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An Evaluation of Change Management Practices in Public Service Organisations Resulting from a Merger: A Case Study of the Forestry Commission of Ghana

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ABSTRACT: The Forestry Commission is the body responsible for the sustainable utilisation, conservation and management of forest and wildlife resources in Ghana. The Commission was created by the merger of the Forestry Department, the Game and Wildlife Department and the Timber Export Development Board / Forest Products Inspection Bureau. Often, corporate institutions struggle to embrace organisational change, particularly mergers. Also, mergers, when not managed, may cause a breakdown in communication, which in turn disrupts management and performance. Hence, this study evaluates change management resulting from the merger of independent institutions to create the Forestry Commission through a phenomenological research approach. Nine participants were purposively selected and interviewed to generate data to answer the research questions of the study. The findings revealed that cost reduction, organisational efficiency and effectiveness, overcoming challenges, policy alignment, and political considerations were the main rationale underpinning the merger of the state institutions into the Forestry Commission. Also, the results indicated that employee and external stakeholder resistance, cultural clashes, poor communication and cultural integration were serious challenges encountered before, during and after the merger. Moreover, the study revealed that employee and stakeholder engagement, performance, enhanced service provision, and achieving strategic objectives were crucial strategies that were adopted to ensure the successful merger of the agencies. Furthermore, robust planning, managing organisational change and cultural diversity, building capacity, and anticipating and addressing challenges proactively were key change management factors that were learned from the process. The study concludes that prudent change management is essential in supervising organisational mergers. The study recommends that organisational change through a merger should be made transparent to all stakeholders of the various public sector agencies being merged.

KEYWORDS: merger, organisational change, change management, Forestry Commission

INTRODUCTION

State enterprises and institutions have been subjected to organisational restructuring in different forms and shapes. While some changes are claimed to be politically biased to fulfil specific political campaign promises to the electorates by the ruling government, some changes are said to have resulted from a direct policy initiative towards the pursuit of economic and financial growth of the economy. Usually, the policy directives on organisational restructuring and mergers are primarily focused on cutting down on the rising cost of production/service or reducing wastage, by eliminating the duplication of agencies or institutions involved in the same or similar roles. Other reasons accounting for mergers in the public sector institutions include, but are not limited to, enhancing the quality of service delivery and promoting efficiency in the production of general goods and services to the citizenry. Different forms of mergers have taken place in the public sector within departments, agencies and institutions, and ministries; in different political administrations since Ghana's independence (see table 1). One major reason for these politically motivated mergers has been attributed to the different political ideologies of the political parties in Ghana, in the absence of a national development plan (Hayes, 2022). The table below captures and summarises some significant mergers or integrations of public sector institutions, ministries, departments, or agencies from 2000 to 2024:

The paper is organised in sections: the introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, conclusions, practical recommendations, and practical implications, providing a holistic exploration of the study's objectives and findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational Change Management

Organisational change is intended to improve organisational performance, capacity and competence by taking proactive or reactive steps to deal with changes that are either forced internally or externally (Arazmjoo & Rahmanseresht, 2020). To accomplish an organisation's strategic goal, change management serves as a means of anticipating or responding to dynamic changes from internal and external influences (Hashim, 2013). Cameron and Green (2019) claimed that managing internal and external circumstances to change in an organisation enhances operations and processes, leading to a better workflow. Change management in an organisation is intended to analyse, rethink, and implement novel operational procedures (Sedej, 2021). According to Osemeke (2021), efficient internal and external change management can reduce overhead by decreasing employee resistance, recognising and avoiding issues, mobilising workers and garnering cooperation. Moreover, change management helps to mitigate risks associated with the change process, as well as improve the experience of those affected by the change and thus, facilitate support from both the top and bottom. Hence, the management of internal and external factors that impinge on the change process is extremely crucial (Collins, 2019; Hashim, 2013).

External influences, according to Sedej (2021), constitute factors beyond an organisation's control, thereby affecting the operations and activities of the organisation. An organisation's interaction with its external environment is closely connected with the organisation's internal characteristics that influence and contribute to the organisation's performance (Bogel, Pereverza, Upham & Kordas, 2019). For instance, a company with a strong understanding of its vision will be better able to communicate with others and align itself with all the beneficial aspects in the specific areas it operates.

