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Is the School a Learning Organization?

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Abstract

The concept of an organization that learns "learning organization" is one of the most mentioned ideas in management, representing a subject of great interest for theorists in the field and for those involved in the functioning of organizations. The actuality of the topic consists in the fact that today learning has an important role within organizations. Learning and teamwork are highly encouraged in order to achieve common goals and to achieve the results that the members of the organizations really want. In contemporary times, society is in a continuous process of change. Under these conditions, the school must develop its ability to change to the new in order to face the challenges so that its role as a factor in the development of society becomes more and more obvious. Thus, permanent learning appeared as a reaction to the rapid transformations taking place in society, representing at the same time a necessity and a solution. The school is part of the category of organizations that learn, it being different from the others due to the specificity of the dominant activity, namely the instructive-educational process. In this article, we addressed the main characteristics existing in the specialized literature that define the learning organization, the school as a learning organization, as well as the identification of the existence of a possible relationship between the personal factors of teachers and the strategies that make the school a learning organization. The results illustrate the necesity of a correlation factors, such as function, teaching degree, seniority at work, with the strategies that make the school a learning organisation. In the table below we can see that the education level of the teaching staff is the only variable that does not correlate with the strategies that make a school a learning organisation.

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1.Introduction

Emil Păun (1999) defines the organization as "a unit or social grouping, consciously founded, with explicitly formulated goals, which trains a large number of individuals to fulfill well-defined roles and statuses within a differentiated structure, with management and coordination of activities".

The concept of an organization that learns "learning organization" is one of the most mentioned ideas in management, representing a subject of great interest for theorists in the field and for those involved in the functioning of organizations. "Learning organization" involves changing people within the collective and as a collective, not individually. This type of learning is a continuous process, which has more dynamic moments, followed by others of relative stabilization" (Păun, 1999, p.45).

The school is defined as an organization by the goals and processes it promotes, but also by the interactions between the members of the organization. At the same time, it is part of the category of "learning organizations", facilitating the learning of all members at the level of the organization, this learning representing its fundamental basis (Anghel, 2023). Emile Durkheim defined school as a social group that has its own entity and physiognomy, an organization similar to that of adult society (Barbu, 2009).

Durkheim considered the school an organized social environment and defined it using the term "school society". The previously mentioned definition constitutes an early stage for a theory in the making of the school organization. This definition highlights the two aspects that characterize the school as an organization, namely, the structural aspect that constitutes the distribution of statutes and roles as well as the existing power relations at the school level and the functional aspect that takes into account the interpersonal relationships of the members of the school organization, the characteristics of the climate and culture (Păun, 1999).

The school has as its main function the production of learning, but at the same time it is a learning organization, but this does not make it different from other organizations because they share the characteristic of a learning organization. This characteristic of a

learning organization makes the school as close as possible to other organizations. Being an organization that learns and produces learning, several particularities stand out that denote the specificity of the school as an organization. The most important particularity mentioned by Emil Păun (1999) refers to two basic activities existing within the school, namely, the managerial-administrative activity and the pedagogical activity. The first activity refers to the management and administration of the school and consists in combining the elements characteristic of bureaucracies with the elements specific to organizational development (Anghel, Lupu, 2013)The second activity is regulated by rules arising from the nature of teaching-learning processes. Pedagogical activities are carried out based on psycho-pedagogical premises that take into account the characteristics of learning processes at different ages, different ways of organizing and conducting teaching-learning, the characteristics of the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student, etc.

