

Role of The Principal as a Driver of Change at MAN 2 Langkat

Rifda Ramadina and Nasrul Syakur Chaniago

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Jl. William Iskandar Ps. V, Medan Estate, Kec. Percut Sei Tuan, Kabupaten Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara

Correspondence: rifdaramadina@gmail.com

Article received: June 2025, Revision: July 2025, Approval: July 2025

DOI: 10.17977/um025v9i12024p247

Abstract: This study examines the principal as a driver of change at MAN 2 Langkat, with the aim of knowing the role of the principal as a driver of change, the challenges faced by the principal, and knowing the determinants of success and obstacles experienced by the principal. The method used is qualitative research with a descriptive design, namely data collection with in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. The research subjects consisted of the principal, vice principal, and teachers at MAN 2 Langkat. The three steps used in the data analysis of this research are data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings of this study show how important the role of the principal is in driving change in schools. Principals are responsible for ensuring the school functions well and offers high-quality education to students, as they are the main leaders in the educational environment. Principals in this situation are not only administrators, but also drivers of change that can lead the school to success. The changes that have been made by the principal are related to physical and non-physical changes.

Keywords: The Role of the Principal, Driver of Change, MAN 2 Langkat.

In the era of globalization and the growing industrial revolution 4.0, educational institutions are faced with various demands for change, both in terms of curriculum, learning methods, technology utilization, and institutional management. Schools are required to not only be a place for the transmission of knowledge, but also as a vehicle for the formation of character, creativity, and 21st century skills (Rahayuningsih & Iskandar, 2022: 7852). Principals have a very important strategic role in improving the quality of teaching in schools. They must be able to become agents of change who can inspire and also motivate all school members to excel.

Principals must have a clear vision and be able to convey the vision to all school stakeholders (Jali, 2023: 97). Principals should also be able to foster positive relationships with all relevant stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, students and the local community. Principals can create a friendly and supportive learning environment for all students with these cooperative efforts (Jailani. & Karwanto., 2021: 3). Principal leadership in managing complex changes in the school environment is essential. Many national

education policies, such as implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, digitizing learning, and improving the quality of teacher human resources, require a principal who is able to become a driver, inspirer, and facilitator of change. The main tasks of principals at all levels have three main responsibilities: managerial, supervisory and entrepreneurial tasks (Wijaya, 2022: 64). However, in practice, not all principals are able to be effective drivers of change. Some principals may be stuck in administrative routines and unable to see the potential changes that can be made in schools. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the role of the principal as a driver of change is needed so that schools continue to develop and advance the quality of education provided to students.

This study examines directly how principals at MAN 2 Langkat face the challenges of change, build a culture of innovation, and overcome resistance that arises in the process of implementing educational policies. The role of the principal is not just a position that sits in an office and monitors the surroundings, however, the responsibilities of the principal go beyond their job description. In order for the whole school community to develop students' character in accordance with world civilization, principals can be role models for educators (Botutihe et al., 2020: 21) . Being a driver of change, the principal must be active to be able to make the educational institution he leads successful and have quality.

In this study, it will be studied further about the principal as a driver of change at MAN 2 Langkat. By understanding this role, it is expected to make a positive contribution in improving the quality of education in schools and creating a better learning environment for all school community members.

METHOD

This research was conducted at MAN 2 Langkat, which is located at Jl. T. Amir Hamzah No. 94 Tanjung Pura, Tanjung Pura District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra. The time of this research is in a period of approximately 3 (three) months, starting from March to May including the process of data collection, data management which includes presentation in the form of journals and the guidance process takes place. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. According to Saryono (2010), qualitative research is research used to investigate, discover, describe, and explain the qualities or characteristics of social influences that cannot be explained, measured, or described through a quantitative approach.

