

Change Process and the Importance of Assumptions that Form the Hidden Culture of School: A Qualitative Study in Turkey

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ABSTRACT In this study, it is attempted to ascertain the negative assumptions of teachers working in a number of primary, secondary and high educational schools about educational change process and efforts. A qualitative research design was used to collect and analyze the data. Standardized open-ended questions prepared by the researchers were used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with 52 teachers working in six different primary, secondary and high schools in Kastamonu province during the 2012-2013 academic year. Results revealed that the negative assumptions expressed by the teachers constitute the greatest barrier, which stands in the way of change. These assumptions reject attempts towards change altogether. Results revealed that assumptions form the basis of the organizational culture and successful change cannot be realized if these assumptions are not addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Changes and innovations in science and technology caused important changes in education as in many other fields. Industrial society is being transformed into information society. This change process requires adopting postmodern philosophy and a constructivist educational approach instead of positivistic philosophy and behavioral educational approach. Parallel to these, there are also changes in contents and presentation of curricula, process of management, teaching and learning and the roles of educational leaders.

Reform efforts have also been forcing the change and transformation in Turkey recently. The recent change and development efforts have created a change process in Turkish National Education System. "Cascading Currency System", "Television Education", "Vocational Training Project of High Educational institutions Graduates", "Course Promotion and Credit System", "Total Quality Management", "Career Steps System", "SBS-OKS Exam Practices", "Transition into Constructivist Education Approach", "Computerization of The Administrative Processes", "Change in Instructional Materials", "Change in the Administrative Organizational Structure of Ministry of National Education" and "4 + 4 + 4 = 12 Years of Compulsory Education" are some of these change and transformation efforts in the

last fifteen years. Although fundamental reforms and innovations were introduced to the system of education in Turkey, it is unfortunate that much of these change efforts do not yield desired and intended results at a satisfactory level. Why do not these efforts yield desired results although it is thought that all necessary conditions have been established and all problems have been eliminated? Why cannot the goals be achieved precisely? This study makes an attempt to answer these questions.

Change process designed and implemented by the government and Ministry of National Education (MONE) have immediate impact on different stakeholders including teachers and educational leaders. Hence, in order to accomplish change initiatives successfully it is essential to study different attitudes of different stakeholders towards the change and transformation practices in Turkish Education System. Understanding the educational institutions' culture correctly and realizing the importance of basic beliefs, values, and assumptions, which are the most important elements of the educational institutions culture, in achieving the change will help develop a broader perspective and think sophisticatedly for comprehending complex relations in the educational institutions, determining the obstacles in front of change, and settling problems.

Schools and educational organizations have to keep pace with the changes in order to achieve their aims. It is necessary for everyone in educational institutions and educational organizations to participate in the change process for effectiveness and improvement. However, when looking at 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.

Educational leaders and principals have a very important role in the realization of a change. What is meant by educational institutions leaders are principals, teachers, and families. All of them play a big role in shaping the educational institutions culture (Peterson and Deal 1998; Hinde 2002). A principal determines the basic assumptions of a school culture, and makes sure that educational institutions 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 educational institutions year, develop supporting organizational arrangements, consult, observe, and strengthen the process of change in order to support innovation. The educational institutions having principals with the above-mentioned qualifications are open to change.

Hargreaves and Fink (2000) attributed the failure of educational institutions in maintaining their 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 educational institutions culture or internalize the educational institutions 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 educational institutions population increases, thus the educational institutions has a more bureaucratic structure, the educational institutions cannot receive enough support from its envi-

ronment and non-governmental organizations, and government policies do not comply with the educational institutions' culture. Moreover, the fact that the governmental policies attempt to have educational institutions 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 educational institutions culture, the change cannot be achieved regardless of the degree of pressure.

When the literature is analyzed, five reasons are stated on why reforms fail (Schwahn and Spady 1998). These are:

1. The aim is not compelling enough. They remark that provided the staff is unable to restate the aim of the reform in their own words and with enthusiasm, the aim is lost to them.
2. The reform effort was developed without the stakeholders' involvement. People included in and influenced by the reform must have a sense of ownership in the effort on condition that 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 administrator and other leaders of educational institutions must model it throughout the year.
4. Each person in the educational institutions was not aligned to the vision or aim of the reform initiative. People involved in the change must have a clear picture of what the change will look like for them personally.
5. Finally, organizational support for the change was not there. Teachers will not change if there are no structures, policies, and procedures in place that support them in their reform efforts.