Managers who learn from their organisations' internal and external environments and effectively connect with them can learn from both, giving rise to a continuous flow of innovations that benefits both the organisation and its environment (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). External influences of organisational change include but not technological advancement, modification and advancement of new materials, alterations in consumer preferences and needs, new government regulations and policies, changes in trade laws, regulations, and economic conditions on a national and international level, changes in social and cultural values, and the creative efforts and business practices of a competitor (Cameron & Green, 2019; Collins, 2019).

Some studies have described events, people, systems, structures, and situations as internally driven environmental factors that influence an organisation. Other factors, such as the mission statement, organisational culture, and leadership style, are connected to an organisation's internal environment. As a result, organisational actions, choices, as well as the attitudes and behaviours of employees, will all be influenced by the internal environment. A significant impact on the organisation may result from changes in the leadership style, the mission, or the culture (Cameron & Green, 2019). Other studies described circumstances that impact an organisation's internal environment through change management. Some of these factors include but are not limited to process innovation and development in manufacturing, brand-new concepts for items that can satisfy and add value to customers' interests, moving the office and manufacturing closer to the marketplace, suppliers, and clients, innovations in the design of goods and services, and takeover by a new senior management team (Collins, 2019).

Empirical Literature

Bambale, Lateef, and Abdulmalik (2021) corroborated that any organisation that wants to survive and seize new possibilities in the present wave of competition must undergo organisational change. Working organisations should be aware of how their employees behave on the job and how they feel about internal transformation initiatives. Organisational transformation is a topic that researchers are increasingly interested in, and it is growing in popularity. While several theoretical propositions have indicated the importance of the change management process (Bambale, et al., 2021; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Karnouskos, 2015; Lines & Reddy, Vardireddy, 2017), some studies have indicated that change management initiatives most time are not successful in managing organisational transitions.

To successfully implement change inside an organisation, organisations invest a large sum of money, time, and human resources (Bambale et al., 2021). The opposite is also true, according to a study by De Keyser, Guiette, and Vandenbempt (2021), which found that organisational change efforts typically fail and worsen the situation. These findings have compelled academics and specialists to investigate the contributing factors and opportunities for putting into practice effective change programmes. Collins (2019) revealed the reasons why practising change failed, including technical difficulties and a lack of resources, with a focus on issues with people's behaviours at work. The empirical works by several scholars presented below have revealed several organisational change management perspectives.

Al-Ali, Singh, Al-Nahyan and Sohal (2017) conducted a study to investigate the impact of change leadership on organisational culture and change management procedures in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) public-sector organisations. The study used a quantitative approach to gather data from 210 middle-management respondents of public-sector enterprises using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling to test stated hypotheses. Their results indicated that change-oriented management has positive, significant indirect effects on planned change and direct significant effects on organised transition and emergent change. Additionally, it was discovered that in the public-sector service organisations in the UAE, hierarchical culture had a positive and large direct impact on both organized and unstructured change management. Their findings imply that change management plays a substantial role in top-down culture in bringing about change in UAE public-sector organisations. However, their findings also pointed out that change management comes with challenges and difficulties that organisations must manage in the process.

Ololube and Ololube (2017) also carried out a study to establish the relationship between leadership perception, attitudes, and application toward organisational change. Principal Officers, their deputies, and faculty perceptions were examined using a structured questionnaire, and the results showed that although organisational change is frequently difficult and chaotic, there is a significant relationship between employee perception, attitude, and application. Thus, the change management plans should be directed at addressing such aspects in organisations. Their findings also revealed that Nigerian institutions should take the initiative to create changes that will enhance their staff members' perceptions of, attitudes toward, and applications of organisational transformation.

In another study, Kimhi and Oliel (2019) investigated the relationship between organisational performance and change management in industrial firms in Nigeria's Anambra state. Lewin's Three-Step Model and organisational change served as the study's main pillars. Their study used a questionnaire to solicit data from 286 employees of listed manufacturing enterprises in Anambra State. According to the findings of their study, technological advancements significantly improve organisational effectiveness in manufacturing organisations. Leadership changes significantly improve organisational performance in Anambra state's manufacturing firms. The study's findings also showed that change management significantly improves organisational performance in manufacturing firms in the state of Anambra. Conclusions from the study suggest that change management of organisations ought to have effective organisational management methods that support the development of positive connections based on their shared beliefs, social attitudes, actions, and perceptions. Instead of forcing employees to participate in the change process they design as a result of their orientation, they must encourage them to want to do so and to choose to contribute.