The subjects in this study consisted of the principal, deputy principal of the curriculum, and several teachers at MAN 2 Langkat. The data collection techniques used in this research are in-depth interviews, observations and document studies. Then, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing are the three stages of data analysis in this study. The result of this research is an analysis that provides a comprehensive picture of the role of the principal as a driver of change, the challenges faced, the determinants of success and the obstacles of the principal as a driver of change at MAN 2 Langkat.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it is known that the leadership of the principal at MAN 2 Langkat is very important as an initiator and motivator in encouraging change and progress. All activities and programs in MAN 2 Langkat always start from the exposure and discussion together, where the principal conveys a comprehensive plan from A-Z. After getting input from the team, then the program is implemented collaboratively by involving all elements of the madrasah. The direction and dynamics of the madrasah depend entirely on the leadership of the principal. If the principal is dynamic, the school will continue to grow. On the other hand, if the principal stops thinking and innovating, the school will stagnate. So, the principal is the center of any changes that occur in the school environment.

The head of MAN 2 Langkat has a strategy in implementing changes that involve teachers, students, and other stakeholders through open communication, quick response to aspirations, and positioning people according to their abilities. The need for change is then identified through direct observation and input from madrasah residents. So far, the head of MAN 2 Langkat has made various significant changes that have an impact on improving the quality of education. Since he took office, there have been several changes that have been made, including physical changes (buildings, facilities) including the construction of 6 new classrooms that meet national standards, renovating prayer rooms to make them wider and able to accommodate all MAN 2 Langkat students who range from \pm 1.200 people, repairing old buildings, making gardens, repainting fences, installing night lights, arranging school canteens which were previously unorganized, are now made more organized even though the capacity is still limited, multipurpose fields (badminton, takraw, futsal, volleyball and others), changing tables and chairs from wood and plastic to iron since 2021, providing suggestion boxes to accommodate the aspirations of students and teachers, lockers cellphone storage for students in digital-based learning.

The non-physical changes (curriculum, culture, leadership, and management) that occur at MAN 2 Langkat are the implementation of the independent curriculum at all grade levels, the implementation of the P5 project (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project), the application of digital learning, active participation of teachers and students, so their needs are heard and followed up if possible in the budget, teachers and students also determine the priority of change in Madrasah, emphasizing a sense of belonging and kinship as the basis for the success of change, structured management and planning, placement of work teams in accordance with the suitability of human resources with their positions. While the way the principal evaluates the impact of the changes that have been implemented is evaluated from the comparison of the conditions before and after, the response of the madrasah community, and the success rate of implementing the new program. Although challenges still exist, especially in human resources and resistance to change, but with a family spirit and a sense of belonging, MAN 2 Langkat shows significant progress towards a better and modern madrasah.

From the results of observations and interviews, there are several challenges experienced by the principal of MAN 2 Langkat, namely the response of teachers and staff who vary in response to changes

that arise in the MAN 2 Langkat environment. Some were supportive and enthusiastic about the changes they wanted to make, especially those related to improving facilities and infrastructure, such as renovating prayer rooms, parks, fields, and repairing classrooms. However, there are also teachers who are resistant to change, especially regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. For example, there are senior teachers who feel that they no longer need to learn because they have been teaching for years. So here there is a challenge in changing the mindset of some teachers who have been teaching for a long time.

Based on observations and interviews, there are no major conflicts within the school management team, but differences of opinion and dynamics still occur. For example, when planning to ceramicize the futsal court, some refused because they were worried that it would break if the construction of the court was tiled. However, such matters can be resolved through deliberation and logical consideration from all parties. Every suggestion was accommodated based on priority scale and budget availability. In the end, the field was not tiled, but only paving blocks were planned. There are several challenges faced by the head of MAN 2 Langkat when making a change, namely teacher resistance to change, especially in the application of the curriculum, human resources who are not ready to keep up with technological developments and changes in teaching methods, budget limitations that make some change programs cannot be immediately realized, the impact of post Covid-19 which causes a decline in student character and learning habits.

The principal's biggest challenge lies in changing the mindset and motivation of individuals and adjusting the needs with budget limitations. Teachers and staff help overcome these challenges by providing input on school needs, involving themselves in activities in the independent curriculum, supporting digitalization and helping students use technology in an orderly and controlled manner and working together to form a solid work team and be responsible for their respective tasks and functions. Through communication strategies, habituation, and active participation, the principal continues to overcome existing obstacles and challenges for the overall progress of the school.

