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## Obstacles to change in educational organization and methods to overcome these obstacles: Views of principals

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### Abstract

The aim of this research is to reveal the obstacles to change and methods to overcome these obstacles which the administrators encounter in educational organizations. In this research, extreme or deviant sampling a kind of qualitative research method is used. Administrators of school A located in a very low socio-economic neighbourhood called Esenler is chosen for the study. Encountered obstacles emphasized by all of five administrators are as follow; “the lack of economic sources, the pressure of the other neighbour school, heavy bureaucracy, lack of perceptions and agreements between organizations.

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of change is a fact which has an evolution in its soul and which becomes an idiom such as “the only thing which doesn’t change is a change itself”. Change is seen as desirable situation which includes opportunities with the meaning of evaluation, maturation, evolvement and development. However change is one of the most significant problems for both individuals and organizations with new century. Change can be assumed both opportunity and threats with these perspectives. The problem seen as an adaptation to change and managing it is of vital importance for organizations. It is not expected that schools undertaking to train future generations are out of this scope. Schools are expected to monitor change tendencies carefully, to lead change rather than to adapt to change and to manage change.

Change is stated as the most general existing style depicting all kinds of activation and precession of every objects and events and all kinds of transition from one situation to another (Turkish Language Society, 2010). The concept of change is seen as a long-awaited differentiation in existing situations of objects and individuals (Balci, 2005) and described as a qualitative and quantitative difference in the elements of whole and relations of elements (Balci, 2005; Demirtaş & Güneş, 2002; Büyüköztürk & Akbaba Altun, 2011). In this sense, the thought of organizations have to be updated with ever-growing new knowledge and tested (Bennis, 1997; Covey, 1997). To be able to practice this, every organization has to discover new opportunities and evaluate their basic assumptions (Hammer, 1997). For this reason the concept of change is attractive and one of the subjects on which there are lots of researchers study. According to Koçel (2010) organizational change is to switch from an existing occasion which

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is related to organizational activities to different occasion. Sabuncuoğlu and Tüz (1998) emphasize that organizational change is an adaptation to the environment in which organizations exist as a structure. As can be seen in the definitions, organizational change is to differentiate by switching from one occasion to another.

It is possible to examine the reasons of organizational change in two ways such as internal reasons and external reasons. Internal reasons which force the organization for a change are directly related to occasions and issues occurring in the structure of organization. For instance, drop in productivity, decrease in motivation, negative-way conflicts between individuals and groups force the organization to make change in its internal structure (Koçel, 2010). If it is concern that every organization takes inputs from its environment and after for a while process the inputs, present these inputs to the environment as outputs, it is out of question that organizations can divorce from the environment.

According to Başaran, (1989) generally external reasons force organizations for changes. Educational organizations have to change and adapt environment as every living being. To be able to catch harmony, changes will be done in the organizations should have done by a coordinator within programme in a regular base. Therefore chaos environment; loss of time, goods and people don't occur in the organizations. The roles of school administrators are very significant to implement changes in the school successfully (Erdoğan, 2002).

School administrators should have following knowledge, skill and behaviours to make the changes in schools succeed: School administrators should have good education, certain thoughts and should be open-minded about school, they should be able to understand the nature, goals and affects of changes they will do, they should have knowledge and skills which can increase participation, support and motivation of personnel, they should be open for new knowledge for both themselves and teachers (Bakioğlu, 1994 cited in Erdoğan, 2002). Although school administrators have knowledge, skills and behaviours said above, they sometimes have to postpone the changes they are willing or give up their intentions entirely because of some kind of obstacles they encounter. The obstacles in the school can be ordered as following: existing system doesn't bother enough, vision isn't attractive enough, people who will act active role in the process of change don't show enough performance, there is a lack of powerful leader, they want to make change on more than one item of school suddenly regardless of concentration, cultural pressures, economic system (Töremen, 2002), resistance of stakeholders of organization.

