

## A NEW SCHOOL PARADIGM: "LEARNING SCHOOL" FROM TEACHERS PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Organizational learning is an organization's transfer and use of information that has obtained to improve its performance. The purpose of the research is to determine the level of perceptions of teachers working for the Ministry of Education in Hakkari about learning school paradigm. The study was designed according to descriptive research model. Quantitative approach was used for collecting data on such measurable variables as demographic characteristics and perceptions of teachers. The study group consisted of 306 teachers of 27 primary secondary schools in Hakkari city in the fall of 2011/2012 term. The data were obtained through the questionnaire that was delivered to all primary schools in Hakkari city. As a result, it can be seen that personal mastery increases seniority increases and It is seen that females' system thinking points are higher than those of males. In the light of findings, some recommendations were made.

**Key words:** learning school; learning organization; organizational learning

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, as a result of global competition, it has become a necessity to improve quality and develop management strategies in all fields. The concept of "learning organizations" as a new management model has also been adapted to educational institutions, as "learning schools". It has a great importance for teachers and administrators to adopt "learning school" paradigm in order to improve the quality of education in schools, and educate happy and satisfied individuals. All organizations, which would like to take firm steps for the future, should not fall behind learning standards in any way. Organizations should learn how to maintain learning, and put emphasis on teamwork, who ignores this learning process will lose their competitive powers. Individuals should combine their skills, open their minds to learn and to create a synergy in organization (Kocel, 2003: 434).

Another important topic dealt with in organizational competition is the concept of "learning organizations". Learning is the process of acquiring skills, information and qualifications. The most important feature of learning organizations is that they are responsive to change. The need for change will be specified for both the product and the organization. Organizations become both learners and teachers in their periods of change. Learning is one of the most important elements of the information age and it has a central importance in the new system's improvement (Toremen, 2002:197).

#### Learning Organizations

According to Senge (2006), who first coined the concept of "learning organization", learning organizations are the ones in which "individuals continuously improve their capacities to have the results they really desire; new and extraordinary ways of thinking are suggested; individuals constantly learn to learn cooperatively". According to Garvin (1999), a learning organization, "has the ability to create, obtain and transfer information and reflect the obtained behavior". According to Rosen (1998) it is an organization which "encourages and supports the individuals' development, regards learning as an investment for improving the capacity and the success of the organization and, accordingly, makes learning and development possible and creates a learning environment".

Learning organizations are the ones which have the essential infrastructure and culture to support organizational learning process. Individuals, on the other hand, are regarded as people who actively participate in this process and mediate the change. Organizational learning is an organization's capacity to change its infrastructure, goals and cultural values according to changing environmental conditions. Accordingly, learning organizations depend on being open to individual and organizational change and to new ideas. Organizations, which strengthen their staff and enable their voluntary participation in learning activities as individuals become more successful in organizational learning and change (Perkins, Bess, Cooper, Jones, Armstead and Speer, 2007).

Organizational learning is an organization's transfer and use of information that has obtained to improve its performance. Lack of organizational learning skill is one of the main factors that prevent improvement in the performance of an organization (Shek Pui Wong, SaiOn, and Ka Yan, 2008). Studies related to organizational learning suggest new perspectives about learning. Learning is not only for individuals; it can also occur at the

organizational level, if appropriate learning conditions and opportunities are satisfied. Organizational learning is more complicated than the total of individual learning. Each learning process in individual, group or organizational level is one of the most crucial features of being a learning organization (Amiri, Jandghi, Alvani, Hosnavi and Ramezan, 2010).

Coppieters (2005) classifies the most important features of learning schools under the titles of school vision and goal, school culture, school and structure, school strategies, policy and sources. Three basic dynamics can be mentioned within the context of the features of learning organizations. The first one is that learning organizations have a relationship with information. The second one is that they have a mechanism that renews them. The last one is that they are open to the outside world. Organizations become sensitive and responsive to drastic changes in the external environment thanks to these three dynamics (Mills and Friesen, 1992:147-148).