In 1990, Peter Senge introduced in his work *The Fifth Discipline* the concept of learning organization, a concept that was born due to the fact that organizations have a life cycle like humans, their lifespan depending on the ability to use their potential and to adapts to the environment. The father of the learning organization concept, Peter Senge, states in his work *The Fifth Discipline* that the values of the learning organization derive from continuous learning, both individual and collective. He believes that the learning organization is one where "people continually develop their ability to create the outcomes they truly desire, where new and expanded patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is freely consented to and where people continually learn how to learn together". The school is not only an organization where one learns, but also a learning organization because not only each individual progresses, but also the whole institution. "When we talk about learning organization, our reference system is not the individual who learns within the organization, but the organization as a whole. In this case, learning organization designates the processes of directed and structured achievement of organizational change, by redefining, resizing and restructuring collective, group values and behaviors" (Păun, 1999, p. 45). The school organization is differentiated from other organizations by the specificity of the dominant activity at the

level of the institution, namely, the teaching-learning process. We speak of organizational learning because school organizations must adapt to the new challenges of contemporary education.

According to founder Peter Senge, the characteristics of the learning organization mentioned in *The Fifth Discipline* are as follows:

- people continuously develop their ability to achieve the results they really want;
- new thinking models are developed and cultivated in which common aspirations are freely adopted and in which people permanently learn to do everything together;
- continuously provides learning opportunities for all its components;
- ensures the combination of individual performance with organizational performance;
- supports research, dialogue, questioning and makes people more open and take risks;
- considers creative tension as a source of energy and renewal.

Peter Senge (2012) says that the core of working in a learning organization is based on five "learning disciplines":

1. personal mastery – refers to the learning of organizations through individuals. It is used for the discipline of personal growth and learning. Through high levels of personal mastery, people have the opportunity to continually expand their ability to create the results they truly seek in life, and they share certain basic characteristics. They even go into a state of continuous learning from which the spirit of the learning organization is born. For such a man, a vision is a vocation, rather than just a good idea.
2. mental models (mental models) – refers to clarifying and improving our images of the world. Senge shows that new ideas are put into practice because they bring about a conflict with deeply rooted internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. They can be simple generalizations like "you can't trust people" and can influence the way they perceive certain life situations, interpersonal relationships and the way they act. Mental models are active and can shape the way we act.

3. shared vision – involves the development of shared images regarding the future we want to achieve and the principles and practices that guide us to reach it. When people share a common vision they "are connected, bound together by a common aspiration." Visions help the organization rise above the everyday. In building a vision, the first step is to encourage your personal point of view. A vision that leads the organization to success is achieved through the interaction of its members.
4. systems thinking – a way of thinking and a language to describe and understand the forces and interrelationships that shape the behavior of systems. It presupposes seeing the phenomena in their entirety, it consists in observing the interrelationships of the cause-effect type.
5. team learning (team learning) – consists in transforming the capacities of communication and collective thinking, so that groups can confidently develop their intelligence and abilities more than the sum of the talents of individual members. Through the teams, a kind of "operational trust" is developed, a capacity for perception.

2.Research methodology

The statistical analysis of the data was carried out with JASP v. 0.16.3.0 software by applying the Kendall Tau test to highlight the relationships between the research variables.

The objective of this study is to identify a possible relationship between the teachers' personal factors such as (level of education, position/function, teaching degree, seniority at work) and the strategies that make the school a learning organization.
H1: It is assumed that there is a statistically significant correlation between the teachers' personal factors such as (level of education, function, teaching degree, seniority at work) and the strategies that make the school a learning organization.

Material and methods

The applied questionaire was made by the authors of this study based on the theory of Peter Senge (2012). The questionnaire has 6 dimensions each with 10 items with the answers from 1-never to 5-very often. The internal consistecy was 0.84.

Sample

108 female teachers aged between 20 and 62 (M=46.5, SD=7.4) participated in the study. 50 of the participants graduated from college, 30 graduated from high school and 24 graduated from a master's program. Most of the participants held a position of teacher in secondary education (36) and most of the participants (48) had a seniority of work between 10 and 20 years. 42 of the participants had teaching degree 1 and 36 had teaching degree 2, 30 were beginners (Table 1).