Baran, Filipkowski and Stockwell (2019) conducted an empirical analysis to establish the perspective of human resource management on organisational change. Data collected from 547 human resources experts working in a variety of industries and organisational levels indicated that top-level involvement accounts for 80% of effective changes. Their findings also imply that human resources personnel play a variety of roles in change initiatives by acting as change agents and consultants. The findings also showed that the majority of human resource management experts tended to think that top-down, hierarchical change is the key to successful organisational change. A small, but possibly significant, percentage of the respondents thought their contribution to organisational change was minimal or unimportant.

Ghana’s economy experienced a windfall of mergers. Several structural organisational changes have been occasioned in the operations of these companies and institutions as a result of the mergers. In 2004, one of the mergers that occurred was between Guinness Ghana Limited (GGL) and Ghana Breweries Limited (GBL). The two enterprises merged into an entity known as Guinness Ghana Breweries Limited (GGBL) (Adu-Darko & Bruce-Twum, 2014; Musah, Abdulai & Baffour, 2020). According to their study, analysis of the pre- and post-merger performance of the acquirer from the financial statements from 1999 to 2009 showed the impact of the merger on the profitability and financial performance of the acquirer. Their study analysed the growth rate implications for the merged firm by considering both the sustainable and internal growth rates. The results of the study indicated a general downward trend in profitability after the merger. Liquidity ratios increased during the post-merger period but plummeted in the last two years of the post-merger. Earnings per share and dividend per share increased continuously except for one year, where they fell marginally (Adu-Darko et al., 2014).

The Central Bank of Ghana (BoG), through a policy directive, merged five indigenous banks into one single bank. These were claimed to have failed to meet the minimum requirements, hence their merger. The five banks are Construction Bank, Beige Bank, Royal Bank, UniBank and Sovereign Bank. In August 2018, the banking licenses of the five banks were revoked their assets and selected liabilities were merged to form Consolidated Bank Ghana Limited (CBG). According to the BoG, the merger was to prevent a total collapse of the five local banks. The collapse would have negatively affected depositor funds and had a ripple effect on the banking and financial sector. Before the merger of the five banks, Ghana Commercial Bank was also directed by the Central Bank to take over the assets and selected liabilities of two local banks: UT Bank Limited and Capital Bank. Liquidity, capitalisation, and governance-related challenges were cited as some reasons for the policy directed by BoG for the closure of such banks (Apreku-Djan, Ahiale, Ameyaw, Owusu & Apreku, 2022).

According to the Ghana Revenue Act 2009 (Act 791), the three revenue agencies, Customs, Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS), Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Value Added Tax Service (VATS), and Revenue Agencies Governing Board (RAGB), were merged to form the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA). The merger was to ensure maximum compliance with all relevant tax laws to ensure a sustainable revenue stream for the government, trade facilitation and a controlled and safe flow of goods across the country's borders. GRA also administer many international agreements that govern relations with other tax jurisdictions and institutions, such as the World Customs Organisation Protocols, World Trade Organisation Protocols, Double Taxation and Exchange of Information Agreements. Since 2016, GRA has employed innovative and cost-effective technologies to facilitate the filing of returns and payment of taxes in line with the relevant tax laws of Ghana. GRA's system is integrated with the Ghana Integrated Payment System and the Ghana government's payment portal. GRA gets policy directives from the Ministry of Finance and collaborates with other government agencies (Alfred & Francis, 2017).

Again, Onyeneke and Abe (2021) investigated how change leadership practices influence employee support for planned organisational transformation. The study collected data from workers in a corporation going through a major transition using a non-experimental quantitative research approach via a self-administered Likert-type questionnaire survey. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), the data were analysed. To ensure personnel, buy-in and participation in planned change activities, change leadership behaviours relating to visioning, communication, engagement, support, and regard for change participants' values were shown to be of major relevance. Employees' behavioural intentions to support change were not directly impacted by change leadership, but their cognitive assessments of the change were. Employee cognitive evaluation and emotional reaction to the planned change event were sequential mediators in the link between change leadership and behavioural intentions to support planned change. This study emphasised the critical role of workers, organisational culture and employee attitudes as stepping stones for the successful implementation of organisational change management. See Table 1 for names of merged institutions.

