CHANGES IN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN SCHOOLS AND READINESS OF TEACHERS FOR THOSE CHANGES

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Abstract
An investigation into Estonia’s educators’ representations of organisational culture, based on the typologies of R. Harrison and C. Handy, and into the educators’ cognitive orientation on the basis of J. Rotter’s internality/externality scale was carried out. The aim was to determine, whether the organisational culture in Estonia’s schools supports the sustainable development of teachers. The study revealed that amongst Estonia’s teachers the individuality-oriented individualistic culture dominated, and that almost half of the teachers had an external locus of control. The conclusion was drawn that the culture of learning organisation was not characteristic of Estonia’s schools, while that type of culture would best support the professional and sustainable development of teachers.

Key words: sustainable development; organisational culture; learning organisation; locus of control; Estonia’s schools.

Introduction: Organisational culture and sustainable development of teachers

In recent decades professionalism of teachers has become a central issue both in education policy and in school development. Nowadays, a professional teacher can be characterised as a flexible, reflective practitioner, a team-worker, a lifelong learner, a person always striving to update his knowledge and skill base, one who is market-oriented, managerial, if not entrepreneurial (Dent & Whitehead, 2003). A professional teacher usually has an important role in society; he/she has autonomy in making decisions, high responsibility, a long study period for getting the qualification, specific knowledge and skills, code of ethics and certain standards to follow (Schön, 1983; Corrigan & Habermas, 1990; Luukkainen, 2000; Eraurt, 2002). In relation to the formation of professionalism in teacher, two main questions arise. First, does the organisational culture in schools support the professional and sustainable development of teachers? If it presently does not, are teachers ready for changes in the organisational culture and what are the prerequisites for those changes?

Several authors have concluded that if a school wants to ensure its ability to develop growth in professional abilities of its personnel, it should become a learning organisation (Fullan, 1993; Leithwood et al., 1998; Nikkanen, 2001; Quicke, 2000; Senge...
et al., 2000; Silins et al., 2002; Smylie et al., 1996; Wallace et al., 1997). The learning organisation is able to keep learning and redesigning itself (Marsick & Watkins, 1999). The concept of learning organisation also includes a system of methods and means for redesigning an organisation into learning organisation. Implementation of the learning organisation concept allows creating an environment, in which people act with enthusiasm and energy; thus, it supports the professional and sustainable development of teachers and of the school as a whole.

According to a number of authors (Schein, 1990; Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1994; Senge et al., 2000; Hargreaves, 1995; Hofstede et al., 1990; Mintzberg, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982), values, beliefs, attitudes, the ways of thinking, customs, and rituals are the main components of organisational culture represented by members of organisation. Therefore it is possible to study the whole area by studying their representations (Danto, 1989; Moscovici, 1984, 1998, 2000; Wagner et al., 1996), and thus the present study focuses on teachers’ representations of the organisational culture in their schools.

The representations were studied within the framework of typology of organisational culture created by Harrison (1972, 1992, 1993) and developed by other authors (Handy, 1993, 1995; Handy & Aitken, 1990; Graves, 1986). Four types of organisational culture have been defined: power-oriented, role-oriented, task-oriented, and individuality-oriented cultures. The power-oriented culture is characterised by a high level of centralisation and a low level of formalisation. The role-oriented culture has a high level both of formalisation and centralisation. The task-oriented culture has a high level of formalisation and a low level of centralisation. In the individuality-oriented culture, the levels of both formalisation and centralisation are low. Analysis of suitability of these cultures for a culture of learning organisation revealed that the task-oriented culture suited the learning organisation best. Thus, task-oriented culture is the one, which best guarantees the sustainable development of teachers. The goal of this study was to find out how common it is for Estonian schools to have task-oriented culture, i.e. the culture type, which best suits for supporting the professional development of teachers. With the methodology developed by Harrison (1992; 1993), the organisational culture both in private and public sector organisations has been studied in Estonia since 2002 (Haage, 2002; Kütt, 2002; Roots, 2003). The studies show that both in the private and public sector either power- or role-oriented culture prevails, while employees would prefer the task- or result-oriented culture. Maaja Vadi (2000) has studied the orientation of Estonia’s organisations to tasks and relations with the aid of a questionnaire about organisational culture and analysed the results by her two-dimensional scale; she has found that Estonia’s organisations may have difficulties with teamwork and other types of cooperation. From these studies it can be concluded that Estonia’s organisations most likely have not developed yet into learning organisations. As Estonia’s schools are part of the same cultural environment, it can be supposed that neither have schools developed into learning organisations yet.