The success of the principal in leading change at MAN 2 Langkat is supported by several important factors. Among them are an open and participatory leadership style, the ability to accommodate the needs of school community, as well as the support of the environment that has a sense of belonging to the school. The principal does not just carry out his role as a director, but also as a facilitator and a good listener. He receives aspirations from teachers, students and education personnel, then develops strategic steps based on priorities and budget capabilities. The principal's leadership is instrumental in driving and maintaining the direction of change. The principal acts as a prime mover who facilitates communication between parties, prioritizes physical and curriculum development, and forms a solid work team. Strategic decisions, such as the construction of new classrooms, the procurement of learning facilities, and the implementation of an independent curriculum are made with careful planning and the involvement of various elements in the school.

Furthermore, school culture plays a dual role in the change process. On the one hand, the culture of kinship and gotong royong supports the spirit of collaboration. Teachers and students feel comfortable

expressing their ideas, needs and even criticizing the school conditions. However, on the other hand, there is also an old culture that actually becomes an obstacle, such as the mindset of some senior teachers who are reluctant to change and are still fixated on old methods. This is often a challenge in implementing new policies or innovations.

The main obstacle in the change process is not external, but internal, especially human resources. Some teachers do not have the willingness to learn or resist change on the grounds that they are used to the old system. Another thing is that the limited budget is also an obstacle in realizing all the improvement proposals that come from the school community. The solution applied to overcome the obstacles is through habituation approach, continuous training, and prioritization. The principal builds a culture of change slowly through training activities, the formation of appropriate work teams and strengthening internal communication. The provision of suggestion boxes and the involvement of students and teachers in decision-making are tangible forms of open management. In addition, changes are made gradually to adjust budget capabilities to remain realistic.

DISCUSSION

The Role of the Principal as a Driver of Change

The results of this study indicate that the role of the principal as a driver of change in MAN 2 Langkat is very significant and strategic. The head of MAN 2 Langkat not only acts as an administrative leader, but also as the main motor that drives transformation in various aspects of the school, ranging from infrastructure development, improving the quality of learning, to the formation of a more open and collaborative work culture. The research results are also in line with the opinion of (Riswanto, 2024: 1189), managing change in schools is the main responsibility of the principal. This includes planning and implementing a change management plan, involving all relevant parties, and handling resistance to change. Principals need to be able to create an atmosphere that encourages creativity and teamwork.

Principals at MAN 2 Langkat have a clear vision of the direction of change to be achieved and are able to communicate the vision to all school members. This is also supported by the view of (Sebayang, 2019: 4) that the role of the principal to be able to advance the school is by formulating a vision for the progress and success of students, creating a school atmosphere that is very suitable for education, instilling leadership attitudes towards all academic and non-academic staff, improving learning, and managing all academic and non-academic staff.

Through a participatory approach, the head of MAN 2 Langkat involves teachers, students, and education personnel in every process of planning and implementing changes to be made. This can create a sense of belonging to the programs that want to run and increase the motivation and commitment of all parties to support school transformation. In line with (Rahmawati, 2023: 2) that leadership is the ability to inspire, encourage, and persuade others to take actions aimed at achieving goals by having the courage to decide what to do. The principal acts as a driver of change who encourages all stakeholders including teachers, students and parents to commit to a shared vision. By having a clear vision, the principal can direct

all efforts towards the same goal and create synergy among all related parties.

The strategy used by MAN 2 Langkat principals in implementing the changes they want to make is to build open communication, respond quickly to aspirations, and place human resources appropriately according to competence and needs. The process of identifying the needs of the changes to be made is through direct observation and active participation of all school members, which shows the sensitivity of leaders to the conditions of field reality. Therefore, school principals play an important role in the expansion and progress of education, especially in improving educational standards and human resources (Livianti et al., 2024: 480). The various stages of interrelated actions (processes), including planning, implementation, and supervision, have an impact on school quality (Alaydrus, 2023: 165). Also supported by the opinion (Pertiwi & Atmaja, 2021: 580) in order for change management to run effectively, leaders must carry out change planning management, change organizing management, change driving management, and change control management.

