

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN DEVELOPING A LEARNING ORGANISATION CULTURE

This chapter builds on from the previous one, continuing the analysis of the Learning Organisation Survey data. The final research question that the study attempted to answer was to examine the role that leadership plays or can play in the development of a learning culture. Learning, openness to change, communication, resources and people are all integral components of the Learning Organisation philosophy. Of these, leadership is perhaps the most critical. Duignan (1994) argues that leaders can transform organisations into Learning Organisations through their commitment to a culture of continuous improvement, reflection on practice, development of vision, and a greater focus on human resource management and development strategies.

Leadership is undeniably a key factor involved in the effective functioning of schools, and this is reiterated by Beare et al (1989: 99) who suggest that “Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools”. Independent School Principals, it has already been argued, have a high degree of autonomy, decision making power and influence. The most important task of the Independent School Principal is the provision of a strong vision and commitment to excellence – all consistent with the principles of the Learning Organisation.

Leadership has already been defined in a number of ways. Some of the key concepts include the making of decisions, making what one believes happen, enabling others to act, and modelling the way (see Barth, 1988; Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Chance, 1992).

Bolman and Deal (1991) described leaders as culture shapers or builders. This becomes critical in the development of Learning Organisation cultures. Northfield (1992), Bhindi (1997) and Duignan (1995) propose that effective leaders need to be effective learners, while Senge (1990: 340) suggests that Learning Organisation leaders need to see themselves as designers, stewards and teachers. Effective leaders encourage others in the school community to take collaborative responsibility for their own learning and work (Donaldson and Marnik, 1995). Leaders as learners need to have a people focus, develop vision, communicate effectively and be aware of who they are and where they are going (Schein, 1992). To do this they should be reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983).

The study of leadership is a huge task. In the context of this study four key aspects of leadership were focused on:

1. Transformational leadership
2. Visionary leadership
3. Leaders as culture builders
4. Leaders as learners.

All of these aspects of leadership are directly related to the Learning Organisation.

Briefly, transformational leadership as already mentioned, has a people oriented and change focus, working by transforming the goals and aspirations of organisational members (see Burns, 1978). Vision, role modelling, systemic thinking and relationship building are all central features of the transformational leader. They are very aware of the importance of organisational culture and its effect on productivity, and clearly have a collaborative focus (see also Leithwood, 1992 and 1994; Roberts, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1990).

There is a close relationship between vision and leadership, and vision and the Learning Organisation philosophy. Vision needs to be developed, shared, communicated and implemented. Leaders able to believe in and “sell” a vision, are more likely to be followed. Most importantly, the leader has to develop amongst his or her charges a true commitment (as opposed to compliance) to the ideals of the vision. Shared vision, Senge (1990) argues, provides the focus and energy for learning within a true Learning Organisation.

The importance of leaders to the culture of an organisation has been repeatedly highlighted throughout this study (see for example Bolman and Deal, 1991; Duignan, 1993; and Peters and Waterman, 1982). Like Bolman and Deal (1991), Duignan (1993) proposes that leadership is primarily a cultural activity and the key to the development of a quality culture. Although it can be argued that leaders can’t “make” a culture, they can certainly mould and shape it. This particularly applies to the Independent School leader

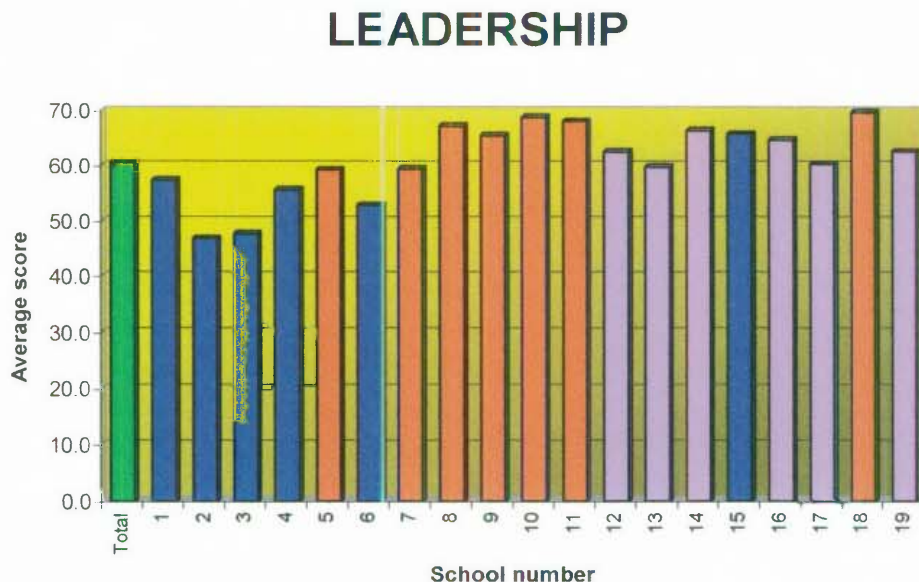
who has greater decision making power than the Government School leader (Kefford, in Simpkins et al, 1987).

