S (2015) From interactions to institutions: Microprocesses of framing and mechanisms for the structuring of institutional fields. *Academy of Management Review* 40(1): 115–143.
- Greenwood R and Hinings CR (2006) Radical organizational change. In: Clegg S, Hardy C, Nord WW, et al. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 814–842.
- Greenwood R, Suddaby R and Hinings CR (2002) Theorizing change: The role of professional associations in the transformation of institutionalized fields. *Academy of Management Journal* 45(1): 58–80.
- Halbesleben JR, Neveu JP, Paustian-Underdahl SC, et al. (2014) Getting to the “COR” understanding the role of resources in conservation of resources theory. *Journal of Management* 40(5): 1334–1364.
- Hales CM, Carroll MD, Fryar CD, et al. (2017) *Prevalence of obesity among adults and youth: United States, 2015–2016*. NCHS Data Brief No. 288. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1–8.
- Hinings CR, Thibault L, Slack T, et al. (1996) Values and organizational structure. *Human Relations* 49(7): 885–916.
- Hobfoll SE (2001) The influence of culture, community, and the nested-self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resources theory. *Applied Psychology* 50(3): 337–421.
- Hoffman AJ (1999) Institutional evolution and change: Environmentalism and the US chemical industry. *Academy of Management Journal* 42(4): 351–371.
- Hoggett P (2006) Conflict, ambivalence, and the contested purpose of public organizations. *Human Relations* 59(2): 175–194.
- Huy QN, Corley KG and Kraatz MS (2014) From support to mutiny: Shifting legitimacy judgments and emotional reactions impacting the implementation of radical change. *Academy of Management Journal* 57(6): 1650–1680.
- Jacquemont D, Maor D and Reich A (2015) *How to Beat the Transformation Odds*. New York: McKinsey & Company.
- Kaltiainen J, Lipponen J and Holtz BC (2017) Dynamic interplay between merger process justice and cognitive trust in top management: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 102(4): 636–647.
- Kaplan S (2008) Framing contests: Strategy making under uncertainty. *Organization Science* 19(5): 729–752.
- Kunisch S, Bartunek JM, Mueller J, et al. (2017) Time in strategic change research. *Academy of Management Annals* 11(2): 1005–1064.
- Langley A and Abdallah C (2011) Templates and turns in qualitative studies of strategy and management. In: Bergh D and Ketchen D (eds) *Building Methodological Bridges: Research Methodology in Strategy and Management (Vol. 6)*. Bingley: Emerald Group, 201–235.

- Lau CM and Woodman RW (1995) Understanding organizational change: A schematic perspective. *Academy of Management Journal* 38(2): 537–554.
- Lawrence TB and Dover G (2015) Place and institutional work: Creating housing for the hard-to-house. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 60(3): 371–410.
- Lee MDP and Lounsbury M (2015) Filtering institutional logics: Community logic variation and differential responses to the institutional complexity of toxic waste. *Organization Science* 26(3): 847–866.
- Litrico JB and David RJ (2017) The evolution of issue interpretation within organizational fields: Actor positions, framing trajectories, and field settlement. *Academy of Management Journal* 60(3): 986–1015.
- Marquis C and Battilana J (2009) Acting globally but thinking locally? The enduring influence of local communities on organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior* 29: 283–302.
- Marquis C and Lounsbury M (2007) Vive la résistance: Competing logics and the consolidation of US community banking. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(4): 799–820.
- Marquis C, Davis GF and Glynn MA (2013) Golfing alone? Corporations, elites, and nonprofit growth in 100 American communities. *Organization Science* 24(1): 39–57.
- Marquis C, Glynn MA and Davis MF (2007) Community isomorphism and corporate social action. *Academy of Management Review* 32(3): 925–945.
- Marquis C, Lounsbury M and Greenwood R (2011) Introduction: Community as an institutional order and a type of organizing. In: Marquis C, Lounsbury M and Greenwood R (eds) *Community and Organizations (Vol. 33)*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Group, ix–xxvii.
- Nag R, Corley KG and Gioia DA (2007) The intersection of organizational identity, knowledge, and practice: Attempting strategic change via knowledge grafting. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(4): 821–847.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) *A nation at risk: The imperative for education reform*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- OECD (2017) Obesity update 2017. Available at: www.oecd.org/health/obesity-update.htm (accessed 20 November 2018).
- Oreg S and Berson Y (2019) Leaders' impact on organizational change: Bridging theoretical and methodological chasms. *Academy of Management Annals* 13(1): 272–307.
- Oreg S and Sverdluk N (2011) Ambivalence toward imposed change: The conflict between dispositional resistance to change and the orientation toward the change agent. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 96(2): 337–349.
- Pazzaglia F, Farrell M, Sonpar K, et al. (2018) Keeping up with the Joneses: Industry rivalry, commitment to frames and sensemaking failures. *Human Relations* 71(3): 427–455.
- Plambeck N and Weber K (2009) CEO ambivalence and responses to strategic issues. *Organization Science* 20(6): 993–1010.
- Plambeck N and Weber K (2010) When the glass is half full and half empty: CEOs' ambivalent interpretations of strategic issues. *Strategic Management Journal* 31(7): 689–710.
- Purdy J, Ansari S and Gray B (2019) Are logics enough? Framing as an alternative tool for understanding institutional meaning making. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 28(4): 409–419.
- Ranson S, Hinings B and Greenwood R (1980) The structuring of organizational structures. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25(1): 1–17.
- Reay T and Hinings CR (2009) Managing the rivalry of competing institutional logics. *Organization Studies* 30(6): 629–652.
- Rousseau DM and Tijoriwala SA (1999) What's a good reason to change? Motivated reasoning and social accounts in promoting organizational change. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84(4): 514–528.

