

Aspects of Building Schools' Capacity as Learning Communities in the Case of 9-Year School in Durres District

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Abstract: Knowledge has historically associated humanity, giving human race strength and survival, especially facing the hardships or ups and downs that human society has passed and will pass through. The key to knowledge is the need to know more. At the moment the individual, society, or even nations see this as internal need, it takes them forward. Lack of emergence or awareness to go towards knowledge society debuts in its opposite; to the detriment of the process or even worse to the product itself aimed to be achieved. Field of study in this article relates to the conception of organization/educational institutions as living systems, where learning should primarily focus on its main actors themselves, i.e. school leaders and teachers. Nowadays, school's field is not sustainable, as result of multiple contingencies that educational institutions face, so schools should be open through continuously learning. The purpose of this study relates to strategic management, focused on organizational learning preceding the changes, and above all, on finding out more efficient and affective solutions by increasing the potential of schools, as well as quality service, which naturally contribute towards a knowledge society.

Key words: strategic management, learning organizational, development capacity, belief and value, organizative culture

1 Introduction

Since the early 90' our educational system has gone through reformation. The reforms have followed each other, bringing some improvement of the system and in many cases returning it back. Education is considered a very important sector, as providers of individual social and economic benefits. Education makes great contribution in individual and social aspects, providing opportunities for individual personal and career development. Referring to the *World Bank Education Strategy* that "At the individual level, while a diploma may open doors to employment, it is a worker's skills that determine his or her productivity and ability to adapt to new technologies and opportunities." (*World Bank Education Strategy*, 2020-April 2011, p.vii.), could claim that our schools should be a learning organization. This is related to a new model of thinking, whereby school should be an open system, not a closed one.

For Senge (1990), real learning allows people and organizations to recreate themselves.

For a learning organization, it is not enough to survive. Senge agreed that survival learning, or adaptive learning, is important, but for a learning organization, "adaptive learning must be joined by 'generative learning,' learning that enhances our capacity to create". Systems thinking is the fifth discipline because it integrates the other disciplines of a shared vision, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery, and fuses them into a coherent body of theory and practice. In systems thinking, the whole can exceed the sum of its parts. A vision without systems thinking lacks the deep understanding of the forces necessary to move forward.

On the other hand, Fullan(2000) claims two key features, professional learning communities and programme coherence. The former refers to the 'social capital', the importance of developing relationships among the staff in order to realise the skills of individuals. The latter refers to the ability of the schools to 'take on the most innovations, but ... are able to integrate, align and coordinate [these] with their own focused programmes'.

Our schools still maintain the culture of being closed. Meanwhile today's dynamic contexts and dynamic integration require educational institutions, where capacity building through continuous learning makes school organizations and flexible and responsible to the challenges and time constraints.

I think this paper is of interest not only for school directors of 9-year schools and the Department of Education in this district, but also on a broader level, which extends the range of applicability of the reforms. Therefore, through this paper, I am interested in a somewhat more practical context of the process. This is because the ideas, despite being very good, can not come automatically, as "Reform does not mean, simply put the most recent policy implementation. Reform means to change the culture of classrooms, schools, districts, universities, and so on "(Fullan).

2 Methodology

3 Project objective

Through this paper, it is aimed on one side to emphasize the important role that changes bring in general and also those in education field in particular for the social life and the development of the country. On the other hand I would argue that unexpected changes, not adopted accordingly to the reality, or sometimes imposed, provoke the opposite of the initial goal, or intent of the changes.

The overall objective of the paper is to analyze the process of strategic management in 9-year schools in the district of Durres, focusing on organizational learning, and to identify main factors affecting quality and productivity of educational process. This objective is attached to some more specific objectives:

- to identify school improvement in an Albanian context, through building the schools' capacity as learning communities, based on common purpose, respect, cohesion, trust, optimism, and mutual support
- To identify the government policy on undergraduate education, determining their impact on educational institutions
- To identify new management practices, which converge in achievements and productivity

4 Methods

The scope of the paper is divided into two segments:

- The first one has the objective of assessment of the 9-year schools in the district of Durres, building capacity and learning communities of their school administrators.
- The second one has the objective of data analysis, interviews with school administrators, and a broader perception through focus groups, and a case study. In this paper is used a qualitative method. For the completion of the paper were used assessment instruments such as: documents' research, interviews, focus groups, and a case study

5. Random sampling

For the purpose of this paper, casual sampling has been used, where representatives were headteachers and teachers of 9-year schools in the district of Durres. We have interviewed people, not only from the center area, but from the surroundings as well. It has been respected a fair proportion, based on statistics obtained from the Departament of Education in Durres, so that sampling could really be casual, in order to gather opinions from different directors in relation to their work. The survey is fulfilled for a period of more than 4-months.

6. Interviews

The interviews were conducted with 30 headteachers. Durres district has four municipalities and six local municipalities, whereby the educational services are offered by 60 schools. Interviews were conducted with 10 leaders of Durres Municipality, and 20 other leaders of the 9-year schools, municipalities in Shijak, Manxë and Sukth, as well as local surrounding municipalities, respectively; Gjepalaj, Ishëm, Katund i Ri, Maminas, Rrashbull, Xhafzotaj. The unstructured interview was designed, including general and specific questions related to process management, level of participation of staff, internal training, and evaluation of teachers.

7.Focus groups

Data were also collected from two focus groups with 10 teachers, including a group of teachers of Durres Municipality, and the other one from local municipalities. The theme was on the scale of qualifications, cooperation with each other, support from school authorities, the demand for innovation and application in educational context

8. Case Study

As a case study is the 'Democracy' school, especially the partnership between that school with "Fjärdingskolan" in Borås of Sweden, whereby the present situation of 9-year schools in Durres district is analysed with the aim of exploring the possibility of building the capacity for improvement, thus creating a professional learning community, to enhance learning.