Learning organizations contribute not only to the organization itself but also the organization personnel. The benefits that learning organization approach provides for personnel are as follows: Personnel working at learning organizations are more pleased with their lives. Learning organizations give their personnel the hope that everything will go for the better. Learning organizations provide an environment suitable for creative ideas. Learning organizations provide a safe ground in taking risks with new ideas. Views of all individuals are evaluated in learning organizations. Learning organizations suggest the idea of system thinking (Toremen, 2001: 45).

Then, individuals should systematically practice teamwork within the organizations, as in the collaborative work in the villages, and as in football; they ought to step in when needed and be part of 'a team game' (Demir, 2011). Learning organization is, in fact, not an administrative model but rather an administrative understanding or administrative philosophy. Every institution should learn how to manage internal functions such as processes, structures and systems and adapt to changes occurring in the external environment in order to be competitive in the ever-changing environment. Most of the incidents in organizations depend on learning (Savas and Dos, 2010).

If this perspective is discussed from the viewpoint of organizations, learning organizations come into the picture. A learning organization is a group of people who develop themselves individually and as a group to reach a common future they desire (Calkavur, 2006: 59). Learning organizations provide opportunities to discover abilities, find application fields, and aim to reach the deepest values of humankind such as integrity, commitment, collective effort and intelligence. They make the logical explanation of why some people are necessary for some others in an effort to support and to enrich the basic learning ambition of humankind. They can provide an insight to adopt a technical approach for organizational development and to reach the desired quality (Toremen, 2001: 18).

Learning organizations are the ones in which learning becomes a basic value and a natural process. There are various features that separate them from other organizations. In learning organizations, learning is not an extra addition but an ordinary part of the profession; learning is not a momentary event but a process. All relationships have cooperation in their bases; while individuals develop themselves, they also change institutions. Learning organizations learn with an open understanding which gets beyond the limits through cooperation. They both evaluate what they learn and how they learn. They quickly turn the data into useful information in the right place and at the right time. They have a motivating understanding for their personnel. They take risks without endangering the basic structure and elements of the organization (Calik, 2003:117).

Senge (2006) expressed five disciplines of learning organizations; mental models, shared vision, team learning, systems thinking, and personal mastery. Learning organizations' five disciplines are explained as follows: Mental models discipline: All assumptions, beliefs, biases, acceptance that we create for years are our mental models. These models influence how we perceive our lives. Individual competency: The discipline of personal mastery is individuals' approaching to their lives just like artists approach to their works, and processing their lives like purling a cloth. Team learning: It includes skills to change differences among team members into riches, to obtain contribution of the outside the team, to think together and to obtain much bigger and more permanent solutions from practices and individuals. Shared vision: It is the goal that is meaningful, important, credited for all individuals and that everybody desires to reach. A vision that is defined together and that is important, valuable, meaningful and exciting for everybody bring along motivation. System thinking: It helps us to see the whole picture and think together. If we evaluate events separately, we cannot see relationships among them and bigger system structures, which create them (Calkavur, 2006: 61).

The major difference that separates learning organizations from others is that learning organizations have skills in some basic activities. These activities are (Genc, 2004:197): Systematic problem solving, trying out new approaches, gaining experience on their own, taking lessons from past experiences and knowing how to benefit from them, taking lessons or benefiting from others or their competitors' practices, efficient and fast information transfer in the whole organization.

Organizations that will be successful in the future should not only have learning capacity and motivation in the individual and organizational level but also create valid and reliable information and apply this information in new areas. It will not be enough for organizations to have stereotypes; they will need to create new information, apply their information and accumulation to new areas and employ information as a factor of production (Calik, 2003:116).

### **Aim of the Study**

This study aims to determine the level of perceptions of teachers working for the Ministry of Education in Hakkari about learning school paradigm. Finding out whether perceptions of these the teachers about learning organization (school) systematic significantly differ according to gender, seniority, position and graduate degree is one of the sub-goals of the research.