Besides since the change spoils the status quo and anticipates the bringing up accustomed things, it can be irritating (Koçel, 2010). For these reasons forcing the organizations to the change, shareholders of organizations were affected by the changes can resist against changes because they are afraid of encountering negative situations and they don't feel themselves in security (Töremen, 2002). The resistance reasons of stakeholders can be insecurity, possibility of social losses, economic losses, bother, afraid of control, unexpected reactions, mass opposition, threat of pressure and missing knowledge (Töremen, 2002). To minimize this resistance school administration should infuse the thought that changes they will make will be beneficial for both organizations and stakeholders. Therefore school administrators should use affective communication method and transfer the sense and philosophy of change to the stakeholders. Besides school administrators should arrange some kinds of symbolic activities and by this way they should provide coordination between stakeholders (Çelik, 1997). So school administrators should benefit from the power of stakeholders during the process of change as possible.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Participants*

In this study, extreme or deviant sampling was used. This sampling method examines the cases which provide limited knowledge in a deep way. Thus extreme or deviant cases have richer knowledge than normal cases have (Yildirim&Simsek, 2008). Because of this reason, in this research, the school which is the number two in the knowledge contest hold around Istanbul in 2009-2010 academic year was selected. As this school left behind private and public schools although it's socio-economic situation and the education level of students' parents were low. In the last academic year, 2010-2011, this school was again the number two. Since their success wasn't an accident, interview was done with one school principle and 5 vice principals.

## 2.2. Data collection tools

An interview form was prepared to search the reasons why school A was different from the other schools despite many disadvantages and what their secrets were to be successful. Interview form was semi-structured which means that these kinds of forms stand by the questions prepared already but at the same time provide people to ask new questions to get deeper information (Yildirim&Simsek, 2008).

## 2.3. Procedure

One on one interview was done instead of focus group interview since the vice principals could hesitate to express realities when the school principle was beside them. Questions were appropriate for daily language and far from academic language as Kruger and Casey (2000) emphasized. They were also short and open-ended (Yıldırım& Şimşek, 2008). Participants were interviewed on the date of 30.05.2011 in their room and their answers were noted on the interview forms prepared before.

## 2.4. Data analysis

Before the analysis, the school was given code name as “school A” and participants were given code name with alphabets such as “A, B,C..” instead of their real name. Data collected from the administrators were examined with the help of two experts from the same field. The answers given to the questions were classified according to the goals of the research. After similar answers were classified in groups, they were interpreted.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Views about physical changes in school A

School principle has led many changes since attained at this school on September 2010. According to the results of interviews, participants emphasized that nearly all of the changes occurred during a year were for physical changes.

Vice principle A told the most important physical change with these sentences:

“When I began to work at this school on July 2010, I saw that there wasn’t Atatürk statue. There were so many missing things that I can’t really tell you. I think the second important missing thing after the Atatürk statue was that there weren’t any garden walls. The school which was so close the main road didn’t have walls. Then I learnt that the school had been writing with district national education directorate for three years for garden walls and finally this year walls could be finished. These are the most important changes”.

Principle added these sentences after stating that physical change are of priority:

“Stone buildings cover everywhere. Our children are already squashed into stone buildings when they are at home; there isn’t any place outside to play because neighbourhoods resemble a tunnel made with long buildings. When I came to this school at first time, I couldn’t see any little feed in the school garden. My first job was to plant the school garden”.

According to interview with vice principle, their answers were merged as following:

- Previously there were one entrance door, but now there are three
- Paper towel are put in the toilettes
- Paint workshop and chess room were done
- Water tanks were renewed
- The Piano was bought and children began to play it with their music teacher’s guidance
- Teachers’ room was renewed and cabinets were given to each teacher.

Besides the physical changes, Principle stated that they could not make change about education because of the disadvantages of centralization. However he told the changes about education as following:

“We are bound hand and foot because of some hinders of centralization. Physical changes aren’t big problem but sometimes we have trouble about education. Still the most important change about education is beginning to use smart boards in all of the first class. Since today’s children are the technology children, it is easier to take their attention to the lesson with smart boards”.

Vice principle B stated that one of the most important changes was “message system to inform parents”. He emphasized that when they send message to the parents when their children didn’t come to the school, the possibility of truancy of students began to decrease. He also stated that they began to give “medals” to the students who are successful and participated in social activities and by doing so, students’ success are strengthened and their success will continue like that.

Vice principle C stated the precautions for school gang as following:

“Our experiences teach us these: If you place the same class level on the same floor, for example 6th class are on the second floor, 5th class are on the 1st floor, then gangs begin between the class levels. In break time, 6th classes begin to fight with 5th classes. Then we think that we spread all class levels on the same floor. So on the first floor there are 1,2,3,4th classes and they protect each other.”