From various forms of change that occurred in MAN 2 Langkat, both physical and non-physical changes, the head of MAN 2 Langkat showed a strong commitment to improving the quality and comfort of the learning environment at MAN 2 Langkat. Various developments and renovations, such as the addition of new classrooms, renovating prayer rooms, arranging public facilities, and modernizing learning equipment, directly reflect the principal's efforts to create a world of education that is feasible, safe, and supports the teaching and learning process. These steps also illustrate visionary leadership that not only responds to current needs, but also prepares madrasahs to face future educational challenges such as conducting digital learning and others.

All forms of physical changes as well as non-physical changes in MAN 2 Langkat have a positive impact on the quality of education and the spirit of learning of school members, and are clear evidence that the principal acts as an agent and driver of progressive change and responsive to the needs of the school environment. This is also supported by (Susanti et al., 2023: 576) that the principal as a leader must be able to encourage the emergence of a strong will with enthusiasm and confidence of teachers, staff, and students in carrying out their respective duties, providing guidance and advice to teachers, staff, and students, as well as supporting progress and motivating the school to achieve its goals.

The principal is responsible for setting the direction of the school's policy, he or she will also determine how the school's educational goals are achieved. To enable the realization of the future vision, the principal is responsible for driving change in the school, including the performance of teaching and administrative staff, as well as the availability of resources and facilities.

Thus, the principal as a driver of change means that the principal acts as a leader of change in the school. He or she does not only carry out administrative duties, but must also actively encourage innovation, improve teaching standards and build a better learning environment.

Challenges Faced by School Principals in Responding to Change

Everything must have its own challenges, as well as the principal of MAN 2 Langkat in facing the changes he wants to make. There are several challenges faced by the head of MAN 2 Langkat when making a change, namely teacher resistance to change, especially in the application of the curriculum, human resources who are not ready to keep up with technological developments and changes in teaching methods, budget limitations that make some change programs cannot be realized immediately, the impact of post Covid-19 which causes a decline in student character and learning habits. That is why the importance of the principal's role as a driver of change is really well implemented.

The challenges experienced by the head of MAN 2 Langkat are also in line with (Hidayat et al., 2019: 63) that leadership in the digital era is not free from challenges, especially related to resistance to change. Not infrequently, some teachers or even students have difficulty adapting to new technologies. In facing such challenges, principals need to have a strategic and inclusive approach. Inviting teachers and staff to participate in the decision-making process regarding the implementation of technology in schools can help reduce resistance. In addition, it is important to provide adequate support, both in terms of resources and training, to ensure that all parties are comfortable and ready for change. Thus, principals are not only responsible for improving the quality of education in schools, but also for ensuring that all teachers and students have equal opportunities to succeed in the digital era (Wening & Santosa, 2020: 58) .

A principal must be able to persuade others to work voluntarily. For that, a principal needs to have the following competencies: vision, critical thinking skills, planning skills, leadership skills, influencing skills, empathic interpersonal relationship skills, development of self-confidence, and determination in tolerance (Rahmawati, 2023: 5-7) . Differences of opinion and dynamics also occur between school management teams, such as for example when planning to tile the futsal field, there are those who refuse because they are worried that it will break if the construction of the field with ceramics. However, this can be resolved through deliberation and logical consideration from all parties. So, every suggestion is accommodated and accommodated based on priority scale and budget availability. In the end, the field was not tiled, but only paving blocks were planned.

Another challenge in the digital era according to (Fitriyah & Santosa, 2020: 68) principals must be able to master IT (Science Technology) in carrying out their duties and responsibilities at school. Principal leadership in the digital era is a must that cannot be ignored. Integrating technology effectively, developing a strategic vision, building an adaptive organizational culture, and overcoming emerging challenges, principals can create a learning environment that is responsive to the times. Through an inclusive and collaborative leadership approach, principals can facilitate positive change in the field of education, in order to produce a generation that is ready to handle various problems that exist including in the world of education. To face a changing world, principals are expected to be agents of change who are able to lead educational institutions towards a better future, with technology as one of the main instruments in achieving these goals (Rosita & Iskandar, 2022: 6009). Supported by the opinion (Darwis, et al, 2024: 4704) that a principal needs to be able to manage the school's technology infrastructure, integrate technology into the

learning process, develop their own digital skills, support teachers' continuous professional development, make data-driven decisions, deliver information through digital platforms, and lead the school effectively through the various challenges posed by digitalization.