Table 1:Summary of Merged Public Sector Institutions in Ghana

Old Name	New Name	Year of Change	Description/Details
Ministry of Lands and Forestry	Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines	2003	The Ministry of Mines was merged with Lands and Forestry
Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines	Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources	2006	The ministry was restructured to cover a broader scope, including land management, natural resources, and forestry.
Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)	2013	Expanded to emphasise innovation and technology.
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	Ministry of Education	2005	The ministry was split, with sports and youth management placed under new ministries.
Ministry of Youth and Sports	No change (remains as Ministry of Youth and Sports)	2005	Youth and Sports responsibilities were separated from education.
Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC)	No change, but certain functions are given to the Petroleum Commission	2011	The Petroleum Commission was established to regulate petroleum activities, transferring some GNPC responsibilities.

Land Valuation Board Survey Department Land Title Registry Land Commission	Lands Commission Survey & Mapping Division, Land Valuation Division, Land Registration Division, Public & Vested Lands Management Division	2008	The Lands Commission was created to integrate the operations of public service land institutions to secure effective and efficient land administration.
Ministry of Aviation	Merged back into the Ministry of Transport	2021	Initially separated, it was later merged back to consolidate transportation-related portfolios.
Ministry of Zongo and InnerCity Development	Absorbed into the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	2021	The ministry was dissolved and its functions integrated into another.
Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing	Ministry of Works and Housing	2017	Water resources were moved to the newly created Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources.
Internal Revenue Service (IRS), VAT Service, Customs Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS)	Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA)	2009	The IRS, VAT Service, and CEPS were merged to form the GRA to streamline revenue collection and management.
Ghana National Trading Corporation (GNTC), State Trading Corporation (STC)	Merged into one under Divestiture	2002	Various divisions of the GNTC and STC were merged or privatised as part of the government divestiture program.
State Enterprises Commission (SEC), Divestiture Implementation Committee (DIC)	State Interest & Governance Authority (SIGA)	2019	The SEC and DIC were restructured and replaced with SIGA.
Export Development and Investment Fund (EDIF), Export Finance Company	Ghana Export-Import Bank (Ghana Exim)	2016	Merged to create a new entity that supports export and import businesses in Ghana.
National Youth Employment Program (NYEP), Youth Enterprises and Skills Development Center (YESDEC)	Youth Employment Agency (YEA)	2015	These institutions were merged to create the YEA to manage youth employment programs more efficiently.

Sources: Compiled by Researcher (2024)

Organisational Change Management

Thakuri (2020) indicated that various factors cause organisations to change. In some circumstances, an organisational change is intended to enhance workflows or work processes in pursuit of efficiency (Baiyere et al., 2020; Thakuri, 2020). In other situations, the organisational change could be initiated to enable an organisation to adapt to external circumstances, such as a shift in consumer behaviour. Different organisational change types call for different approaches. Depending on the type of change, everything from successful execution to information exchange must be designed.

According to Arazmjoo and Rahmanseresht (2020), organisational change management is categorised into three main perspectives. These perspectives are evolutionary, revolutionary, and directed change management. While evolutionary change management is perceived as a change that is decentralised, participatory decision-making and the understanding that everyone, regardless of rank, has an essential, worthwhile role to play (Ihnatenko et al., 2020). Revolutionary change is profound and considered to be a permanent change in an organisation. It is perceived from the standpoint of an organisation that it restructures and reconnects strategic goals that frequently lead to radical shifts in attitudes or behaviours (Mosteanu et al., 2020). The third phase, directed change, is seen as a change well-planned to achieve specific objectives. Usually, for development, transitory and transformational objectives (Vlados, 2019).

Merger as a Change Management Strategy

A corporate merger is established when two or more formerly independent businesses, departments or organisations come together to become one business or entity (Yen & Andre, 2019). Mergers enable enterprises to combine resources and expand operations (Smollan, 2015). According to Dorling (2017), change management occasioned by merger arrangements yields benefits to stakeholders. A major advantage of mergers to stockholders is the increased market share and the elimination of competitive rivalry. Also, shareholders benefit from increased shares in the new firm and controlling interest in the resources of the original institution. According to Smollan (2015), mergers result in asset acquisition, organic growth, and tax benefits. A merger may result in the expansion into new markets or diversification of product and service offerings and strategies, resulting in increased profitability (Hayes, 2022; Maidell, 2015). Another benefit that accrues as a result of a merger arrangement is that the merger kills competition and rivalry, as compared to fierce marketing campaigns and expensive television commercials. A firm that generates considerable taxable revenue may consider merging with another company with a significant tax loss to reduce its tax burden (Van der Voet, Kuipers & Groeneveld, 2016).