In conclusion, although all of the participants agree that nearly all changes are physical, little but important changes for increasing students’ success such as using smart boards in first class level, taking precautions for gangs and giving medals to the students who are successful and participate in social activities.

### *3.2. Views about obstacles in change management and the methods to overcome these obstacles*

All of the participants except principle stated that they had financial problem. Vice principle A stated that inadequate number of the officers and servants slightly hinder the changes they wanted to make, adding to financial obstacles. Principle emphasized that they didn’t have serious troubles because they were able to overcome these obstacles anyway. Principle emphasized this situation as:

“If I give into the words that everybody say, for what am I here? I am the administrator of this school. The administrator takes decisions and implements them. Of course the administrator sometimes has to adapt bureaucracy but he/she can not be captured by bureaucracy...”

As can be seen from here, while principle thinks that he has enough skills to make changes and overcome obstacles, vice principals accepted that they are incompetent for change.

All of the participants except principle stated that since the biggest trouble was financial, they could overcome these obstacles from getting help from parent-teacher association, municipality and financial support from parents.

Besides financial problem, vice principle D states that one of the problems they encounter is lack of perceptions:

“I think the most important obstacle is the lack of perceptions. Although you have lots of money, you can’t make any change if there isn’t any perception. After our school made many changes, families of other schools wanted changes from their own schools. Then our school’s name was on the newspaper. So we began to cut a wide swath around the county. The principals of other schools were discomfort and complained us to District National Education Directorate. What could have happened if they had taken us as an example?”

While principle stated that they got biggest support from the teachers’ determination and motivation, vice principle D used these sentences supporting principals’ statements:

“Our teacher staffs are composed of young and new-assigned. So they are very open for changes. We saw the biggest spiritually support from our teachers. When we ask money from parents, they don’t give. But our teachers are so good that when they ask money from parents, they give it because they don’t want to loose the teacher. Besides we change our economy politics. Every school firstly make promises, ask money and if they collect money, they can make change. But we firstly become indebted, make change and then ask money via teachers. In that way parents can see the changes, they don’t avoid giving money for their children’s education”.

### *3.3. Views about changes the school and school success*

Vice principle A stated that changes in that school firstly affected the parents' perspective about the school. He added that as a result of this occasion parents interested in what their children do more than before. For example according to him, the parents weren't disturbed to come to the school and they encouraged their children to attend the lessons.

Principle emphasized that they increase the children's motivation by giving medals to successful children and by organizing school trip.

Vice principle E emphasized that after children felt themselves comfortable in the school of which physical conditions, they were more engaged in lessons. Besides for him, after name of the school become important around the environment, students embraced their school and they studied harder than before.

Vice principle A stated that renewing teachers' room made teachers more motivated for their teaching and this was also reflected to the students.

In conclusion all of the participants emphasized that changes increased motivations of students, teachers and parents and this situation reflected students' success.

#### 4. Conclusion

According to the findings, all of the participants stated that they primarily made physical changes in the school. They added that the reason why they want to make physical change is to present students better learning environment. All of the participants except principle emphasized that the biggest trouble they had was inadequate economy resources and they solved this problem with the cooperation of parents, municipality and teacher-parent association. However principle doesn't see any economic trouble, which vice principals see, as an obstacle. All of the participants agree that after the little physical changes, bigger changes they would do in the future would bring bigger obstacles. They emphasized that these obstacles could be heavy bureaucracy, the pressure of the other neighbour school, lack of perceptions and agreements between organizations rather than economic troubles. Participants agree that they wouldn't be afraid of these obstacles. They stated that they took and would take support by getting help from students, teachers, parents, tradesmen, Private Corporation and municipality. All of the participants stated that their success, although they were in the county which had low socio economic level was because their changes affected parents, students and teachers. All of the participants emphasized that the success of the school would be better with changes which carried school to the better condition. Therefore the schools of which socio- economic level is low can increase their success with changes they will make. It is inevitable that there aren't any obstacles against changes. Regardless of many obstacles and resistance against the changes the administrators will make, administrators can make changes by standing decisive against the obstacles. Therefore the students' success will increase and the schools will be able to go beyond.

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