In a study (Chikoko et al., 2011: 319) noted that assessment, challenge, and support are the three main factors that influence leadership growth. They argue that the presence of all three maximizes the effectiveness of leadership development. An individual's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement are determined through assessment. By requiring individuals to face new situations and develop new abilities, challenge pushes people out of their comfort zone. Support involves encouraging others and boosting their self-esteem so that they can develop, learn, and evolve. In addition, (Wicaksana & Rachman, 2018: 90-94) argues that to be a good leader, you must be able to encourage school members to explore and encourage collaboration to increase motivation.

So, the biggest challenge for school principals lies in changing the *mindset* and motivation of individuals as well as adjusting needs with budget limitations. Through communication strategies, habituation, and active participation, the principal continues to overcome the obstacles and challenges for the betterment of the school as a whole.

Determining Factors for Success and Obstacles for Principals as Drivers of Change

The success of the head of MAN 2 Langkat in leading change is supported by a leadership style that is open, participatory, and responsive to the aspirations of school community. The principal not only acts as a decision maker, but also as a facilitator and a good listener. From this, one of the many duties and responsibilities that must be held by the principal is EMASLIMDEF (educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, motivator, dynamicator, evaluator, and facilitator) (Susanto, 2013: 201).

The ability to develop priority-based strategies and realistic budgets, as well as building effective communication between school elements, is the main key in driving the direction of planned and sustainable change. Effective leadership is the ability to plan tasks effectively so that the task can be completed in accordance with the plan (Wijaya, 2017: 114). The same opinion was expressed by (Ahmad, 2012: 131) that principals must have a variety of specific management abilities to fulfill their role as leaders, including (1) technical skills, (2) human relations skills, and (3) skills.

School culture is also a determining factor in the success of the principal of MAN 2 Langkat as a driver of which prioritizes kinship and mutual cooperation can help strengthen the collaboration process, although it still faces challenges from the old culture that is resistant to innovation, especially from some senior teachers. Strengthened by the view of (Habe et al., 2022: 308-309) that the determinants of the success of educational leadership are; 1) Leadership morality, 2) Organizational culture, and 3) Reward. Other factors that support success in leading are: First, learning in this case a leader must continue to learn to study and learn and read many books on leadership, and learn to better quality schools (internships) discussions with several experts and experts. Second, is communication, the principal's skill in communicating is very important because ordering, reminding, mobilizing, inviting and controlling it needs

to use good language. Third is the support from the organizers, namely the foundation (Minsih et al., 2019: 34).

The main obstacles experienced by the principal of MAN 2 Langkat as a driver of change come from internal, namely the low readiness and willingness of some human resources to change, as well as budget limitations. Similar to what was conveyed by (Zahro et al., 2018: 361) that the obstacles experienced by principals to drive change in the school environment are the attitudes of educators who, because they are always afraid of failure, are reluctant to try new ideas and change. The attitudes of educators who, because they are always afraid of failure, are reluctant to try new ideas and change. The results of the study are in line with the views of (Wibawani et al., 2019: 184) inhibiting factors or obstacles come from internal parties, namely due to the lack of academic education possessed by teachers so that it becomes an obstacle for principals as leaders of change to improve the quality of education and the lack of understanding of the community related to efforts to improve the quality of education.

However, the principal of MAN 2 Langkat managed to overcome various obstacles that existed through a gradual approach, continuous training, the formation of a solid work team, and strengthening internal communication. Reinforced by the opinion of (Wahyudin, 2018: 253) that the principal's leadership is one of the determining factors that can move all school resources to be able to realize the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the school through programs that are implemented in a planned and gradual manner.