Notwithstanding the benefits of a merger arrangement, some vices have been associated with merger arrangements. Mergers targeted at killing competitive rivalry equally promote the ideals of monopoly, price hikes, and layoffs (Vdovichenko, 2015). Organisational change through mergers is an important strategy aimed at promoting the welfare and the good of society, but it can become an adversary to the workers and the community at large. Therefore, a merger can promote.

As a change management strategy, merging three agencies into one public sector service organisation, the Forestry Commission brings several key economic benefits, including:

- Cost reduction: Merging organisations can lead to cost savings by eliminating duplicated functions, streamlining processes, and reducing administrative overhead. This can result in more efficient resource utilisation and reduced operating costs.
- Improved productivity: By combining resources and expertise, merged organisations can enhance productivity. This includes optimising staffing levels and leveraging best practices from both organisations, and creating a more focused and coordinated workforce. Increased productivity can lead to cost savings and improved service delivery.
- Enhanced financial stability: Merging two organisations can provide financial stability by combining budgets, resources, and funding sources. This can help address financial challenges and create a more sustainable entity with a stronger financial position.
- Expanded service offerings: Merged organisations can offer a broader range of services to their constituents. This can lead to increased revenue generation and improved cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, the combined expertise and capabilities can enable the merged entity to provide more comprehensive and integrated services.
- Increased economies of scale: Merging public sector organisations can result in economies of scale, allowing for bulk purchasing, shared infrastructure, and consolidated operations. This can lead to lower costs per unit and improved efficiency in delivering services.
- Improved stakeholder satisfaction: Merging organisations can lead to improved stakeholder satisfaction by providing better services and more efficient processes. This can enhance public trust, increase citizen satisfaction, and improve the overall reputation of the merged entity.
- Enhanced strategic capabilities: Merging organisations can combine their strategic capabilities, expertise, and resources to better address complex challenges and opportunities. This can lead to improved decision-making, innovative solutions, and better alignment with the organisation's mission and goals.

Implementing a merger as a change management strategy requires careful planning, effective communication, and stakeholder engagement. The success of the merger in achieving these economic benefits depends on the thoroughness of the change management process and the ability to address potential challenges and risks (Dorling, 2017; Hayes, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), there are three main parts of qualitative research. The first is the information, which can be gleaned from a variety of sources, including interviews, observations, records, documents, and movies (Towers, et al., 2020). The second is the methods used in research to analyse and arrange the data. In other words, coding can be defined as conceiving, reducing, developing, and linking the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The writing process also includes other steps, including memo writing, sampling, and producing written and spoken reports. The views of (Ningi, 2022) are best exemplified by this qualitative study, which uses published papers and interviews to organise, conceptualise, and categorise data as well as to formally describe and record findings.

Objectives and Questions

The objectives of this study are to explore the phenomenon of change management through mergers in public sector institutions in Ghana. This qualitative research examines four areas of the phenomenon. Firstly, understand the objectives and principles that necessitated the merger of the three Independent State Institutions into the Forestry Commission of Ghana. Second, explore the challenges posed to the merged organisation as a result of the organisational change through a merger. Thirdly, the study examined strategies adopted to accept the merger arrangement. Finally, the lessons learnt (if any) as a result of the organisational change through a merger.

The research questions of the study were intended to address the main theme of the study: exploring the drivers, effects, influences, challenges, strategic objectives and lessons of organisational change through mergers in the public sector of Ghana. The first research question sought to explore the critical factors underpinning organisational change through the merger of the three agencies into the Forestry Commission of Ghana; the second research question focused on the challenges that were experienced before, during and after the organisational change through the merger arrangement. The third research question focused on unravelling the strategies adopted in the implementation of the organisational change (Oreg, et al., 2018) through merger to ensure successful integration and sustainable growth of the merged organisation. The final research question is linked to the theory of learning organisations (Basten, et al., 2018). What lessons have been learnt (if any by the implementation of organisational change through a merger of the three independent institutions into the Forestry Commission of Ghana?