9. Analysis

From the interviews with school headteachers is noticed that 30% of them say that staff are less involved in school management. 23% say that staff have lost interest, 31% say that they find support at teaching staff and 16% say that their relations with the staff are not good. Referring to the relationship between director and the staff, 54% of respondents say they prefer to have the authority of the director, using distant communication, 30% try to merge the director with the colleague, while 16% base the relationship on the law. Regarding the evaluation system 30% of executives use the format required by DAR, 38% use different forms and formats of control, 22% based on the outcome of teachers labor (department tests, students' achievements, or test results), 10% connect everything with the performance of teachers, including their participation in activities of various projects or school promotions.

The executives express that they plan model classes to qualify the staff, whereby 63% of executives say that everything goes very well and teachers have no criticism about that, 20% say that older teachers do not accept criticism, feeling themselves in a bad position, even prejudices situations. while 17% argued that all teachers welcome the different opinions from each other, learning more through debating and sharing their thoughts and new ideas.

Leaders has an interesting perception of wrong-right technique, as well as about initiatives and projects in the school. Referring to the first, 74% of executives say that the staff learn through mistakes. 20% say that in these cases they give advice and instructions to improve the situations, while only 8% of executives say that they document the errors to evaluate teacher's work. The view seems quite different in terms of the second question. 85% of executives say they do not like to take initiatives or projects that have risk, arguing that they can not accept failure in their work, as they feel confident when initiatives or projects are clear and successful. Whereas only 15% undertake new projects, despite the risk, as a new headteacher stated: "The failure of an initiative could be a success, because we learn more how to do better in other initiatives and projects in the future".

Nevertheless, the teachers say that they work harder when their work is highly-appreciated. "We want our voice to be heard". They say that working in education is tedious, and sometimes things are required in an imposing way. Teachers should be asked more, because they are the right people to implement the policies. Curricula often undergo changes, and the texts need to improve, for they cause confusion instead. Furthermore, when the director transmits personal values, professional and managerial skills, then things become easier, and teacher job satisfaction comes in: there is more participation and collaboration, bringing different experiences.

Meanwhile the partnership of "Democracy" school with the "Fjärdingsskolan" in Borås of Sweden is a good example in Durres district, by sharing experience and schools policy. This is a case, where states and cultures have the opportunity to approach each other. Recently, by this partnership "Democracy" school has learned more about democratization of school, and "Fjärdingsskolan" in Borås is interested in about math's curriculum and methods.

10 Results and discussion

Education policies play a central role in the development of education and the development of the country life. *Plans are best estimates of what will happen in the future, but must be modified on an ongoing basis to take account of what actually happens during implementation. Implementation should thus be seen as a continuous learning process whereby experience gained is reviewed and fed-back into ongoing planning.*¹ Meanwhile, Senge (1990) stated that learning organizations are places "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together"(p 8). If the members of an organization work as a group, they will direct their efforts toward a shared goal or vision.

But, for countries which for years have been indoctrinated is not an easy path, since the system imposed a closing culture in the mental model to the individual. Our schools still maintain the culture of being closed. Values and behaviors from directors should include a high degree of respect and care to individuals at the school, as well as a strong sense of fairness, integrity, and honesty in their relationship with other people. Trust is the necessary agent for sound relationships and knowledge sharing. The leader plays a vital role in the implementation of change.

A successful headteacher is someone who focuses on building the capacities and commitments of staff in the school and in the interests of students. Organizational orientation helps the teacher to become acquainted with the objectives,

¹ Aid Delivery Methods. *Project Cycle Management*. European Commission, volume 1, pp.41.

vision, organizational culture, its history, philosophy and procedures. Successful orientation reduces stress, uncertainty, and above all increases the possibilities of a much higher performance and fit with the culture of the institution. On the other hand, educational organizations themselves become more dynamic by sharing ideas, as well.

Creating the right climate by the school leader, following the practice of cooperation and involvement, not only minimizes the undesirable conflicts in the organization, but above all, to strengthen school potential. From the results the interviews and focus groups is noticed that few headteachers are transformational leaders.

However in District of Durres there are positive examples of successful leaders, who include several styles of management, being a good motivator, collaborator, catalyst or crisis manager. Referring to similar contexts, they use various forms of organizational learning, making school a dynamic and open system, where teachers willingly collaborate by sharing ideas, new teachers are welcome and appreciated being involved in different activities and projects. On the other hand, teachers with long experienced teachers find it easier to apply IT by collaborating with young teachers, thus creating their own school culture. It is not only a privilege of schools in the city, but also in rural areas in which positive examples are observed. These factors make a good contribution in the strengthening our school, and it is time that the environments in our school should be a place where there is a constant learning.

11. Conclusions

In order to correct some crucial aspects of undergraduate education system, we would claim:

- Organizational learning becomes more dynamic and successful when it is based on initiatives and school projects, by sharing thoughts and ideas.
- Educational institutions learn better when people in cohesive teams trust each other enough to expose the assumptions they are making and then to scrutinize and share them with their colleagues.
- Asking for greater responsibility of school administrators for student achievements through; successful functioning of school system, school goals and objectives.
- Changes in education should be integrated with positive change in the culture of educational institutions.
- School administrators should be the real decision-making instance with regard to selection of teaching and support staff, proceeding on the basis of standards, merits and periodically measuring the competence of staff.
- Involvement in decision-making of all stakeholders, such as students, staff, parents, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, etc.

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