In addition to Schwahn and Spady's list, Fullan (1997: 288) reported that there are three basic reasons that the reforms he has studied have failed. He noted that they often failed because of a growing sense of alienation among teachers, the balkanization and burnout of the most re-

form-minded teachers, and “the overwhelming multiplicity of unconnected, fragmented change initiatives”.

The educational institutions’ administrators being an obstacle, the lack of support in the region, changing population of the educational institutions are also stated as reasons that are influential in the failure of change and reform efforts (Fullan and Hargreaves 1996; Sarason 1996; Tyack and Cuban 1995). Hargreaves (1997b) reviewed the literature about unsuccessful reforms, and stated that educational changes failed due to the below-mentioned reasons:

- The change is not stated 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 multipurpose, teachers need to work in many different fields and areas. On the other hand, when the change is very limited and narrow-scaled, 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 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 educational institutions where reform has lasted. In particular, Peterson et al. (1997) studied three educational institutions 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.
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 educational institutions where reform efforts succeeded.

All these demonstrate how necessary and critical it is to examine the cultural atmosphere of the educational institutions prior to, and during, the process of change (Hinde 2004). 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, ways of thinking, styles of administration, paradigms and approaches) remains unchanged (Cameron and Quinn 1999).

All of the reasons blocking change and reform efforts stated in literature are generally a visible part of the iceberg. The invisible part of the iceberg is assumptions. Schein (1999) states that assumptions form the basis of the organizational culture and successful change cannot be realized if these assumptions are not addressed. Finnan (2000) expresses that everyone in the educational institutions has assumptions shaped by their values and behavior and that shapes them. Bozkurt (2000) emphasized that assumptions direct values, beliefs and norms of organizational culture. These assumptions and the interaction of values and behaviors determine the responsibilities that an individual will take willingly to change the educational institutions.

Participation in educational institutions reform efforts requires people to take on new responsibilities willingly and this participation is only possible if these new responsibilities are compatible with the values and assumptions of individuals (Finnan 2000).

Finnan (2000) described five underlying assumptions that determine the success or failure of reform efforts. Finnan (2000) defines assumptions as things that are taken for granted and are accepted as truth. The assumptions described by Finnan (2000) are:

1. Assumptions that adults (managers, teachers, workers and parents) hold for students,
2. Assumptions about leadership and decision-making,
3. Assumptions about roles and responsibilities of adults,
4. Assumptions about best practices and structures for educating students, and
5. Assumptions about the value of change.

The last one, that is, the value attributed to change is at the heart of assumptions (Finnan 2000). Provided that the general attitude towards change is positive in the educational institutions and there is a predominant belief that change will bring about improvement, starting the reform can be possible to. But on the condition that there is a negative attitude towards change because of previous unsuccessful experiences and people avoid and fear of change, then any attempts for reform will face strong resistance from the very beginning. People who hold such thoughts cling to the assumption that "if former changes have done nothing but worsened the situation, why should present and future changes yield positive results?" At educational institutions of this sort, people usually believe that problems originate not from themselves but from the incompetence of others. The reason for these change efforts are either state-based or regional, and far from reflecting and answering the needs and demands of that particular educational institutions, which is to say they are dictated from outside. On the other hand, when efforts towards change are accepted by employees, in other words, when the assumptions are oriented towards the acceptance of change, it will be easier to commence and perpetuate the reform attempts. For example, if teachers can free themselves from the *idée fixe* that their habitual methods are necessarily the best and if they happen to be amiable towards innovation and reforms, this means that they comprehend the value of change.

It can be concluded that assumptions are of great importance in terms of educational institutions culture. It is imperative that the assumptions of the educational institutions must be taken into consideration and must be harmonious with the assumptions of the model of change in order to realize a change at a particular educational institution.

The Aim of the Study

In this study, it is attempted to ascertain the negative assumptions of teachers working in a number of primary, secondary and high educational schools in the central district of Kastamonu province about educational change process and efforts. The teachers included in the study group were asked about their assumptions they held regarding various educational practices that radically changed previous ways of educational thinking, such as the "Course Promotion and Credit System", "Total Quality Management", "Career Steps System", "SBS-OKS Exam Practices", "Transition into Constructivist Education Approach", "Computerization of The Administrative Processes", "Change in Instructional Materials", "Change in the Administrative Organizational Structure of Ministry of National Education" and "4 + 4 + 4 = 12 Years of Compulsory Education". These are especially related to value of change, which corresponds to the final series of assumptions.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study design was used to collect and analyze the data. Standardized open-ended questions prepared by the researchers were used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with 52 teachers working in six different primary, secondary and high educational schools in Kastamonu province during the 2012-2013 academic year. Educational schools and participants were randomly selected. Participants were asked to be a volunteer for an interview to be conducted with them. After gaining the participants' consents, the interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed by the researchers. Participants were named as T1, T2 and T3. Once the coding was done, themes emerged and the data obtained was systematically analyzed through content analysis techniques, and the results were presented descriptively.