A total of nine (9) participants were purposively selected and interviewed by the researcher. These participants represent Junior, Middle, and Senior management (see Table 2) of the Forestry Commission.

Table 2: Detail of Interviewees

Interviewee Name	Agency/Divisions	Level/Position	Experience (Years)
Interviewee I	FD	Senior Management	31
Interviewee II	FSD	Junior Management	16
Interviewee III	FSD	Middle Management	18
Interviewee IV	GWD	Senior Management	28
Interviewee V	WD	Middle Management	19
Interviewee VI	WD	Junior Management	18
Interviewee VII	TEDB/FPIB	Senior Management	23
Interviewee VIII	TIDD	Junior Management	16
Interviewee IX	TIDD	Middle Management	17

Source: Field Data 2024

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to Drosos et al. (2021), change is an unceasing element of nature and occurs in every aspect of life. Managing and adapting to change has generated a lot of interest globally due to the challenges experienced in changing times (Cameron & Green, 2019). Consequently, prudent organisational change management practices are becoming increasingly important across industries, nations and sectors. The degree to which a corporation may adopt a new change management method or system depends on its capacity to manage change proactively (Al-Ali et al., 2017).

This study uncovered four crucial underlying factors influencing organisational change through mergers in public service organisations in Ghana. These include, but are not limited to: cost reduction, operational efficiency, improved service delivery and enhanced effectiveness (theme 1), overcoming challenges (theme 2), policy alignment (theme 3), and political and administrative considerations (theme 4). Consistent with the study results, Beaulieu et al. (2020) discovered that organisational change through mergers promotes the improved performance of the new organisation. Also, Cirjevskis (2019) underscored that organisation mergers are instrumental in pursuing new value propositions of services provided and thus, enhance the new organisation's competitiveness. Moreover, some studies on organisational change through mergers accentuate that mergers are directed towards increasing organisational effectiveness (Van Dick et al., 2018; Walk & Handy, 2018). The fundamental tenet of these studies is that the degree to which people accept organisational change and how they respond to it determines whether the changes have positive or negative effects on the organisation. Various recent pieces of research support this notion (Alfes et al., 2019; Beare et al., 2020; Borges & Quintas, 2020).

Furthermore, independent studies by Khaw et al. (2023) and Oreg and Berson (2019) underlined that the purpose of every major organisational change is to enhance administrative and operational efficiency and effectiveness, as well as surmount challenges confronting the organisation. Contrarily, Ayagre (2018) found that organisational change through mergers has no significant impact on enhancing the internal control system in public organisations. This study's findings, together with past research, have unanimously established that every organisational change through a merger intends to improve the managerial and functioning competence of the merged organisation; however, not all mergers have been successful in achieving this objective.

From the findings, the study established that the public sector reform program (theme 3a), national forest policy (theme 3b), the national development plan (theme 3c), and emerging global issues (theme 3d) were critical policy and administrative issues influenced the organisational change considerations at the Forestry Commission. Khaw et al. (2023) stated that policy considerations are decisive in implementing change through mergers in public organisations. Cuadrado-Ballesteros and Bisogno (2021) highlight that public sector reform program in developing countries improves governance quality by improving the degree of accountability, administrative efficiency, the standard of regulations, and the rule of law, and reduce corruption; nonetheless, political stability remains unaffected by these reforms. Public reform programs are crucial in enhancing the efficiency of public organisations nevertheless, the success of such reforms is dependent on the administrative, political and policy conditions on which these reforms are implemented (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020). Successful implementation of change programs should be accompanied by a national plan for development to guide the process (Chimhowu, Hulme & Munro, 2019). Currently, over 80% of people in the world reside in nations having national development plans which are instrumental to developmental needs (Chimhowu et al., 2019; Derbile, Chirawurah & Naab, 2022). As a result, discourse developmental plans, and sectorial policy development and implementation have gained global attention, which has led to the development of several interventions in various economic sectors (Derbile et al., 2022). See Table 3 below.