The behaviour of people in an organisation is closely related to their way of thinking and that, in turn, determines their perception of the world. The application of Rotter’s theory of cognitive orientation (Rotter, 1954, 1982, 1990) based on the social-cognitive paradigm provided an additional insight into the issue. Depending on whether an individual perceives that his life is mostly managed by his inner self or by external circumstances, we can distinguish between the people with the internal locus of control and the external one. People with the internal locus of control are more apt to take
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initiative and more open to change, they are better at learning, more willing to contribute to the process of decision making and co-operation, more active in directing their own lives (Crooker et al., 2002). People with the internal locus of control tend to prefer the participative style of management, they are more motivated, also as learners, and they have higher expectations for achievement (Mitchell et al., 1975; Spector, 1982; Gul et al., 1994; Burns et al., 1999). In view of this, it is fair to argue that the primary goal of a learning organisation is to create the organisational culture whereby people want to take responsibility for the development of their organisation as well as of themselves, and use it as a means, which ensures their continuous learning and ability to reshape themselves, which creates the necessary conditions for their sustainable development. This also yields information about the question, are teachers ready for changes in the organisational culture and how much responsibility they are ready to take in the process of changes.

Method

The study consisted of two independent parts; in each part different groups of respondents were involved. The first part investigated how teachers, deputy heads, and heads of school perceived the organisational culture; their representations were analysed within the framework of the four types of organisational culture: the power-oriented, role-oriented, task-oriented, and person-oriented culture. The study was carried out by means of the Questionnaire on Organisational Orientation – a four-dimensional questionnaire based on the organisation typology and devised by Harrison (1972), Handy (1993, 1995), and Handy and Aitken (1990). In total, 744 respondents took part in the study, including teachers (N=604), heads of school (N=72), and deputy heads (N=68).

In the second part of the study, The Locus of Control Questionnaire compiled by Rotter (1982: 185-188) was used. In total, 1187 respondents took part in the study, including teachers (N=1108), deputy heads (N=46), and heads of schools (N=33).

The questioning in schools with the instruction in the Estonian language was carried out in 1999-2004.

Results

The first study revealed that in the representations of teachers the person-oriented organisational culture prevailed (33.9%); it was followed by the task-oriented (25.2%) and the power-oriented culture (24.7%). The role-oriented organisational culture was found to be the least common (16.2%).

Thus, one hardly can say that the culture of learning organisation is represented to any significant extent in Estonian schools. It follows from the results that the majority of the teachers who participated in the study did not perceive the organisational culture in schools as task-oriented; rather, they perceived it as person-oriented. As teachers perceive that the prevalent organisational culture in schools is person-oriented, the following general observation can be made on the basis of the principles of that culture. The majority of teachers perceive that the organisation takes account of their personal wishes and needs, that they are free in organising their own work. The teachers perceive themselves as professionals and individuals who are served by the organisation, rather
than _vice versa_; they do not assign the highest priority to attaining organisation’s goals. Teachers are more inclined to be individualistic than seekers of co-operation. The main obstacle for the development of task-oriented culture, characteristic of a learning organisation, is apparently the individualism of teachers; such individualism facilitates isolation rather than co-operation. Harrison (1993) analyses the problems which are difficult to solve in the person-oriented culture. The person-oriented culture, prevalent in most Estonia’s schools, is not strongly focused on achieving results. In addition, it is not able to efficiently solve conflicts. The process of decision-making is weak, strivings of people differ widely and have no single aim. This culture does not motivate people to get results and there is an inclination to prioritize the person’s needs over the organisation’s needs. These drawbacks may constitute a serious obstacle to the sustainable development of teachers. The main issue is how to boost co-operation between teachers who think of themselves as professionals and experts in their respective fields, and how to make them aware of their development needs.

The second part of the study revealed that nearly half of the responding teachers (47%) perceived their locus of control to be external, rather than internal. Thus, only half of teachers have internal locus of control, and it can be expected that quite many teachers place the causes of their success or misfortune beyond their sphere of influence; this should be taken into account in the management of the change process. There is a gap between the actual readiness of teachers to assume responsibility for change and the readiness to do so that is inherent in a learning organisation; however, this readiness is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of teachers. Development of a learning organisation presupposes a fundamental change in both the individual thinking and the collective thinking. The key actor in the learning organisation is person. If people will assume an active role, all the organisational and technical difficulties could be surmounted. It is easier to achieve the learning organisation with persons whose locus of control is internal, because they are more active, they have more initiative, assume responsibility more easily and believe more in their capabilities than those who perceive their locus of control to be external.

Figure 2 shows that the power-oriented organisational culture is more common among the teachers than among the deputy heads and heads of school. The power-oriented organisational culture presupposes that in such an organisation there is somebody who makes decisions, while other members of the organisation implement the decisions (Handy, 1995). Thus, the responsibility for the quality of decisions and their consequences rests more with the decision-maker than with those who implement the decisions. For any failure there will be the excuse that apparently the decision was bad. Thus, a reason why the organisational culture is perceived as power-oriented may be the wish to avoid any responsibility for decision-making. This is further supported by the result that about half of respondents, upon filling in the questionnaire designed to determine the degree of internality/externality, chose the answers that indicated that they perceived their locus of control to be external. People with an external locus of control tend to see the causes of their failures in other people (Rotter, 1954, 1982, 1990).
Sustainable development of teachers and of the school as a whole implies continuing changes and readiness of organisation members for those changes. From the comparison of the results of these studies the conclusion could be drawn that the readiness for changes was greatest with heads of school, then with deputy heads and it was smallest with teachers. Heads of school and deputy heads, more than teachers, were inclined to perceive the organisational culture as task-oriented (Figure 3), which is the most suitable organisational culture on flexible management of the process of changes (Handy, 1995). Heads of school and deputy heads perceived more often than teachers that their locus of control was internal (Table 1), thus, they had more initiative and were more ready for changes (Crooker et al., 2002).