RESULTS

Here are the basic values and assumptions that form the iceberg's invisible, hidden, and the largest part of the essence of the educational institutions' culture about change in terms of views of teachers. The views of teachers were mostly about the below-mentioned assumptions in general:

- "As new things are integrated into old structures, schools become more and more inextricable."
- "Previous innovations did not serve anything other than making things worse and more complicated. This is what the current ones will cause, too."
- "It is easy for the top brass to give instructions. What is difficult is to implement these instructions. It is impossible for us to accomplish the requested results by limited means under current conditions."
- "I wonder whether the officials at ministries are aliens. They should put themselves in our shoes. If we do what they ask us to do, a state of chaos emerges."
- "There is always something changing. We retrogress rather than progress."
- "There is always something changing. It is not clear whether we progress or retrogress."
- "We cannot implement innovations because schools do not have adequate and appropriate physical infrastructures and conditions. I wonder whether they could implement those innovations if they came here."
- "Educational processes at educational schools cannot change for the better unless the system is changed to its foundations."
- "What is done and introduced under the title of innovations will be a continuation of the old system. There will be no considerable improvement at all."
- "What the principal wants is implemented at our educational institutions. Decisions are always made by him. Thus, we do not have to run ourselves into the ground."
- "Delivering our opinions in regard to the decisions to be taken is nonsense. No one has listened to our views until now. This is how it will be from now on, too."
- "Parents come to educational institutions only when they are called. They do not

help the educational institutions. They generally do not wonder and ask about the statuses of their children."

- "The fundamental duty of educational institutions is to ensure discipline and order. Therefore, there should be strict and fixed rules. Students should not be spoiled too much."
- "They have invented another thing to keep us occupied. We cannot do anything other than preparing reports."
- "Everything is just like a jigsaw puzzle at schools. New things are introduced before we can solve and understand a previously introduced practice."
- "We already do our best. How can we achieve more than that?"

These kinds of assumptions adopted by employees have an obstructive effect on the process of change both before and after launching a change attempt. The cause of failure is always sought in the visible structures or in the process of change. However, those assumptions that constitute the hidden culture of educational institutions are not taken into consideration. Before anything else, these negative assumptions should be replaced by positive ones. The most important prerequisite is that employees be psychologically ready for the process of change. Otherwise, a reform model will face a strong resistance regardless of the benefits and good intentions it has.

DISCUSSION

As life goes on, change will occur. Social, cultural, political, scientific and technological developments positively or negatively influence organizations. Gunter (1997) reflects the belief that everything changes. Her premise is that there are so many variables affecting all aspects of life that change is not only inevitable, it is unpredictable. As the saying goes, "The only thing constant is change". Organizations have to adapt to changing conditions in order to survive. It is not that easy for organizations to adapt to the changing conditions, as they face a variety of resistance.

Urbanization, globalization, modernization, technological developments, deviation from traditional social structure, growing population, and

increasing need for education entail the introduction of new skills in the schema of the traditional managerial skills set of educational institutions administrators (Demir 2016). In the process of change, there have also been important changes in contents and presentation of curricula, process of management, teaching and learning and the roles of educational leaders. Educational organizations must adapt themselves to these changes and developments.

Developments and changes in management force educational organizations towards change and innovation. One of the latest examples of this is the application of "Total Quality Management" to educational organizations and schools (Ozdemir 2000). However, it is very difficult to say that the achievement of the objectives was realized in "Total Quality Management" applications so far despite the struggle, time and labor spent on education. Concrete indicators about improvements in terms of quality problems in the education system are not yet available except some of the physical improvements, vision and mission statements in public and private schools.

If one looks at the previous attempts to change the education system, Cascading Currency System, Television Education, Vocational Training Project of High Educational Institutions Graduates, and Course Promotion and Credit System can be displayed as failed reform efforts (Ozdemir 2000). In spite of the efforts and time spent on all of these initiatives and all the costs, the desired results were not achieved and are not being achieved.