Table 3: **Determinants influencing organisational change through mergers in public service organisations**

No.	Main themes	Subsidiary theme
1	Cost reduction and efficiency in service delivery	
2	Overcoming challenges	
3	Policy alignment	a. Public Sector Reform Program b. National Forest Policy c. National Development Plan d. Emerging Global Issues
4	Political and Administrative	a. Facilitate governance frameworks b. Manage political issues

Source: Field Data (2024)

Information gathered from the study revealed that employee resistance (theme 5) was a major challenge encountered before the change process commenced. Several research works have established that employee resistance to change is one of the common and fundamental challenges of organisational change (Darmawan & Azizah, 2020; Furxhi, 2021; Goksoy, 2017; Grama & Todericiu, 2016; Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Rehman et al., 2021; Serban & Iorga, 2016). However, with the appropriate change management strategies and approaches, such resistance could be managed proactively and effectively (Goksoy, 2017; Khaw et al., 2023). This study also found that cultural clashes (theme 6), external stakeholder resistance (theme 7), limited resource capacity (theme 8), poor communication and stakeholder engagement (theme 9), and delayed decision-making (theme 10) were the main challenges encountered during the merging (change) process. Separate studies by Iankova (2014) and Hasan et al. (2016)

identified cultural clashes as one of the major crucial factors that could affect the success of organisational mergers. According to Peng, Li, Wang and Lin (2021), the cooperation of employees and other stakeholders is necessary for implementing change. Moreover, the process of organisational change can be adversely affected by a combination of psychological, social, emotional and cultural aspects resulting from employee and other stakeholder reactions (Khaw et al., 2023). Hence, considering employees and other stakeholders as an organisation's most important authority is instrumental in managing an effective change process. Also, Li, et al. (2021) emphasised that organisational imbalances are usually caused by a lack of communication within the organisation, which significantly impacts reactions to organisational change.

Findings from this empirical study revealed that workforce integration (theme 11), financial and operational integration (theme 12), service delivery continuity (theme 13), and cultural integration (theme 14) were the main post-merger challenges identified. In agreement with the study results, Iankova (2014) established that swift post-merger integration, cultural similarities, leadership qualities of management, and strategic shared interests are crucial for the successful performance of the new organisation. Hasan et al. (2016) underline that the prudent management of different cultures from the organisations that are being merged is essential for a successful change management process through mergers. Besides, Li, Redding and Xie (2021) underscored that the success of public organisation mergers is dependent on organisational characteristics such as functional and operational integration, marketing resources, technological intensity, management structure, and organisation affiliation. Furthermore, Degbey and Pelto (2021) point out that customer dedication-based motivation that seeks to augment and sustain service delivery continuity and fast operation integration is essential for success in a newly merged organisation. These ideas suggest that prudent management after the formation of the new organisation is key to achieving the vision and mission of the new organisation. The themes are named in Table 4.

Table 4: Challenges of managing change through the merger in public service organisations

	Main themes		
No.	Before	During	After
5	Employee resistance		
6		Cultural clashes	
7		External stakeholder resistance	
8		Limited resource capacity	
9		Poor communication and stakeholder engagement	
10		Delayed decision-making	
11			Workforce integration
12			Financial and operational integration
13			Service delivery continuity
14			Cultural integration

Field data (2024)

Results from this study indicated that (see table 5) enhanced service provision (theme 15), cost savings and financial performance (theme 16), enhanced organisational effectiveness (theme 17), a broader range of services (theme 18), employee satisfaction and engagement (theme 19), stakeholder satisfaction and engagement (theme 20), and achieving strategic objectives (theme 21) were key strategies adopted in organisational change through a merger at the Forestry Commission. In harmony with the study findings, Peng et al. (2021) indicated that employee and stakeholder engagement, as well as enhanced organisational effectiveness, are vital during a change process through mergers. Moreover, Kang and Liu (2021) and Gonzalez-Torres et al. (2020) independently stressed that organisational mergers are decisive in achieving an organisation’s performance objectives, as well as increasing productivity. While several factors could influence the need for a merger, clarity on the purpose, vision, mission, and resources of the new organisation should be the fundamental reason for implementing mergers (Hossain, 2021).

