How do staff motivation and workplace environment affect capacity of governments to adapt to climate change in developing countries?

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ABSTRACT

Government ministries are increasingly mainstreaming climate change adaptation within policies and plans. However, government staff in key implementing ministries need to be empowered to ensure effective delivery of policy goals. Motivation to act on climate change, combined with the capacity to make decisions and apply resources to programmes, is crucial. Informed by theories of motivation and workplace environments from social psychology and organisational theory, this paper reports findings from a questionnaire of government staff (103 respondents) in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia. The questionnaire was designed using self-determination theory to investigate the role of external influences, institutional structures and resources and how these, in turn, affect staff motivation and capacities to design and implement new policies and strategies. The study finds that whilst external influences and hierarchical structures are recognised, these do not have a strong direct influence on staff motivation, but they do appear to inhibit capacities to act. The results show that lack of staff and limited government-allocated budget reduce the ability of ministries to be self-determined and set their own agendas. Instead they are dependent on donor-determined projects which may be selective in the aspects of climate change adaptation plans and policies they support and even divert focus away from government priorities.

1. Introduction

Climate change is increasingly recognised as an issue in southern Africa and many countries are responding by introducing policies and programmes to support adaptation (Reid and Huq, 2014; Ampaire et al., 2017; Nightingale, 2017). Since 2009, fourteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) introduced national climate change policies or strategies (Climate Change Laws of the World database, 2018) and more are under development. Yet, for these policies and strategies to be implemented effectively, certain conditions need to be met. In particular, those tasked with implementation require the capacity and motivation to prioritise climate change adaptation and take action.

Lack of resources is typically cited as a key capacity constraint to designing and implementing climate change adaptation, but the specific ways in which this is manifest are rarely elaborated (Amundsen et al., 2010; Clar et al., 2013; Biesbroek et al., 2014; Shackleton et al., 2015). There are other factors which affect the extent to which government staff are motivated and able to take decisions. A more nuanced understanding of these will enhance understanding of barriers to, and enablers of, climate change adaptation, and how motivation and agency can be maximised for effective delivery. In this paper we build on insights from social psychological and organisational theory to examine a range of factors that affect capacities to implement climate change adaptation agendas.

Despite its relevance, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has rarely been applied in the context of adaptation (Conway and Mustelin, 2014) and, to our knowledge, only once in a sub-Saharan African country (Hepworth, 2009). Applications to pro-environmental behaviour, including action on climate change, have previously focussed on individual and household levels, and experiments have tended to be conducted in laboratory environments, with students as the main subjects (de Groot and Steg, 2010; Lavergne et al., 2010; Wolf et al., 2013). We argue there is strong potential to apply SDT in more complex, real world environments at different levels of governance, and in developing country contexts. Hence, the aim of this paper is to apply organisational theory and SDT to characterise the nature of workplace environments and capacities, and examine their influences on motivation to implement actions on adaptation.

The paper examines findings from a sample of national and local government planners in sectors concerned with climate change (103

individuals, including water, agriculture, energy, environment, health and planning) in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia. These three southern African countries all face disruption to rainfall patterns and higher temperatures associated with climate change (Niang et al., 2014). They all have policy frameworks for climate change in place (a policy in Malawi and strategies in Tanzania and Zambia (GOM, 2011, 2016, ; GOT, 2012; GOZ, 2010, 2016)). Whilst motivation to act is personal, the capacity for individuals to exert their agency is contingent upon institutional structures, which differ within and between each country. This paper begins by providing background on climate change activity at the national level in the three countries. This is followed by presentation of the theoretical framing of motivation and workplace capacities, drawing on insights from social psychology, and organisational theory. Data collection and methods (a questionnaire administered among government staff) are then described. The results show various aspects of motivation and the workplace environment, highlighting the importance of specific factors and the nature of barriers to public sector responses to climate change. The paper ends with a discussion of implications for action to enable adaptation in sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Background

2.1. Responses to climate change in southern African case studies

Public sector responses to address climate change are incorporated in policies, strategies, plans and programmes in which the formulation stage is often driven by negotiations at the international level. Member states are then tasked with translating the agreed international policy agenda into their own national policy landscape. Since climate change is a cross-cutting issue, this often takes the form of a national over-arching policy or guidance document with influences on other sectoral policies (Huq et al., 2011; England et al., 2018).

Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia all have multiple policies, strategies, plans and programmes in place to address climate change. Malawi's National Climate Change Management Policy was adopted in 2016 (GoM, 2016). The country also has a National Climate Change and Environment Communication Strategy 2012-16 and a Strategy on Climate Change Learning (GoM, 2012, 2013). Tanzania has a National Climate Change Strategy that was finalised in 2012, as well as Guidelines for Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into National Sectoral Policies, Plans and Programmes (GoT, 2012). Zambia has a National Climate Change Response Strategy and a National Climate Change Policy that was adopted in 2016 (GoZ, 2010; 2016).

The policies and/or strategies of all three countries provide a framework for climate change to be integrated into sectoral policies, which staff in the relevant sector ministries are tasked with implementing. However, challenges with implementation in southern Africa are well documented and include issues of coordination and policy coherence across sectors, and lack of political will (Lawrence et al., 2015; Pardoe et al., 2017; England et al., 2018; Spires and Shackleton, 2018). For practical barriers, lack of resources is commonly cited, relating to human resources, equipment and technology, data and information, or inadequate budgets to carry out tasks (Amundsen et al., 2010; Biesbroek et al., 2013; Clar et al., 2013; Spires et al., 2014). However, action to overcome these barriers has not been forthcoming and this suggests that, among other things, there is a need to better understand the contextual factors that influence (in)action (Biesbroek et al., 2013; Azhoni et al., 2017).

2.2. Motivation and workplace environments– insights from social psychology and organisational theory

Within the social psychology literature there is a substantial body of work that examines what affects the extent to which staff are likely to engage in their jobs. Definitions of employee engagement differ, but common elements are "the notion that employee engagement is a

desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy" (Macey and Schneider, 2008: 4). Levels of engagement can reflect elements of motivation, which can be both intrinsic (internal to an individual) or extrinsic (generated externally).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation relate to the ways in which rewards are generated (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is internally-driven by a sense of meaning and interest. The rewards generated by intrinsic motivation include a sense of meaning and value, or experience of competence which, in turn, generates positive emotions within an individual. In contrast, extrinsic motivation occurs when the motivation to act is driven by potential to earn a reward or avoid punishment. Attempting to improve employee engagement is thus more likely to be effective when an employee's motivation is understood. Intrinsic motivation is strongly linked to effort and performance (Lawler and Hall, 1970).

The growth in evidence for the role of intrinsic motivation suggests that staff are more productive and positive work outcomes are more likely where staff are motivated by the task itself and recognition of its inherent value (Gagne and Deci, 2005; Schreurs et al., 2014). Since developing effective climate change responses and adaptation requires a sense of collective purpose and agency for creativity and innovation, a workplace environment that supports autonomy is likely to be helpful. However, differently designed workplace environments can have different effects on motivation and engagement (Cameron and Pierce, 1996; Cameron et al., 2001; Baard et al., 2004).

Organisational theory provides insights into the design of the workplace environment which, in turn, is linked to motivation. Classical theory is based on several principles: that there is a method to perform each task; workers should be trained to carry out this method; they should be closely supervised; and that the role of management is planning and control (Shafritz et al., 2016). Under the classical paradigm organisations were strongly hierarchical, exhibited a high degree of control, and focused on external reward as the main motivator and driver of change. However, this did not consider the role of individual freedom and the importance of social relationships in influencing outcomes (MacGregor, 1960; Scott, 1961).

Recognition of the fact that the external workplace environment can affect level and type of motivation has given rise to SDT (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000). SDT assumes that, for active employee engagement and positive workplace outcomes, a range of motivational needs should be satisfied. This can take place through, for example, the existence of an inspiring vision in which work tasks contribute to a collective sense of meaning and value in a common purpose (Gagne and Deci, 2005). It can also be encouraged by other organisational behaviour and management practices that allow staff to feel they have the autonomy to make decisions, and that they are competent and able to carry out their assigned tasks (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000), develop new ideas, and challenge convention when it is no longer appropriate (e.g., Bass and Avolio, 1990; Dvir et al., 2002).

SDT has been widely applied in the field of social psychology relating to health (e.g. Blevins et al., 2016), particularly motivation for sport (e.g. Amorose et al., 2016; Sebire et al., 2016), and education (e.g. Andrews, 2016). In terms of environmental action and climate change adaptation, SDT has been applied in studies examining pro-environmental behaviour, again focussing on the individual and examining motivating factors such as the perception of government support for pro-environmental behaviour (De Groot and Steg, 2010; Lavergne et al., 2010).

Application of SDT in developing country contexts, particularly for national government/public sector staff, is very rare. To our knowledge, only Hepworth (2009) has applied SDT to public sector staff in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. This work was focussed on staff motivation in relation to the implementation of integrated water resource management. The study highlighted how autocratic management and external