Successful organizational change ease in with planned change initiatives that aim corporate culture and integrate this culture with change process, but this raises a problem, that is, in order to understand the culture of an organization, hidden elements of the culture, that is, hidden beliefs and assumptions must be uncovered. These hidden beliefs and assumptions shape cultural elements such as behaviors and visible organizational structures and processes, and therefore affect results of the change in the organization (Hall 1997). These assumptions are hidden understandings that are rarely brought to the fore in educational institutions cultures (Hinde 2004). The key to successful organizational change is the unspoken beliefs and assumptions of the organizational members about the organization and the world, that is, hidden culture. Wilkins and Patterson (1985 cited from

Hall 1997) state that the cause of the failure of many change efforts is that they do not address the hidden culture. The power of beliefs and assumptions, that is hidden culture, stems from the fact that they affect behaviors of the people although they are not aware.

One of the invisible reasons behind the failure of various change attempts in the education system is the disregard for the assumptions and beliefs, which comprise the hidden culture of the educational institutions and the subsequent inability to understand whether this culture is harmonious with reform attempts. In order for any kind of change to be efficient, it is imperative that the assumptions of the reform model be compatible with the culture of the educational institutions (and, by extension, with the assumptions that shape and mold the educational institutions culture in every aspect). In the findings section, it is seen that the negative assumptions expressed by the teachers constitute the greatest barrier, which stands in the way of change. These assumptions reject attempts towards change altogether.

Teachers are by no means unjustified in their negative assumptions. Unfortunately, the changes and innovations introduced to the educational system often yield no improvement at all. If one wants to eliminate all these negative assumptions, it is necessary to govern the change process with the utmost care and accuracy. Decision-making mechanisms must understand the perspectives of all stakeholders to be affected by the change, not to simply disregard them later but to encompass them all in a democratic participation process. Otherwise the changes implemented will not be long lasting and will be discarded every time the administration changes (sometimes even by the same administration).

Top-down change attempts, which do not answer the needs and demands of the educational institutions and which disregard the assumptions that constitute the hidden culture of the educational institutions are, unfortunately, characteristic traits of the reform attempts implemented in the country. Schein (1999) expresses that the extent to which the support of the prevalent culture is secured determines how easily change will be achieved. What is important in this context is to choose and apply the reform models, which fit (and may secure the support of) prevalent educational institutions cultures to a satisfactory degree. Alternatively, planned change

attempts may seek to eliminate the negative assumptions against the reform model.

It is not easy to change prevalent beliefs and assumptions, especially because they would have to be forgotten in the first place. Schein (1999) has indicated that change encompasses not only learning new things but also the necessity to forget previous beliefs, values, and assumptions. One of the reasons people resist change is that forgetting prevalent beliefs, values, and assumptions is a distressing and uncomfortable process. In order to make the educational institutions up to date and realize changes and reforms at the educational institutions, one will have to determine (with utmost care) those beliefs and assumptions, which comprise the hidden cultures of educational institutions and replace them with beliefs and assumptions, which are harmonious with the reform model at hand. Alternatively, one will have to pick those reform models, which are harmonious with the prevalent beliefs and assumptions. These basic beliefs are critical in terms of what the employees think, what their attitudes and behaviors are, and how various educational institutions affairs are carried out. Disregarding them will mean that any change attempts will meet failure in a complex fashion, the reasons of which will be difficult to comprehend.

Finnan (2000) concludes that in order for reforms to be accepted by educational institutions, the assumptions between the reform model and the educational institutions must be compatible. This requires the culture of the educational institutions to be analyzed and brought to the conscience level of staff and administrators. Observers of educational institutions culture must account for each of these assumptions in their observations.

Another major point, which is not to be forgotten, is that imposing change and reform effort by an external bureaucratic force before their various aspects are fully embraced will cause the teachers and other stakeholders to develop resistance and refuse the change attempt. Securing the collaboration of the employees is only possible through a very detailed explanation of the reform model and through the harmonization of the assumptions, which comprise the hidden culture of the educational institutions and those of the reform model. As a result, employees will take responsibilities and embrace the change

process, thus making it possible to realize an effective and permanent change.

CONCLUSION

Assumptions about the value of change are the subject of research in this study. This study emphasizes the importance of assumptions and change process and investigates assumptions that form the hidden culture of educational institutions and educational organizations. These assumptions are of great importance in terms of determining the culture of educational institutions. In order to realize a change at particular educational institutions, it is imperative that the assumptions of the educational institutions be harmonious with the assumptions of the model of change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Similar researches on assumptions about the value of change will surely contribute to the generalization of the results. Conducting similar studies about assumptions, change process, and hidden culture of the educational institutions is of great importance in terms of the understandability of these concepts. Assumptions and hidden culture should be studied with its different dimensions in different educational organizations and different study groups in order to contribute to the related field.

LIMITATIONS

The study was carried out in Kastamonu, Turkey. The results in this study and comments about them are limited to the study group.

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