In summary, leadership is a critical element of the success or otherwise of a school. Independent School leaders have a high degree of decision making power and influence. Leaders are important shapers of culture, and through the development and communication of vision can have a significant impact. Leaders need to model learning and develop a vibrant, open, people-oriented, collaborative, empowering climate where the organisation seeks to continually improve. By using these qualities to bring out the best in their people, leaders can transform organisations into Learning Organisations where people want to work and feel valued and committed. In this type of organisation people will see the benefits of learning and will be more likely to embrace change and take the organisation forward into an uncertain future. The importance of leadership in schools cannot be emphasised enough.

In the Learning Organisation Survey carried out, the Leadership category was the equal highest scoring one, along with Vision (which is closely linked to leadership). The total average for the Leadership category was 76% (compared to the overall average for the survey of 68%). This result is not surprising as Independent School leaders are highly revered throughout their communities (see Table 3 on page 127, for a more comprehensive comparison of the Learning Organisation categories).

When these results are disaggregated by school type, another picture emerges. Almost all of the boys' schools responses were below the overall average, with three of them having noticeably lower responses. All of the coeducational schools were around or slightly above the average (with the best average being 83%). Also, all of the girls' schools scored around or above the average. In fact the top four scoring schools in the leadership category were all girls' schools (with the highest average response 87%). These observations closely follow those of the previous chapter. On face value, this would tend to lend credence to the notion that leadership has a significant impact on many other Learning Organisation categories in this survey. Thus, it could be argued that leadership does play a very important role in developing a Learning Organisation culture in their schools. The data collated from the survey for the Leadership category is illustrated in Figure 39 below.

Figure 39 Results for the Leadership Category



't' testing of the Leadership data revealed that (see Table 12):

1. The girls' schools had statistically significantly higher mean scores than the boys' schools (collectively),
2. The coeducational schools had statistically significantly higher mean scores than the boys' schools,
3. There was not evidence of a statistically significant difference between the means of the girls' and coeducational schools.

Table 12

LEADERSHIP

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	<i>Variable 1(Boys')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Girls')</i>
Mean	54.5234	65.0410
Variance	104.3606	79.0691
Observations	64	61
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	122	
t Stat	-6.1477	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000	
t Critical one-tail	1.6574	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0000	
t Critical two-tail	1.9796	

	<i>Variable 1(Boys')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Coed)</i>
Mean	54.5234	62.8302
Variance	104.3606	58.7975
Observations	64	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	114	
t Stat	-5.0183	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000	
t Critical one-tail	1.6583	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0000	
t Critical two-tail	1.9810	

	<i>Variable 1(Girls')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Coed)</i>
Mean	65.0410	62.8302
Variance	79.0691	58.7975
Observations	61	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	112	
t Stat	1.4254	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0784	
t Critical one-tail	1.6586	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.1568	
t Critical two-tail	1.9814	