The words of Allah Swt in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 286 which reads:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إصْرًا
كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ
الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٨٦﴾

Meaning: Allah does not silence a person, except according to his ability. For him there is something (reward) for the (virtue) he strives for and for him there is (also) something (torment) for the (crime) he commits. (They prayed,) "O our Lord, do not punish us if we forget or we are wrong. O our Lord, do not burden us with a heavy burden as You imposed on those before us. O our Lord, do not carry on us what we cannot bear. Forgive us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our protector. So, help us in facing the disbelievers."

In tafsir Al-Maraghi, Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi emphasizes that from the verse there is an explanation of the concept of burden and responsibility in Islam. Although it does not clearly discuss leadership, but the verse contains principles that are relevant to the concept of leadership in Islam. This verse emphasizes that Allah does not burden a person beyond his ability, which can be interpreted that a leader should be aware of his limits and not impose responsibilities that exceed his capacity. In addition, this verse also emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility for his actions, which means that a leader must be responsible for the decisions and actions he takes (Yahya Amirul Munirah & Mustafa Abdullah, 2014: 72).

In relation to the results of the study that the principal of MAN 2 Langkat showed an understanding that is in line with this verse, which is not imposing a change or responsibility beyond the capacity of

teachers, staff, and students. Every change made, both in the form of infrastructure development and curriculum transformation, always considers the readiness and ability of existing resources. For example, in dealing with teacher resistance to the Merdeka Curriculum, the principal does not force it, but encourages habituation, training, and gives time for teachers to adapt according to their capacity. Then, the principal at MAN 2 Langkat demonstrates the principle of responsibility for decisions and actions through openness in receiving criticism, proposals, and suggestions from teachers and students, as well as ensuring that every change implemented has a strong basis and has a positive impact on the educational process. For example, any construction or renovation is based on real needs and carefully studied, with accountability for every budget and implementation. Furthermore, the principal not only focuses on the big vision of change, but is also wise in managing limitations. He postponed some projects that could not be budgeted, but noted them for next year's planning. This reflects the principle of not burdening more than the ability of a real practice of the interpretation of the verse.

So, in general, success as a school principal is in the leadership of the principal himself, especially when gathering and coordinating all available instructional resources. While the constraints are the same as the challenges faced, namely in the form of resistance to change from some teachers, limited human resources (HR), and budget constraints. The solution undertaken by the principal of MAN 2 Langkat is to involve all elements of the school in decision making and adjust the change program to the existing capacity with the aim of building a culture of change that is more adaptive, inclusive, and oriented to common progress.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the head of MAN 2 Langkat has a strategic role as the main driver in encouraging change and progress in schools. Participative leadership, open to aspirations, and able to bridge the needs and limitations are the main factors in the success of various innovative programs that have been implemented.

The changes made include physical aspects such as the construction of more representative school facilities and infrastructure, as well as non-physical changes such as the implementation of an independent curriculum, digitalization of learning, and improving the quality of collaboration-based management. Principals can also foster a collaborative and familial work culture, although they still face challenges in the form of resistance to change from some teachers, limited human resources (HR), and limited budgets.

The success of change is strongly influenced by the principal's leadership in developing adaptive strategies, building effective communication, and creating an inclusive & solutive work atmosphere. The principal of MAN 2 Langkat is able to build a culture of gradual and systematic change through involving all elements of the madrasah in the planning process to evaluation.

SUGGESTIONS

The principal of MAN 2 Langkat is advised to continue to increase the capacity of human resources through continuing education, especially for teachers who have difficulty in dealing with changes in curriculum and technology. An innovative culture also needs to be strengthened by encouraging creative ideas from teachers and students. Furthermore, the change process must continue to be carried out in an inclusive and participatory manner in order to create a sense of belonging and reduce resistance. Effective communication and transparency are key to the success of any action. Within budget constraints, programs must be structured based on priorities, and supported by collaboration with external parties. Evaluation of change needs to be done objectively and measurably. Finally, digital transformation should be encouraged through technology training and regulation of its use in an orderly and productive manner.

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