Table 5: Strategies adopted in organisational change through a merger at the Forestry Commission

No.	Main themes
15	Enhanced service provision
16	Cost savings and financial performance
17	Enhanced organisational effectiveness
18	Broader range of services
19	Employee satisfaction and engagement
20	Stakeholder satisfaction and engagement
21	Achieving strategic objectives

Field data (2024)

Furthermore, the study results in Table 6 shows that, robust planning and implementation framework (theme 22), autonomous supervision and assessment (theme 23), managing organisational change and cultural diversity (theme 24), building capacity and providing training (theme 25), anticipating and addressing challenges proactively (theme 26), and regular monitoring and assessment (theme 27) are vital principles that could be applied to supervise organisational mergers successfully. Darmawan and Azizah (2020) and Rehman et al. (2021) have independently underlined the significance of anticipating and prudently managing resistance that accompanies organisational change. Besides, Hasan et al. (2016) pointed out the importance of managing cultural diversity in the change process and how this could have a considerable bearing on the merger process. Similar to the study results, Muhlemann et al. (2022) discovered that supervision and capacity-building training during a merger offer some positive outcomes for workers, such as job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour, reduced depression, life satisfaction, and reduced post-traumatic growth, which ultimately enhance the activities of the new organisation. Also, Safavi (2021) and Silvestre et al. (2022) noted that the design and implementation structure of the pre- and post-merger plans is important for initiating, navigating and guiding the process during and after the merger. Such frameworks are crucial evidential documents that validate the purpose of the merger. According to Silvestre et al. (2022), it is noteworthy to emphasise that the management supervising a change process through a merger should anticipate various reactions from the different stakeholders to be able to swiftly manage them.

Table 6: Lessons learned from the organisational change through the merger

No.	Main theme
22	Robust planning and implementation framework
23	Autonomous supervision and assessment
24	Managing organisational change and cultural diversity
25	Building capacity and providing training
26	Anticipate and address challenges proactively
27	Regular monitoring and assessment

Field data (2024)

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the merger process comes with various challenges which should be anticipated and addressed proactively (theme 26). Common challenges that come with such organisational change include employee resistance (theme 5), external stakeholder resistance (theme 7), cultural clashes (theme 6), cultural integration (theme 14), workforce integration (theme 11), financial and operational integration (theme 12), and poor communication and stakeholder engagement (theme 9). The framework for merging public services organisations should incorporate strategies that will pragmatically manage these familiar challenges that accompany every major organisational change.

Furthermore, the study concludes that organisational change through mergers in public service organisations is directed at reducing cost associated duplication of roles in government agencies, improving organisational efficiency and service delivery (theme 1), enhancing the efficiency of the organisation (theme 2), and overcoming institutional challenges (theme 3). These factors are crucial for ensuring that public service organisations deliver their mandate effectively while expanding their services to all jurisdictions in the country.

The study concludes that the Forestry Commission was established to align the institution with current government policies (theme 3), political and administrative considerations (theme 4), and development plans. The three public agencies were amalgamated into the Forestry Commission to conform to the country's Public Sector Reform Program (theme 3a), National Forest Policy (theme 3b), National Development Plan (theme 3c), and Emerging Global Issues (theme 3d). Moreover, the Commission was established to facilitate governance frameworks (theme 4a), manage political issues (theme 4b), and comply with extensive administrative reforms (theme 4c). These policy frameworks and developmental initiatives are in harmony with existing political, administrative and regulatory requirements.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that;

1. The top management of these public service organisations or agencies must be united, understand and support the change management process through the merger. Senior management and directors need to fully support the endeavour. The Government's backing through solid political leadership must be constant throughout the change process. The principal manager should be able to persuade their senior executives to embrace the merger, and these individuals must go on to promote it internally until all staff members eventually agree.
2. The organisational change through the merger should be made transparent to all stakeholders of the various public sector agencies being merged. Transparency needs to go beyond the leadership and other significant players who are actively engaged in this process. It is important to keep all staff members informed, from middle managers to frontline workers, to avoid worry and its negative consequences, which include decreased morale and productivity. Employee comfort and seamless operation during the merger process can be achieved by having a greater awareness of the advantageous business effects of this proposed merger.
3. A transition team is required to oversee the change (merger) process. In addition to making the change management through the merger go more smoothly, a committed and capable transition team may also set the stage for a peaceful and effective post-merger environment. It is best to entrust this team with evaluating and anticipating obstacles and fixing them as they come up. The team may also be in charge of keeping an eye on output and assessing advancement over time in comparison to predetermined standards.
4. A meticulously thought-out and executed integration is required. When the time comes to combine two or more organisations' operations, procedures, and cultures, organisations should review and, if needed, adjust their initial plans and objectives. Change can take place over long periods, during which time changes may occur in the economy, market dynamics, or corporate performance.

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