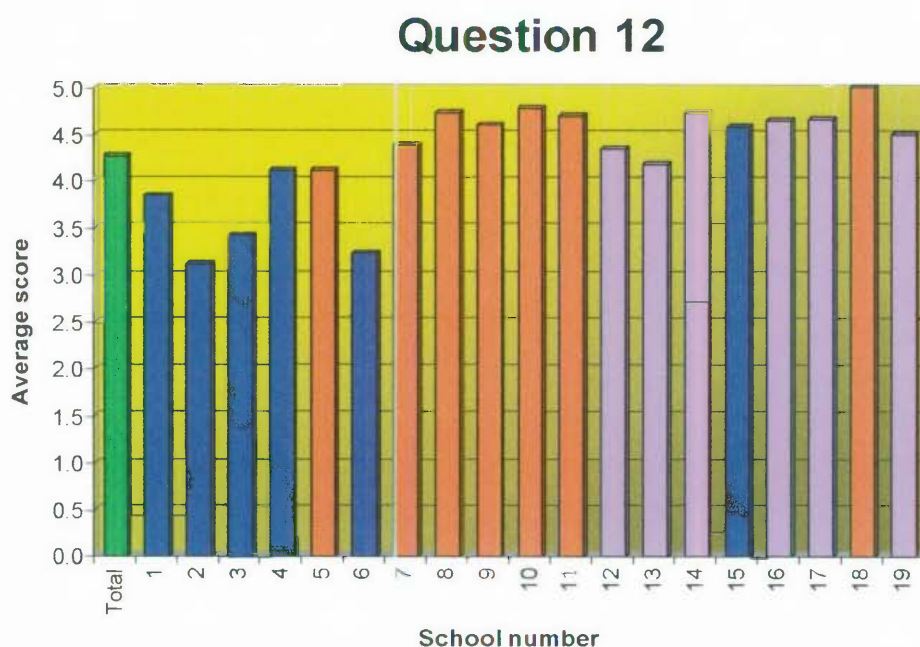
As a result of the inextricable link of Leadership with the other Learning Organisation categories, most of the questions that were placed into the Leadership category also fitted into other categories. In fact, it could be argued that leadership has a significant impact on all of the other Learning Organisation categories. The following questions were associated with the Leadership category: Questions 7, 8, 12, 17, 19, 20, 25, 28, 33, 34, 38, 40, 41, 44, 45, and 51.

Question 7 asked whether new ways of organising and managing daily work are encouraged. This survey item was also categorised as relating to Positive Thinking. The results were rather polarised, with half of the schools achieving low average scores (<2.80), and the other half achieving noticeably higher scores (see Figure 10, p143). This question relates to leadership in a number of ways – is the organisation open to change, do leaders encourage shared or collaborative leadership, is the culture open and vibrant, and so on. The critical influence of the leader on these aspects of school life has already been discussed.

Question 8 asked whether the Principal actively supports innovation. This question had a much higher average score (3.76) than the previously discussed question, with girls' and coeducational schools again scoring more favourably than boys' schools. From the results of this survey, it could be argued that Independent School leaders do actively support innovation, a crucial starting point for organisations wishing to change, improve and move forward.

Question 12 asked whether the Principal treats staff with dignity and respect. This question should be an essential ingredient of any surveys on Learning Organisations, effective leadership or successful schools. It is one of the few undisputed and universal qualities of effective leadership. This question had the highest overall average score (4.25), with no schools scoring in the low range. Sixteen of the nineteen schools surveyed had average scores in the high range, with almost half averaging over 90%. These results signify the importance given to the selection of Independent School leaders, and the degree of influence they wield. One could argue that it is clear from this survey that Independent School leaders do treat their staff with dignity and respect. Figure 40 below effectively illustrates the responses to this question.

Figure 40 The principal treats staff with dignity and respect



Question 17 asked whether the Principal involves others in planning. This question was also placed into the Risk Taking / Openness to Change and Importance of People categories and has thus been discussed already. Obviously this question relates most closely to Leadership, and is a gauge of the degree of autocracy/collaboration in action at the school in question. The overall average for this question (3.62) was at the upper end of the intermediate range, with five girls' schools having high scores, and four boys' schools having low scores. Figure 24 illustrates the data collected for this question and can be seen on page 172. Collaborative leadership is arguably even more important for Learning Organisations as it engenders greater commitment and motivation amongst employees by giving them a sense of ownership, control and input into the direction the organisation wishes to proceed in. This style of leadership has already been deemed to be of significant relevance to a number of leadership aspects considered fundamental to this thesis, namely: transformational leadership, and leaders as culture builders and learners.

