THE REASONS OF FAILURE IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the reasons of failure in organizational change process and the role of school leaders within the context of school culture. This study emphasizes the importance of the school culture and school leaders in organizational change process. This study was based on literature review. Successful organizational change eases with planned change initiatives that aim corporate culture and integrate this culture with change process. The role of school leaders is of great significance in this context. As a conclusion, it can be said that schools, the role of school leaders and school cultures must be taken into consideration in establishing new ways of working and reform models and in fostering improvement and development especially if we don’t want our schools to fail.

Keywords: Organizational change process, school culture, school leader

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INTRODUCTION

Everything changes. Scientific and technological developments in communication systems resulted in information age. Information has become a much more significant than ever in this information age. Change deeply affects everything with fast information increase, fast development and fast communication. Constant change, innovations and transformations force all organizations to change and to adapt these changing conditions. Therefore, it can be said that the necessity of change is inevitable in the information age.

Changes and innovations in science and technology caused important changes in education as in many other fields. There have been important changes in contents and presentation of curricula, process of management, teaching and learning and the roles of school leaders. Schools and educational organizations have to keep pace with the changes in order to achieve their aims. It is necessary for everyone in schools and educational organizations to participate in the change process for effectiveness and improvement. However, when we look today’s educational organizations it can be seen that change process cannot be managed as it must be and there is resistance to change and as a result it results in failure.

Organizational change process and schools

Organizational change process is the core activity in realising organisational goals, Today, humanity is going through the fastest change ever. This change manifests itself in structures, mentalities, practices in different fields, and thus educational organizations and schools. This is because; knowledge and the ways of accessing the knowledge change. The changes and variations in social life, technology and the tools used took place over many years in the past. However, they are observed and experienced in one year, one month, or even one day at the present time. This situation requires schools to keep pace with the change.

Başaran (1992) states that a change refers to a quantitatively or qualitatively observable difference (in comparison to the former form[s]) in the constituents of a whole or in the relations of such constituents with one another. Economic, social and political developments and scientific research findings affect and force societies to change. The accommodation of an organization to change is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of the organization and increasing the job satisfaction of personnel in the short term, improving the accommodation of the organization to its environment in the medium term, and enabling the organization to continue its existence in the long-term (Özdemir and Cemaloğlu, 2000).

Schools are affected by the changes occurring in their environments directly or indirectly. They have to prepare themselves for these changes. Bursalıoğlu (1987) argues that the system of education, which affects and is affected by economic, political and social systems, fulfils the function of ensuring the continuance of a nation socially, economically and culturally through educational organizations, and that schools have a special position obliged to ensure the socialization of children, transfer the culture of society to them, enable the generation which it cultivates to accommodate to the political structure of the society, bring to light the young people who have leadership abilities, and cultivate qualified work force. It becomes necessary (in terms of their goals and functions) for educational organizations to perform innovative practices in accordance with their own structural characteristics and the expectations of their environments, teachers, parents, and students (Çalık, 1997). It is impossible for educational organizations and schools which aim to change human behaviours positively not to be affected by the process of change. If the educational organizations that take on the task of spreading culture fail to keep pace with changes and innovations, the societies affected by these organizations will fall behind the innovations (Can, 2002).

The achievement of any change and any innovation at schools depends on the degree to which employees do their best and identify themselves with the school culture. If new approaches are regarded as short-term fast solutions to the perceived problems, they will have a superficial effect on a couple of participants alone. Thus, not a satisfactory effect will be achieved. In this regard, the important question is, “How do schools ensure long-term and permanent success in the process of change?”

If a school is to be the centre of change for continuous innovation, teachers need to be participatory in creating and maintaining the change across the school besides the efforts they make in their classrooms (Senge, 2000). There are some obstacles preventing teachers from
being participatory and willing. Berman and McLaughlin (cited by Sarason, 1996) found out that the term of employment in teaching profession had a negative impact on the process of change. The longer this term is, the less possible it is for the change to improve student achievement and for the project to achieve its goals. In addition, it was determined that it is less likely for the teachers with a long term of employment to change their old habits and practices. Another factor having a negative effect on the process of change is that teachers have a tendency to teach students in the same manner as they were taught in the past (Sarason, 1996). A change which teachers are unfamiliar with will most probably face a resistance (Hinde, 2004).

If staff realise that the improvement process is 'less ego-endangering' for their workplace, then "the more they will request and offer advice and assistance to accomplish agreed-upon goals" (Rosenholtz, 1989: 6). Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) state that it is only when teachers recognise a personal and professional gain from the task, that they will be motivated and committed to it. Consequently, any strategy used needs to be one that will bridge all arguments and unite the staff around a common purpose, that of improvement and development.

