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Learning organization as a tool for better and more effective schools

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Abstract

The socio-economic context of learning and the needs for increasing the quality of the teaching profession in Hungary. The research was aimed at increasing employability via improving the quality of higher and public education. This paper analyses and highlights the relations between a knowledge-rich economy and the quality of higher education with special regard to the preparation of teachers and schools that all serve as a motivating environment for learning. Schools as learning organizations and a model used for diagnosing them. The second part of the paper introduces the scientific basis for diagnosing schools. It analyses how the concept of a learning organization developed by Senge can be interpreted and adapted to schools. The applied model integrates three key concepts: the culture and the efficiency of a school organization were investigated with the application of the Competing Values Framework model; the behavioral competences of opinion leaders in schools were tested with a professional HR model (INRO/RDA); schools made SWOT analyses of themselves focusing on their learning capacity. These three concepts/models were integrated in one complex and holistic model, which provided a firm basis for the analyses. Profiles and characteristics of schools as learning organizations. The core part of the paper provides a brief overview of the characteristics of the 82 schools based on the complex diagnosis model. This part of the paper describes how the characteristics of schools as learning organizations were formed, and what differences arose among the schools. Based on the fitness of the schools to the LO profile, the paper analyses what kind of differences appear in the CVF model. Conclusions: The closing part of the paper summarizes the main conclusions of the diagnosis, and gives suggestions that were articulated for the schools on the basis of the research.

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1. The socio-economic context of learning, needs for increasing the quality of the teaching profession in Hungary

Nomenclature

LO	learning organization
INRO	holistic, behavioural model of human competencies, based on its earlier form called RDA (Role Diagrammatic Approach)
CVF	Competing Values Framework, organizational effectiveness and a culture model developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh
HIES	high level experienced school in learning and institution development
MIES	medium level experienced school in learning and institution development

1.1. Introduction

As a result of the complexity of our knowledge society and the exponential changes that characterize our age – and probably even more so, our future – the role of schools is also changing. While before, it was normal for students in various types and levels of schools to prepare for specific and well-known professions, now schools need to assist their students in preparing for jobs that are not known at the time their training or prepare them for solving problems that have not even been recognized. This influences the very essence of learning, the way we view learning, as well as learning management technologies and methods that can be applied efficiently. We can conclude that these changes have a significant impact on teacher training, its content as well as its methods, and on schools where teachers work.

Next, we will introduce a program that was conducted by the University of Szeged and that was aimed at improving the quality of higher education, which would eventually lead to increasing employability via providing a better-trained workforce. This objective requires that the efficiency of education and teaching in the public schooling system should be increased, which is closely linked with the professional knowledge and preparedness of teachers as well as with the institutions' quality, adaptivity, and their attitude and dedication to learning. Thus, improving the quality of the public education system can only be achieved by developing the teachers and the institutions. Institutions employing highly qualified teachers and providing the right conditions for organizational learning, which also consciously and systematically develop their own knowledge asset (by selecting training programs and other development forms that are in harmony with their relevant, motivating and specific objectives) are the ones that are capable of gradually increasing their students' results and improving their individual chances in life. Students prepared this way, who enter the labor market, perform better at work, and those who have a higher standard of knowledge can enhance their individual prospective as employees, thus contributing better to social development by being able to produce an added value.

1.2. Knowledge economy, higher education, teaching profession

Our transition into a knowledge society increases the value of knowledge, which now plays a major role in the world of economy and work alike. The link between learning and economy is clearly demonstrated by the results of a research project conducted by the OECD in 2010, according to which even a relatively small increase in student performance – expressed by the PISA test results – could have a significant impact on the competences of the labor force of each country, which would lead to an increased sense of well-being in the long-run. Researchers considered three different occurrences of performance increase and, calculating with a life expectancy of 80 years of those born in 2010, they predicted that by 2090, the total economic growth in OECD countries would reach USD 115, 200 and 260 trillion. This growth is much larger than the expenses spent on development [1]. The OECD analysis proves the importance of learning both for the society and the individual. It is not the length of time spent with learning but its efficiency that counts. The exponential pace at which knowledge is growing and how rapidly it becomes outdated as well as the extent of learning affecting our entire life, all bring learning abilities and attitudes into focus.

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