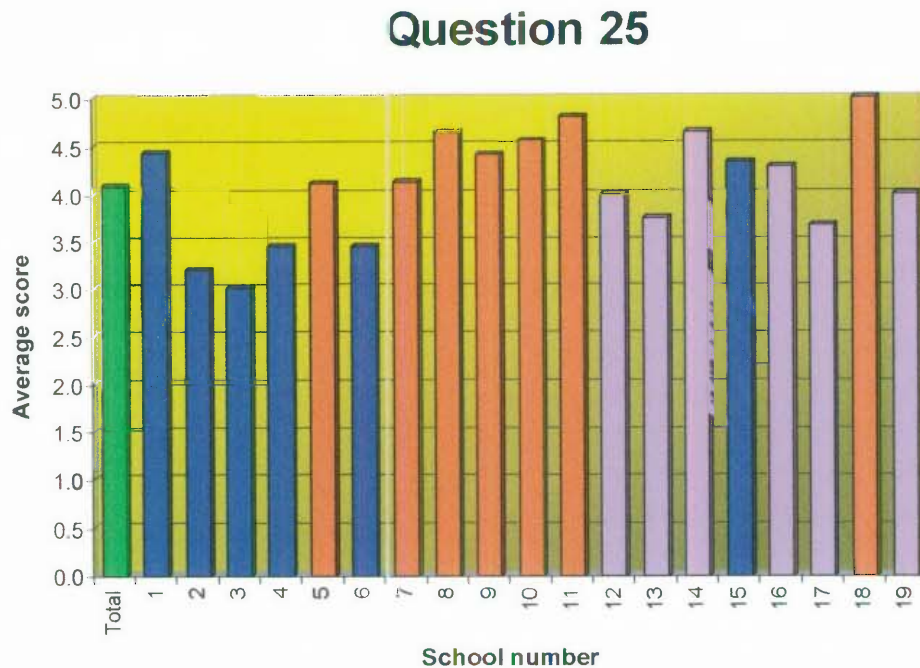
Questions 19 and 20 need to be considered together. The former question asked whether senior staff were approachable, while the latter asked whether senior staff were supportive. Both of these questions were very high scoring. All schools had average scores for Question 19 in the high range, (with three schools averaging very close to 100%). The responses to Question 20 were only slightly lower, with the overall average score (4.02) still falling into the high range. Only one school had an average response that did not fall into the high range. One of the girls' schools surveyed had an average score of over 90%.

The strongly positive results for Questions 12, 19 and 20 indicate that Independent School leaders treat their staff well and are approachable and supportive. Thus, it could be argued that this is another area where the foundations have been laid for the further development of the Learning Organisation philosophy.

Question 25 asked whether the Principal leads the way in setting high standards.

Effective leaders need to be good role models in relation to many factors. Some of these include learning, reflection on practice, humility, dignity, collaboration, the pursuit of excellence, commitment to the vision and so on. The results for this question were again very positive, with the overall average falling into the high range. The girls' schools in the sample tended to score most highly, with the four lowest average scores all coming from boys' schools. This result should be a concern for these leaders, although on the whole the results from this survey item suggest that generally Independent School leaders are very effective role models and do lead the way in setting high standards. The data collected from this question is illustrated in Figure 41.

Figure 41 The principal leads the way in setting high standards



Question 28 asked whether the Principal often discusses the future as he/she envisages it. This question has already been discussed in the preceding chapter, as it was also placed into the Vision Category. The overall average response fell in the upper level of the intermediate range, with only a small number of schools scoring in the low range. The more positive responses to this question, combined with the lack of a pattern with other linked questions, indicates that leaders are now realising the importance of having and communicating a vision for their schools.

Question 33 asked whether the Principal gives praise when a job is well done. This survey item was discussed in the Positive Thinking category and figure 12 on page 145 illustrates the trends that were evident from this question. Leaders of the girls' schools

tended to score highly (six of seven), whilst two thirds of the boys' schools had average scores in the low range. Leadership style and school culture are both important underlying factors relating to this question. Men are appointed to lead boys' schools, and women are more commonly appointed to lead girls' schools. Are female leaders better communicators and esteem builders? Again, more research is needed to answer this question.