School culture and the role of school leaders

The concept of culture needs to be taken into consideration in order for significant reform to take place, and that the concept of culture has often been neglected (Ainscow, 1998; Stoll, 1997; Stoll and Fink, 1996). Studies support the argument that in order for successful reform to occur, practitioners must establish a culture of change (Sarason, 1996; Hollins, 1996; Hampel, 1999; Ancess, 2000). Understanding the school culture is an important factor in any change and reform attempt (Hinde, 2004). Understanding school culture can help us to use "a broader framework for understanding difficult problems and complex relationships within the school" (Stolp, 1994). The school culture either enhances or blocks change. The culture of each school drives everything that happens at schools. By understanding school culture deeply, how school evolves towards continuous improvement can be understood. Finnan (2000) states that success or failure of reform efforts depend on whether brought reform model is compatible with the culture of the school or whether it is supported by the majority to a large extent.

We must have a closer look on what the literature say on culture before exploring school culture Schein (2000) defined culture by stating "culture usually refers to how people feel about the organization, the authority system, and the degree of employee involvement and commitment" (p. xxiii). According to Bush (1995), culture refers to the "values, beliefs and norms of individuals in the organization" and is "manifested by symbols and rituals rather than through the formal structure of the organization" (p.29). Fidler, Russell and Simkins (1997) describe culture as “the distinctive way in which organization members go about their work and relate to each other in a particular organization” (p.35). Organizational culture is composed of values, beliefs, assumptions, ceremonies, celebrations, symbols and stories that form the identity of the organization (Balci, 2002; Çelik, 2002; Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Şişman, 1993, 1994; Finnan, 2000).

Culture influences all aspects of schools, including such things as how the staff dresses (Peterson & Deal, 1998), what staff talk about in the teachers’ lounge (Kottler, 1997), how teachers decorate their classrooms, their emphasis on certain aspects of the curriculum, and teachers’ willingness to change (Hargreaves, 1997a). In fact, as Donahoe (1997) states, “If culture changes, everything changes”

It is very difficult to define school culture although it is the most common and comprehensive element of the schools (Hinde, 2004). School culture can be defined as the historical patterns that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood by members of the school community (Stolp & Smith, 1994). Peterson (2002a) also defines school culture as the underlying set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and traditions that make up the unwritten rules of how to think, feel, and act in an organization. Phillips (1993, n.d.) characterizes school culture as the "beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize a school in terms of: how people treat and feel about each other, the extent to which people feel included and appreciated, and rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality."

Geertz (1973) has made a large contribution to our current understanding of the term. For Geertz, culture represents a "historically transmitted pattern of meaning." Those patterns of meaning are expressed both (explicitly)
The importance of leadership in culture has always been emphasized (Schein, 1985; Nias, Southworth and Yeomans, 1989). Schein states that leaders help to create, sustain and change cultures. He also suggests that cultures are the result of the beliefs and values of the founders of the organisation; the learned experiences of group members while the organisation evolves; and new beliefs and values brought in by newcomers and by leaders. According to Schein, leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin when examined closely, and neither can be understood by itself. Hitt (1988) states that leadership connects with notions of organisation and group existence, with notions of organisational culture and indeed organisational change, researchers such as Schein (1985) and Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) states that leaders are founders of organisational culture; leaders create, sustain, destroy and re-build culture.

Evolving technology, increasing information level, social-cultural and economic innovations cause to appear new management perceptiveness, paradigm and style. Leadership, in parallel to these changes has changed and self-renewed itself. “Leadership” has an important role in organizational change process. So the role of school leaders gains great importance.

Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners recognize the role of school leaders in developing high-performing schools. There has been growing attention to the pivotal role of school leaders in improving the quality of education. Largely overlooked in the various reform movements of the past two decades, principals are now regarded as central to the task of building schools that promote powerful teaching and learning for all students, rather than merely maintaining the status quo (NPBEA, 2001; Peterson, 2002b).

School leaders have a critical role of in recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers; creating a learning culture within the school; it can be said that it is obvious that achievement levels were higher in schools where principals undertake and lead a school reform process; act as managers of school improvement; cultivate the school’s vision.

School leaders have a very important role in the realization of a change. What is meant by school leaders are principals, teachers, and families. All of them play a big role in shaping the school culture (Peterson and Deal, 1998; Hinde, 2002). A principal determines the basic assumptions of a school culture, and makes sure that school members adopt these assumptions. A principal has a key role in adopting and removing a change. Fullan (2001) described the principals facilitating change as “initiators”, and indicated the characteristics of these principals. Initiating principals work in cooperation and have close relations with all personnel during the entire school year, develop supporting organizational arrangements, consult, observe, and strengthen the process of change in order to support innovation. The schools having principals with the above-mentioned qualifications are open to change.

The reasons of failure in organizational change process

The term of “Failing schools” is one of the most used negative terms in explaining the failure of educational organizations in organizational change process. Studies and researches stated several reasons for failure in organizational change process.

