

A survey on the quality of learning organization in Mashhad public schools based on Peter Senge disciplines

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Abstract

In the active and full of competition world of today, management of organizations is a complex and difficult task. Old approaches however, cannot be implied to solve today's problems. Therefore "learning for the purpose of problem-solving" and "learning with the aim of expansion and development" have been added to their strategic policy. The pioneers know that by using pre-determined regularities they cannot achieve missions: they need the learning opportunities, by which they meet the urgent new demands. The study at hand examines the qualities of "organization learning" of Mashhad primary schools, middle school and high schools. By the survey method, 36 schools were randomly selected as the research sample (including 36 principals and 180 teachers). This sample was gathered using the multi-level clustered sampling method. Data was collected and analyzed by reliable questionnaire, open interview, and planned observation. The findings show, based on Peter

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Senge disciplines, that there are significant differences between existing conditions with respect to the ability to learn in schools and the ideal conditions in Senge's five fundamental principals. Furthermore, based on the main research variable, the difference in school years is significant. This is while there is no significance for the difference between education districts.

Key words: Learning organizaton; Public schools; Peter Senge; Mashhad.

Stating the Problem

The angle with which the scientists choose to look at motivative power, ideas, universal interactions, and the world of nature becomes the fundamental on which we base our world. Throughout the recent centuries, the dominating belief on our thoughts was that the world is at still, linear, controllable, predictable, and clock-like (Haslebin, 1999, 29). This assumption and belief has roots in Newton's thoughts, the eminent English physicist and mathematician in the seventeenth century, who not only assumed the universe a machine, but also a machine with an exact definition, a completely closed and independent clock.

Today, we live in conditions where organizations do not assume their environment and phenomena to be constant. They have accepted the numerous and unpredictable changes of the world. With this attitude, management by the traditional methods is incapable of unfolding, predicting, and controlling the inner and outer organizational content. Organizations need a new model for compromise and adaptability with these conditions. By rethinking about the traditional management concepts and offering new theories based on this need, scientists such as Alvin Toffler, Peter Draker, Jack Welch, Shoshana Zubloff, Charless Handy, and Peter Senge, founded a modern paradigm (Iran-zadeh, 2001, 58). At last, this paradigm became famous as Learning Organization. In the midst of this, Peter Senge brought forward certain fundamentals in the framework of 5 principles or arrangements and provided the operational grounds for the set-up of these organizations: 1.

Expansion of personal mastery; 2. Mental models; 3. Shared vision; 4. Team learning; and 5. System thinking. Providing of this theory is the beginning of a new chapter in personal and organizational life which has a new attitude toward human, other than the previous beliefs and shows new manifests of tomorrow's human-being. The flourishing of this human (the learning human) has deep connection with the future of schools and organizational systems. The new world, with its transformations in various fields, demands schools in the same level and requires change in the traditional educations and management learnings and all of this is in need of creating schools titled "learning schools".

Research Questions

Main Question: What is the condition with schools of city of Mashhad based on morality indexes of the learning organization?

Minor Questions

1. What is the condition with the sample schools in the research in the field of personality masteries expansion?
2. What is the condition with the sample schools in the research in the field of mental models?
3. What is the condition with the sample schools in the research in the field of common visions?
4. What is the condition with the sample schools in the research in the field of team learning?
5. What is the condition with the sample schools in the research in the field of system thinking?
6. What is the condition of various teaching regions in the research sample in comparison with each other with respect to learning organization?
7. What is the condition of various teaching levels in the research sample in comparison with each other with respect to

learning organization?

Research Method

This research method, has been descriptive of the survey type and its statistical society included all governmental schools of the three education levels, that is, primary school, middle school, and high school in the city of Mashhad (N=1751). The research sample was selected by taking advantage of multi-level clustered sampling method (n=36). The research data collection was done through teachers' completion of a questionnaire (each school with five teachers: n = 180), structured interview with principals, and investigating the school condition and facilities. Teachers' questionnaire. The teachers' questionnaire was in the closed format – with answers adjusted based on five components of learning organization. The research validity was confirmed through management university professors and experts. The interview questions with managers was in the open format – The answers were designed based on the five components of the learning organization.