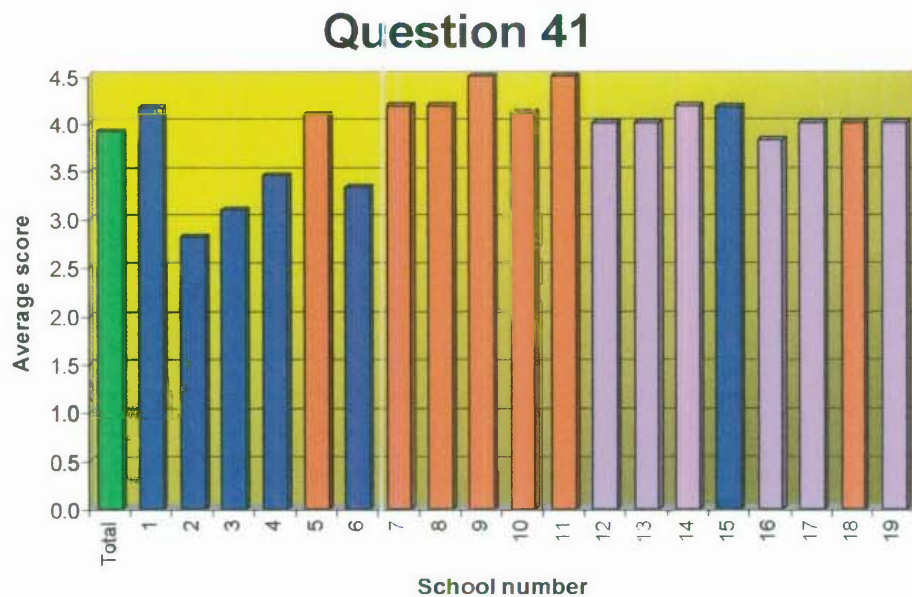
Question 34 refers to the responsiveness of management practices, and has thus been placed into both the Leadership and Risk Taking / Openness to Change categories (see page 154). The results of this question tended to fall in the intermediate range, with only a small number of high and low average scores. This would therefore indicate that the management is reasonably responsive to staff needs, although there is still plenty of room for improvement. Having senior staff that are in tune with the "workers" can lead to greater involvement in the organisation, and commitment to the core values of the organisation. An organisation that changes its practices as the need arises is obviously one that is likely to be moving forward, aligned with societal changes, and more open to innovation and change for the better.

Question 38 asked whether the school vision is regularly espoused by the Principal. It was very similar in nature to Question 28, with both of these questions also fitting in the Vision category. The overall average score for this question (3.80) was in the high range (and had very similar responses to Question 28). However, three boys' schools had low average scores. The overall results show that Principals generally appear to have

developed a vision for their schools and are now focusing on communicating this vision (the next step is to engender a sharing in or commitment to the vision).

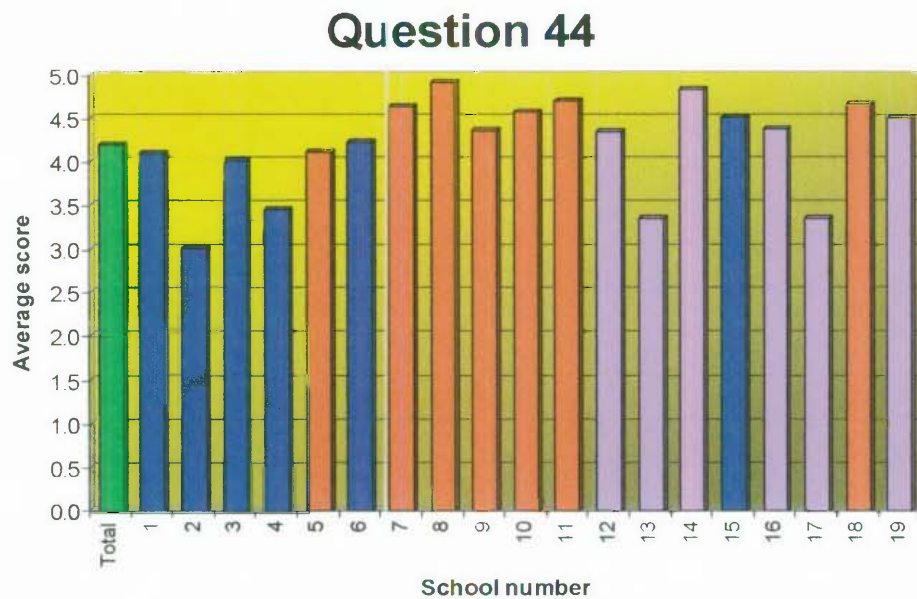
Questions 40 and 41 were also linked. The former asked whether the Principal provides opportunities for individual staff learning, while the latter question used the term support (rather than opportunities). These questions were related to the concept of the Leader as Learner developed earlier. The overall average score for Question 40 just fell into the high range (3.78). By schools, the five lowest average scores came from the boys' schools, while all of the girls' schools had average scores in the high range. The coeducational schools had average scores in the high range or at the upper end of the intermediate range. The average score for Question 41 (3.92) was actually slightly higher, and all but four schools (all boys') had high average scores. In summary, most of the schools averaged around 80% for this question, indicating that Independent School leaders are providing support for individual staff learning. Thus, their support is certainly deep-seated and committed, rather than superficial. The data collected from Question 41 is shown in Figure 42.