**2. METHODOLOGY**

The study was designed according to descriptive research model. Scanning model is used in this research as it aims to determine the current situation (Karasar, 2006). Quantitative approach was used for collecting data on such measurable variables as demographic characteristics and perceptions of teachers.

The study group consisted of 306 teachers of 27 primary secondary schools in Hakkari city in the fall of 2011- 12 term. The data were obtained through the questionnaire that was delivered to all primary schools in Hakkari city. As the data collection tool, Learning School Scale (LSS), which has been developed by Subas (2010), is used in the research. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the LSS was found as 0.873 for the instruments's internal inconsistency. LSS is a 4-likert type and 120 point scale. Also LSS includes 5 sub-factors and 30 items.

Quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations. A further comparison was made by t-test analyses to determine if gender and seniority in teaching made any difference in teachers' perceptions. SPSS 17.0 was used for statistical analysis.

**3. RESULTS**

Distribution of teachers who took part in the study based on gender, seniority and graduation demographics is provided in Table 1.

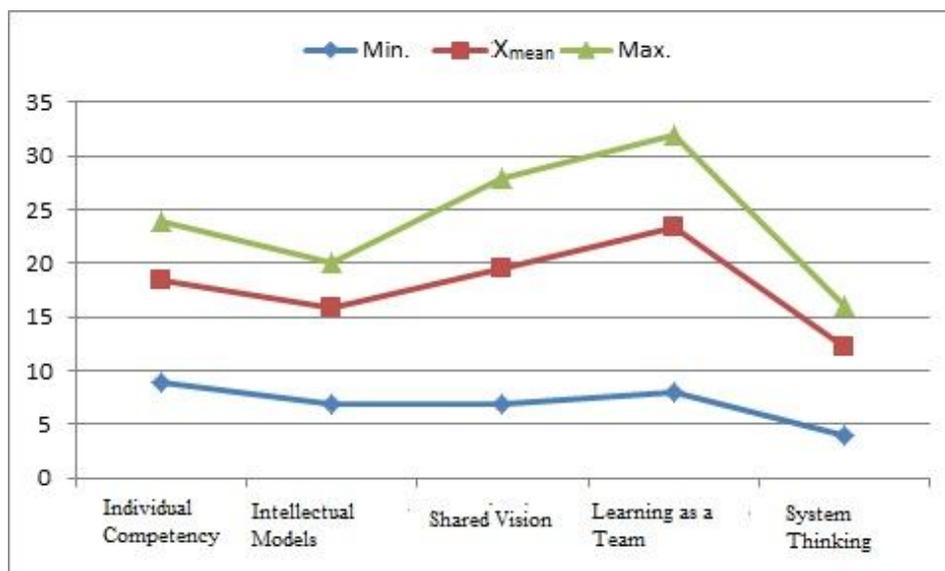
**Table 1.** Distribution of the sample according to demographic variables

		N	%
Gender	Male	146	47,7
	Female	160	52,3
Seniority	1-5 years	251	82,0
	6 and above	55	18,0
Graduation	Associate Degree	10	3,3
	B.A.	279	90,5
	M.A.	19	6,2
TOTAL		306	100

As can be seen in Table 1, most of the teachers participating in the research are the ones who have just started working as teachers (seniority 1-5 years) (82%). In gender distribution females (52.3%) are dominant.

**Table 2.** Dimensions and their general arithmetic means according to the research carried out with LSS

Dimensions	N	Min.	Max.	$X_{mean}$	Shx	SS
Personal Mastery	306	9	24	18.50	0.17	3.12
Mental Models	306	7	20	15.82	0.15	2.61
Shared Vision	306	7	28	19.56	0.24	4.16
Learning as a Team	306	8	32	23.41	0.29	5.13
System Thinking	306	4	16	12.34	0.14	2.39
Total Points	306	49	120	90.35	0.75	13.07



**Fig. 1.** Arithmetic means, minimum and maximum graphics of LSS dimensions

As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 1, while the mean points which are obtained in the sub-dimensions of personal mastery, mental models and system thinking in the results of the research with LSS approach to maximum points that can be scored, the maximum points that can be scored become distant in the sub-dimensions shared vision and team learning.