- Schwarz GM, Watson BM and Callan VJ (2011) Talking up failure: How discourse can signal failure to change. *Management Communication Quarterly* 25(2): 311–352.
- Simon AF (2006) Leadership and managing ambivalence. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 58(2): 91–105.
- Stensaker I, Falkenberg J and Grønhaug K (2008) Implementation activities and organizational sensemaking. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 44(2): 162–185.
- Strauss A and Corbin J (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Van Burg E, Berends H and Van Raaij EM (2014) Framing and interorganizational knowledge transfer: A process study of collaborative innovation in the aircraft industry. *Journal of Management Studies* 51(3): 349–378.
- Vardaman JM, Amis JM, Dyson BP, et al. (2012) Interpreting change as controllable: The role of network centrality and self-efficacy. *Human Relations* 65(7): 835–859.
- Warren M, Beck S and Rayburn J (2018) *State of obesity 2018*. Washington, DC: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- Weick KE (1976) Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21(1): 1–19.
- Wright AL and Zammuto RF (2013) Wielding the willow: Processes of institutional change in English country cricket. *Academy of Management Journal* 56(1): 308–330.

James M Vardaman is an Associate Professor and the Nancy Allen Fellow of Management at Mississippi State University. His research, which focuses on the role of social networks, social influence and social comparisons in retention and responses to organizational change, has been published in *Organization Science*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *Human Relations*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Family Business Review*, and other journals. He is also an Associate Editor for *Group and Organization Management*. [Email: jvardaman@business.msstate.edu]

John M Amis is Professor of Strategic Management and Organization at the University of Edinburgh Business School and an Associate Editor with *Academy of Management Review*. His research interests center on issues of large-scale organizational, institutional, and social change and his work has been published in journals that include *Academy of Management Annals*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *Human Relations*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*, and *Organizational Research Methods*. His most recent book, *Race, Economics and the Politics of Educational Change* (2018, co-edited with Paul Wright) provides a multidisciplinary investigation of the recent Memphis-Shelby County school district merger, the largest in US history. He also co-edited a recent Special Issue of *Organization Studies* titled 'Inequality, institutions and organizations' (with Tom Lawrence, Kamal Munir, Paul Hirsch, and Anita McGahan). He is past Chair of the Academy of Management's Organization Development & Change division. [Email: john.amis@ed.ac.uk]

Paul M Wright is a Presidential Engagement Professor and the Lane-Zimmerman Endowed Chair of Kinesiology and Physical Education at Northern Illinois University in the USA. His research interests revolve around physical education and youth sport programs as contexts for promoting positive youth development, teaching transferable life skills, and engaging youth in physical activity. He has published widely on these topics as they relate to pedagogy, policy implementation, program evaluation, and organizational change. He has an extensive network of international collaboration and has been recognized by UNESCO as a content specialist in his area of research. [Email: pwright@niu.edu]

Ben P Dyson is with the Department of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Ben is an internationally recognized researcher in Health and Physical Education in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy and innovative pedagogical practice. His school-based research has an emerging area of scholarship in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Ben has carried out research and taught at McGill University, Canada, University of New Hampshire, University of Memphis, and the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He has published over 70 refereed research articles, book chapters, and books. Recently, Ben was the Co-Editor of the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* (2012–2016). In 2017 Ben was elected Chair for the Physical Education Special Interest Group at the American Education Research Association (AERA.net). In 2018 he was re-elected onto the board of the *International Association Internationale des Écoles Supérieures d'Éducation Physique* (AIESEP.org). [Email: dpdyson@uncg.edu]