Figure 42 The principal provides support for individual staff learning



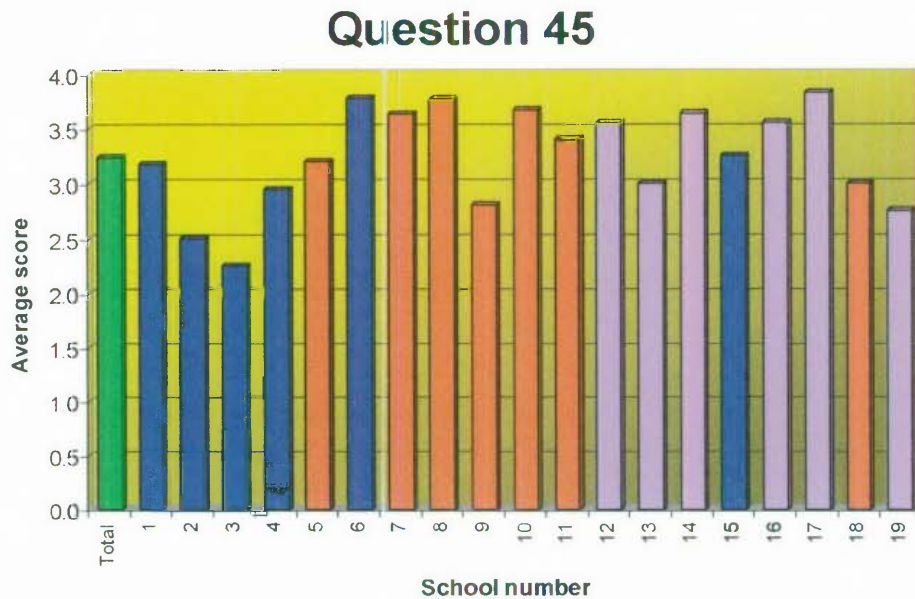
Question 44 asked whether the Principal is up-to-date in school and educational developments. This was one of the highest scoring questions in the survey (overall average score 4.19). The results for this item confirm that Independent School leaders are effective learners and role models. It would be expected that all Principals (even poor ones) would be up-to-date with school developments. However, it was not expected that survey respondents would necessarily concur that Principals were up-to-date with educational developments. One boys' school had a low average score, and one boys' and two coeducational schools had intermediate scores. All other schools had average scores that easily fell into the high range, with six schools averaging over 90% for this question. This data is illustrated in Figure 43.