The findings of this research, which was conducted on teachers working for the Ministry of Education in Hakkari with LSS in Figure 2 have been compared with the results of the research conducted by Subas (2010) on teachers working for the Ministry of Education in İstanbul.

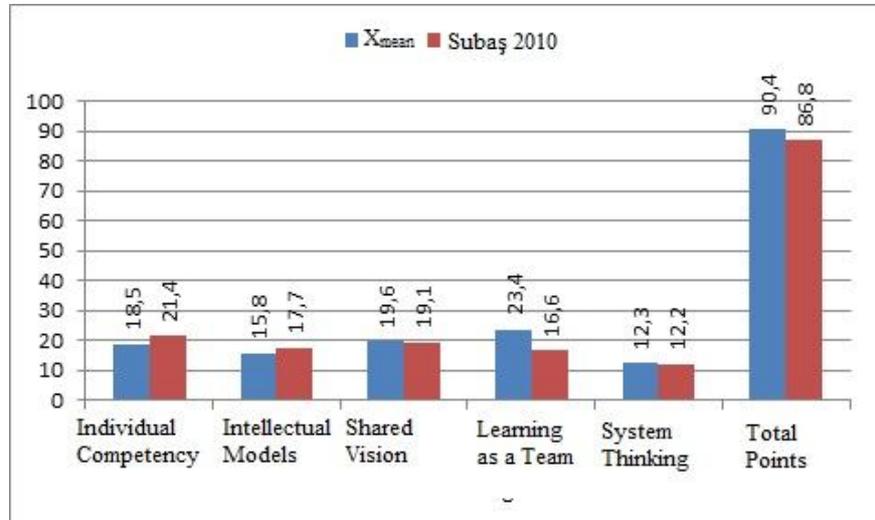


Fig. 2. Comparison of this research with Subas's (2010)

Table 3. T-test results of independent groups in order to test whether teachers' perceptions about learning schools differ according to gender through LSS

	Group	N	X <sub>mean</sub>	SS	sd	t	p
Personal Mastery	Male	146	18.44	3.19	304	0.36	0.72
	Female	160	18.57	3.06			
Mental Models	Male	146	15.73	2.60	304	0.56	0.57
	Female	160	15.90	2.61			
Shared Vision	Male	146	19.25	4.18	304	1.27	0.21
	Female	160	19.86	4.15			
Learning as a Team	Male	146	23.06	5.11	304	1.17	0.25
	Female	160	23.75	5.13			
System Thinking	Male	146	12.06	2.45	304	1.98	0.04*
	Female	160	12.60	2.31			
Total Points	Male	146	89.21	12.93	304	1.46	0.17
	Female	160	91.39	13.16			

\*p<0.05

There is a significant difference only in the dimension of system thinking in the results of the t-test which is conducted to find out whether LSS points differ according to the gender variable.

Table 4. T-test results of independent groups in order to test whether teachers' perceptions about learning schools differ according to seniority through LSS

	Group	N	X <sub>mean</sub>	SS	sd	t	p
Personal Mastery	1-5 years	251	18.34	3.01	304	2.02	0.04*
	6 years and above	55	19.27	3.15			
Mental Models	1-5 years	251	15.74	2.59	304	1.23	0.22
	6 years and above	55	16.22	2.68			
Shared Vision	1-5 years	251	19.71	3.92	304	1.34	0.18
	6 years and above	55	18.88	5.13			
Learning as a Team	1-5 years	251	23.67	4.85	304	1.83	0.07
	6 years and above	55	22.28	6.16			
System Thinking	1-5 years	251	12.35	2.31	304	0.11	0.92
	6 years and above	55	12.32	2.77			
Total Points	1-5 years	251	90.40	12.99	304	0.16	0.88
	6 years and above	55	90.10	13.55			

\*p<0.05

There is a significant difference only in the dimension of personal mastery in the results of the t-test which is conducted to find out whether LSS points differ according to the seniority variable.