Discussion and Conclusion

Investigating the research findings shows that considering their structural and management characteristics which is due to the centered management structure in Iran, schools are distant from principles of learning organization. In the current circumstances, schools provide only the education which has the adaptation aspect and only reacts to the changes in the society which is by relying on training of experts and the aim to keep the current status. In this approach, the schools seek to complete their responsibility in the most operational unit of education, the classroom, with their hierarchical structure, which is derived from management thoughts of the modern era. Emphasis in this approach is on the foundation of one-way teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher is the predominant element. This is while in learning schools it works based on creative education, and generative approach. The purpose

of such approach is to help all school members, such as students, in order to learn the method of learning, thinking, flexibility, acceptance of responsibility, and participation in matters and suitable freedom. In this approach, learning goes beyond the classroom and becomes common across the entire school and multi-way and networked relationships are established among all school members. In order to reach this position, all school members should modify and trim their beliefs toward school and its responsibilities; by holding a common attitude on this ground, everyone should embrace the different attitude toward education and learning for all members.

In the current conditions, most school human resources have this belief that their learnings during their education period are enough and are the constant and stable matters for completion of school responsibilities and that there is no need for new learnings. This is where educational managers gain the responsibility in their teaching role, which is one of the three main managerial responsibilities in the learning organization, to modify and enhance the teachers' belief. It is important that these managers suggest what they want and what they should be, that is, researcher and investigator, and through it provide the attraction in the teachers for advancement and creativity. This is the attraction Senge calls "the creative attraction". On top of this however, we should know that although providing for and making available the information resources and increasing the educational abilities in teachers for renovation of their knowledge is important, but expansion of personal abilities does not mean increase in teachers' educational certificate through special governmental subsidies to special students in universities, considering the strong background toward just gaining a certificate in Iran. Rather, the expansion of personal abilities is a continuous process which is life long, which includes all things a human-being doesn't have and as the result is not paused on the known areas. In order to reach such potentials the education system should work on modifying the beliefs and mental models by its teachers and employees, thoughts and beliefs that are different in individuals due to their various life backgrounds and are obstacles for carrying-through modern thoughts in schools.

According to Senge, by relying on mental models management, educational leaders should create circumstances in which all employees present their mental models and test them. For this reason Senge provides a balanced combination of two skills, being questioning, and taking sides. In the first skill, the members gain the ability to hear the others' opinions which is not necessarily in concurrence with them being the listener. By the second skill, they are invited to question and investigate about the others' opinions. Therefore, dialog becomes the axis and foundation of activities of the school employees. Through this, the schools get closer to learning organizations which form under the help of dialog-centered education.

Investigations and analysis of the research findings emphasize this point that the goals are put-together by the education-system and is sent to schools based on the instructions and work methods. This is the operation method of traditional organizations in which goals and objectives are decided on by high rank managers and leaders and the organization members, in best possible scenario, with compliance, accept it and try to make it possible in the framework of rules. The result of such method is the members' mental frustration and routine-work. In the learning organization, where the educational leaders create the ground for common goals that are accepted by all members to help them, the members do not limit themselves in boundaries of regulations and show effort for changes and resolving of obstacles.

And finally, based on Senge's fifth principle in his theory of learning organizations, it should be accepted that there is an extremely decomposing viewpoint in the schools available insight, an aspect of which is due to structuring and the organization of schools and due to analytical thought for efficiency improvement which states that the efficiency is improved through the efficiency of each single component. Based on this belief, this idea becomes common that the teachers' job of teaching to students is an individual process. According to the findings in this research, teachers find no need for others' assistance in playing their part in teaching and show no interest for group-work and participation in meetings. Thus, to reach "learning schools", the school principals

should set up group meetings within the organizational context and background in order to help reach the potentials that are not possible to reach on an individual bases. For this to occur, the school principals are required to provide the ground for development of systematic thought in schools so that the staff can see the relationship between the components instead of seeing components and processes separately and to seek for the existing school problems in school within the actual school and its unsuitable system design, unlike teachers who project to external elements and other people.

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