Table 1. *Demographic data*

level.of.study	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
high school	30	27.778	27.778	27.778
faculty	54	50.000	50.000	77.778
masters	24	22.222	22.222	100.000
function				
educator	24	22.222	22.222	22.222
teacher in preschool education	24	22.222	22.222	44.444
teacher in primary school	24	22.222	22.222	66.667
teacher	36	33.333	33.333	100.000
seniority.at.work				
less than 3 years	24	22.222	22.222	22.222
3-5 years	12	11.111	11.111	33.333
5-10 years	6	5.556	5.556	38.889
10-20 years	48	44.444	44.444	83.333
more than 20 years	18	16.667	16.667	100.000
teaching.grade				
didactic degree 1	42	38.889	38.889	38.889
didactic degree 2	36	33.333	33.333	72.222
beginner	30	27.778	27.778	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	108	100.000		

3.Results

Regarding the correlation between the teachers' personal factors such as (level of education, function, teaching degree, seniority at work) and the strategies that make the school a learning organization, in the table below we can see that the education level of the teaching staff is the only variable that does not correlate with the strategies that make a school a learning organization, $p > 0.05$.

In addition, work experience, teaching degree and the function of the teaching staff in the school correlated positively with all strategies (Developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students, Promoting and supporting continuous professional learning for all staff, Fostering team learning and collaboration among staff, Establishing a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning, Learning with and from the external environment and larger system, Modelling and growing learning leadership), $p < 0.05$.

Table 2. *Kendall's Tau Correlations*

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. level.of.study	Kendall's Tau B	—										
	p-value	—										
2. function	Kendall's Tau B	0.406	—									
	p-value	< .001	—									
3. seniority.at.work	Kendall's Tau B	0.157	0.222	—								
	p-value	0.105	0.021	—								
4. teaching.grade	Kendall's Tau B	0.174	0.397	0.817	—							
	p-value	0.072	0.002	< .001	—							
5. shared.vision	Kendall's Tau B	-0.124	-0.403	0.145	0.261	—						
	p-value	0.202	< .001	0.047	0.030	—						

6. continuous.professional.learning	Kendall's Tau B	-0.074	-0.446	-0.296	-0.215	0.836	—					
	p-value	0.458	< .001	0.039	0.021	< .001	—					
7. colaboration	Kendall's Tau B	-0.084	-0.438	-0.335	-0.284	0.897	0.847	—				
	p-value	0.387	< .001	0.043	0.035	< .001	< .001	—				
8. innovation	Kendall's Tau B	-0.091	-0.413	-0.286	-0.295	0.857	0.861	0.819	—			
	p-value	0.349	< .001	0.036	0.028	< .001	< .001	< .001	—			
9. exchanging.knowledge	Kendall's Tau B	-0.116	-0.452	-0.196	-0.317	0.887	0.952	0.904	0.906	—		
	p-value	0.232	< .001	0.042	0.024	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—		
10. external.environment	Kendall's Tau B	-0.088	-0.356	-0.323	-0.502	0.758	0.832	0.749	0.783	0.889	—	
	p-value	0.367	< .001	< .001	0.002	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—	
11. leadership	Kendall's Tau B	-0.088	-0.460	-0.517	-0.499	0.852	0.888	0.798	0.783	0.848	-0.468	—
	p-value	0.777	< .001	< .001	0.005	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	0.027	—

Average correlations were obtained between the position held by teachers in the school and all the strategies, but also between seniority and Fostering team learning and collaboration among staff, Learning with and from the external environment and larger system, Modelling and growing learning leadership, teaching degree and Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning, Learning with and from the external environment and larger system, modelling and growing learning leadership.
In conclusion, the hypothesis of our study was partially confirmed.

4.Conclusions

The school as a learning organization is a topic of interest, but quite controversial because over the years its definition has been difficult. Our study brings into discussion the image of the Romanian school that learns through the correlations between personal factors and the multiple strategies that make a school a learning organization.
A limitation of our study is the relatively small number of participants. As a future direction in research, we propose to analyze the factors that would predict the transformation of schools into learning organizations.

The results of our study can be used to explore the characteristics that make a school or learning organization.

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