No significant difference is found in the results of the t-test which is conducted to find out whether LSS points differ according to the position variable.

No significant difference is found in the results of Kruskal Wallis H test, which is conducted to find out whether LSS points differ according to the graduation variable.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it can be understood from the comparison that the results of these two researches are very close to each other. However, in the sub-dimension of team learning, it is observed that the points of teachers in Hakkari (23.4) are higher than the ones in Istanbul (16.6). Accordingly, it can be inferred that the teachers in Hakkari have more eagerness and are more successful in team learning in the institutions they work.

Total point of the perceptions of teachers in Hakkari about learning schools as a result of the research conducted Learning School Scale (LSS) is 90.35 (min: 30, max:120). We can say that, in the institutions that comprise the sample, the systematic learning school is available, but these institutions are far from being learning organizations as their current situations demonstrate (Subas, 2010).

It is seen that the mean is  $X_{\text{mean}}=18.50$  (min:6, max:24) in the sub-dimension of personal mastery. Accordingly, it is necessary to provide learning environments, which will develop teachers' individual competencies in order to maximize their attitudes in this subject.

It is seen that the mean is  $X_{\text{mean}}=15.82$  (min:7, max:28) when we look at the sub-dimension of mental models. If school activities which will contribute to the development of teachers' mental models are not arranged, the available mental models will be the biggest obstacles in the approach of learning models.

In shared vision, which describes the unity of aims in institutions' reaching their aims, the mean is found out to be 19.56 (min:7, max:28). In this case, shareholders should be consulted and provided help to adopt the vision created in order to improve the attitudes of teachers towards shared vision.

When the mean for team learning ( $X_{\text{mean}}=23.41$  – min:8, max:32) is taken into consideration, it can be said that the number of motivating activities about this subject should be increased in institutions. An indication of being a learning school is its personnel's ability to learn as a team; only in this way a highly efficient organization can be developed.

It is seen that the mean point of system thinking is 12.34 (min:4, max:16). The reason why system thinking point is low can be the failure of the available system in schools or the personal mastery and mental models that teachers have. Firstly, the factor leading to the low point in this subject should be determined. Based upon this, efforts should be made to create systematic thinking in becoming a learning school.

It can be seen that personal mastery increases as seniority increases. It can be said that teachers who have a lot of experience consider their individual competencies to be meaningfully high. These results are compatible with those of Güles (2007) and Subas's research (2010). Güles (2007) and Subas (2010) found out that teachers with low seniority have meaningfully lower points compared to teachers with high seniority. In contrast to this result, Kilic (2009) found that personal mastery scores of teachers with experience of 11 -15 years was significantly lower than teachers who have a high level of expertise and experience as well as low. Another study, Yildiz (2011) found that empowered staff discipline scores of employees with 1-5 years of experience was more effective compared to those with 6-10 years of experience.

It is seen that females' system thinking points are higher than those of males. It can be said that female teachers consider systematic thinking in the institutions they work meaningfully high. This is the opposite of the results of the research conducted by Alp (2007), Güles (2007) and Subas (2010). Subas (2010) found out a meaningful difference only in system thinking in terms of gender. In these study, the mean points of males were higher than those of females.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations can be stated as follows: this study is limited to the Turkish teachers in Hakkari city. Researchers may repeat the research in another country or city with different sample groups. The Ministry of Education should take a step to popularize the understanding of learning schools in order to improve the quality of education. Within this context, the first thing to do is to investigate how ready and willing schools are for this improvement. This and other similar research will create awareness about the learning organization concept order to create the learning schools paradigm and will provide help to the Ministry of Education in this subject. The Ministry of Education should cooperate with the Board of Higher Education and include lessons about the concept of learning schools for students studying in education faculties. Afterwards, the Ministry should arrange seminars for teachers who are currently working.

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