Hargreaves and Fink (2000) attributed the failure of a school in maintaining its innovative character to many reasons. Among these reasons, the most important one is that the principals launching an innovation are not succeeded by charismatic leaders who can follow the
established vision, influence people, and ensure participation. The second reason is that the new personnel cannot adapt themselves to the school culture or internalize the school vision; the staff members who are very good at fulfilling their tasks retire or proceed to leadership positions; and the excitement and energy of the current employees for change decrease as they become older. Among other important factors that prevent achieving and maintaining a change are that school population increases, thus the school has a more bureaucratic structure, the school cannot receive enough support from its environment and non-governmental organizations, and government policies do not comply with the school culture. Moreover, the fact that the governmental policies attempt to have schools implement reform efforts by force through regulations, circulars or directives brings about a resistance against the change. To indicate that these kinds of changes cannot be effective, Fullan (2001) says that pressures change certain things, but do not affect main problems, and people do not and cannot be changed through instructions if a complex and complicated change is in question. In the event that the reform efforts that are requested to be implemented by force do not comply with the school culture, the change cannot be achieved regardless of the degree of pressure.

Schwahn and Spady (1998) cite five reasons on why reforms fail in organizational change process when the literature is analyzed (1) The purpose is not compelling enough. They remark that if the staff is unable to restate the purpose of the reform in their own words and with enthusiasm, then the purpose is lost to them. (2) The reform effort was developed without the stakeholders’ involvement. People involved in and affected by the reform must have a sense of ownership in the effort if the change is going to last. (3) The change was not immediately implemented. The vision of the proposed reform must be integrated into all decisions and actions, and the principal and other school leaders must model it throughout the year. (4) Everyone in the school was not aligned to the vision or purpose of the reform initiative. People involved in the change must have a clear picture of what the change will look like for them personally. Finally, (5) organizational support for the change was not there. Teachers will not change if there are not structures, policies, and procedures in place that support them in their reform efforts.

In addition to Schwahn and Spady’s list, Fullan (1997) reported that there are three basic reasons that the reforms he has studied have failed. He noted that they often failed because of (1) a growing sense of alienation among teachers, (2) the balkanization and burnout of the most reform-minded teachers, and (3) “the overwhelming multiplicity of unconnected, fragmented change initiatives” (p. 288).

Hargreaves (1997b) reviewed the literature about unsuccessful reforms, and stated that educational changes failed due to the below-mentioned reasons:

- The change is not explained clearly and understandably enough. It is unclear whom and how the change will serve. It is not pronounced what the change will bring in for students.
- When the change is very comprehensive and multi-purpose, teachers need to work in many different fields and areas. On the other hand, when the change is very limited and narrow-scoped, it is achieved only to a very limited extent.
- When the change is too fast, people fail to deal with it. On the other hand, when the change is too slow, people grow impatient or become bored, and pay their attentions to different things.
- Either the change is supported by weak sources or the relevant sources are withdrawn following the first stage of the innovation. There is not enough time for teachers to do planning, and not enough money for the purchase of necessary materials.
- There is no long-term participation in the change that will eliminate the anxieties, fears, and despairs of people.
- Families oppose the change because they are distant to and unaware of the change.
- Leaders are either over-controlling or too ineffective.
- The participation of the key personnel who will make the main contribution to the change or who may be affected by the change is not ensured; or, on the contrary, the key personnel may be in the...
management or innovative elite which other teachers feel left out of.

- The change proceeds in isolation and other non-changing structures have a negative impact on the process of change.

Due to the detrimental effects of the factors determined above, many reforms launched with good intentions have failed. On the other hand, there are numerous case studies of schools where reform has lasted. In particular, Peterson, McCarthey, and Elmore (1997) studied three schools where reform efforts endured. They found that in all cases the following four qualities were apparent: (1) the vision or philosophy was related to student learning, (2) teachers were afforded opportunities to meet together and engage in meaningful discussion about the reform, (3) teachers were involved in shared decision making concerning the reform, and (4) teachers had access to new ideas about reforming their practices. In other words, most of the elements of successful reform that were noted in the previous sections were employed in schools where reform efforts succeeded.

All these demonstrate how necessary and critical it is to examine the cultural atmosphere of the schools prior to, and during, the process of change (Hinde, 2002). In order to facilitate a total change, it is not sufficient to simply prepare the entire physical infrastructure, technology, and equipment. Nor is it sufficient to execute the strategy for change with determination. Many change efforts aimed at the amelioration of organizational performance eventually fail due to the fact that the basic culture of the organization (values, assumptions, and ways of thinking, styles of administration, paradigms and approaches) remains unchanged (Cameron and Quinn, 1999). Actually the main reason for failing schools is that these schools aren’t able to make compatible their culture with the change and so they are not also able to keep pace with the change.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the importance of organizational culture and the role of school leaders in fostering improvement and development are emphasized in this paper. Schools and school cultures must be taken into consideration in establishing new ways of working and reform models. Cultural change is a requirement for improvement to take place. Successful organizational change eases with planned change initiatives that aim corporate culture and integrate this culture with change process.

It is also essential to study the role of school leaders in organizational change process in order to accomplish change initiatives successfully. Understanding the school culture correctly and recognizing the importance of leadership in achieving the change will help develop a broader perspective and think sophisticatedly for comprehending complex relations in the school, determining the obstacles in front of change. Schools, the role of school leaders and school cultures must be taken into consideration in establishing new ways of working and reform models especially if we don’t want our schools to fail.

REFERENCES