Table 1. Percentage of persons with the external locus of control in various categories of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of respondents</th>
<th>Externality</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy heads</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heads of school</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Harrison argues that it is difficult to change the prevalent culture; an easier and more productive way would be to strengthen it, for example, in the case of power-oriented and role-oriented culture. According to him, however, there hardly is any sense in strengthening a person-oriented culture; it would be better to complement it with positive aspects of the result-oriented (task-oriented) culture (Harrison, 1993). Handy (1995) also argues that, in general, it is good first to focus on the individual needs of the people and then to try to relate these with the task-oriented culture. The main strengths of the result- (or task-) oriented culture counterbalance the weaknesses of the person-oriented culture. Result-oriented culture strives for achieving unanimity with respect to goals, as then there is less need for controlling people; the level of motivation of people is high, their abilities are most efficiently used; members of such an organisation have a high self-esteem, people are ready to quickly learn and solve problems and accommodate themselves to changes (Handy, 1995).

Thus, for complementing the person-oriented culture with the positive aspects of the task-oriented culture we have to change the culture, rather than to strengthen it. This is a difficult task, as it is difficult to change the person-oriented culture. At the same time, combining these two cultures with the aim of modifying the existing culture towards the task-oriented one may yield good results (Harrison, 1993). Person-oriented culture is characterised by the focus on needs and relations of people, while in the task-oriented culture the focus is on teamwork and results, which provides a framework directing the activities of every member of such an organisation. A combination of these two cultures allows the schools to strike a good balance between centralisation and decentralisation by creating a situation through the setting of common aims, which regulates the activities of the employees; this reduces the need for external control and direction. In Estonia’s schools, there are preconditions for such culture changes, as the task-oriented culture has the second important position in the representations of teachers.

Conclusion

From theoretical research the conclusion has been drawn that learning organisation provides the best conditions for the development of the members of organisation. The present study revealed that task-oriented culture, which is characteristic of learning organisation, is not the prevailing culture in Estonia’s schools; thus, the organisational culture in Estonia’s schools is not the one that would best support the sustainable development of teachers. The study revealed some unfavourable factors which hinder the change of culture. The main unfavourable factor is the predominance of individualistic person-oriented organisational culture, which leads to such kind of self-actualisation where personal aims, rather than those of the organisation are pursued. Another unfavourable factor is the great share of teachers who have an external locus of control.

In order to create preconditions for sustainable development of teachers in Estonia’s schools it is essential that heads and deputy heads of school would well understand the basic ideas of the learning organisation concept and learn the methods and means, which allow them to reorganise their schools into learning organisations. Senge (1990) underlines that the role of leaders is extremely important, as they themselves must serve as models in implementing cooperation-based working methods. A central place in this process belongs to developing of visions, which could be recognised by
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Both Senge (1990) and Wallace (2003) consider that ensuring efficient communication in an organisation is a vital task. It should be understood, however, that leaders must always keep this in mind and make continuing efforts for ensuring this; otherwise it can be expected that the dominance of the person-oriented organisational culture would drive teachers into isolation. For example, solutions to difficult pedagogical problems should be sought in small task groups as a rule. An important task of leaders is to provide teachers with the time resources and develop their cooperation skills, which are needed for such work.

Another important task in ensuring the sustainable development of Estonia’s teachers proceeds from the circumstance that person’s locus of control in the internality/externality scale may change under the impact of certain events and experience (Rotter, 1954); it follows from this that more work is to be done for developing the internal locus of control in teachers. For achieving that, work methods should be applied, which contribute to strengthening teachers’ control over their work results. For example, in assessing work results in schools, various self-assessment and self-analysis methods should be systematically used: teachers should compile summaries of school year’s work on the basis of self-analysis of their individual and group task efforts and discuss these summaries with their direct supervisor; in the case of unsatisfactory pedagogical results, the work of the teacher should be analysed and plans for improving the situation should be made, etc. Developing of the internal locus of control greatly depends on the teacher’s ability to lead the educational process. It is very important to know how to establish goals, the achievement of which could be measured, how to plan one’s activities and how to develop an efficient cooperation with partners. On the basis of the present study it can be said that focussing of leaders on the aforementioned tasks would greatly contribute to ensuring the sustainable development of teachers and schools in Estonia.

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