Figure 43 The principal is up to date in school and educational developments



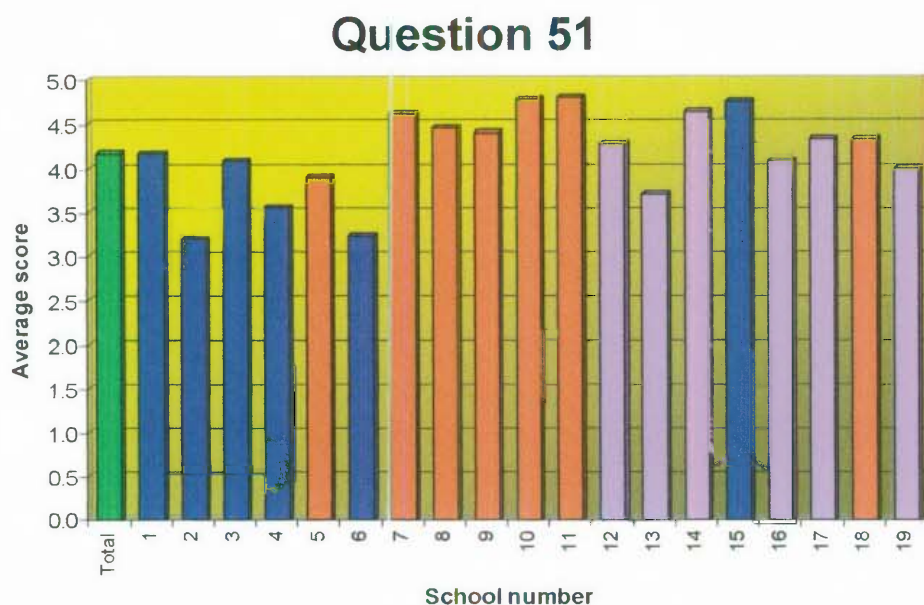
Question 45 asked whether department heads are expected to lead rather than just administer their departments. As Figure 44 below indicates, the schools were more variable in their responses to this question. The overall average (3.25) was in the intermediate range. Eight schools had high average scores (four coeducational, three girls', one boys' school). Two boys' schools averaged below 50% for this question, with another five schools also having low average scores. Girls' schools do not appear to have more favourable results as a group for this question. Many Independent Schools do not appear to expect their department heads to be anything more than administrators or managers, raising the issue of providing opportunities for academic leadership at department head level. In today's climate of flattening leadership structures, there should be greater leadership expectations at the middle management level. The data that was collected for this survey item is illustrated in Figure 44.

Figure 44 Department heads in this school lead, rather than just administer departments



Question 51 asked whether the Principal practices the values that he or she publicly espouses. The responses to this question were very positive, with the overall average score (4.17) being one of the higher ones. All of the girls' schools had high average scores, while all of the coeducational and boys' schools had responses in the intermediate to high range. Five of the six boys' schools still had average scores that were lower than the overall average. Five schools had average scores of over 90%. The data collected for this question leads credence to the notion that Independent School leaders are very good people and role models. It is far easier to preach good values than it is to practise them consistently. The Independent School leaders in this sample appear to be doing just that – practising what they preach, making them more effective role models for both staff and students. This data is illustrated in Figure 45.

Figure 45 The principal practices the values he / she publicly espouses



In summary, the Leadership category of this survey produced positive results, with the overall category average just falling into the high range (at 76%), confirming leadership has a large impact on the other Learning Organisation categories. The girls' and coeducational schools involved in the study clearly scored more highly in terms of leadership than the boys' schools.

The Independent School leaders involved in this study scored most highly in the questions relating to their personal qualities. Thus, one would be unlikely to question their credentials, abilities or commitment. They also appeared to be supportive of and committed to the promotion of learning opportunities at an individual level. Where they perhaps need to focus on is in the seeking of continuous improvement through the

embracing and promotion of change, by improving their communication skills and by thinking positively and treating people with the importance they deserve. By focusing more closely on learning as a way to improve, schools should be able to move forward. This will enable them to compete more effectively in today's educational market, and perhaps most importantly, prepare their students more effectively for life into the next millennium. The role of leadership in developing (not creating) this culture cannot be emphasised enough. Leaders need to be good role models and include the modelling of learning and reflection on practice in their daily lives. Leaders must continue to develop and communicate their schools vision, and in doing so, endeavour to engender greater commitment to it amongst their staff members. Leaders need to be prepared to share their leadership, to generate hope, optimism and energy. The hiring and induction of staff is a vital element of leadership that should not be underestimated in the context of what has just been written. Leaders should continue to strive for personal excellence, and recognise those meritorious efforts of other staff members. They should, wherever possible, try to be pro-active rather than reactive.

In summary, leaders need to pay great attention to the culture of the organisation, to learning, to change, to motivation and to the sharing of vision.

The data collected from this survey indicates that Independent School leaders are well intentioned and of very good character. The concepts just described now need to pervade the policies and practices of their organisations. Leaders do not create the culture or ethos of a school, but over time they can have a significant impact on the way this culture

is shaped. Thus, the role of leadership in developing a Learning Organisation culture is of absolutely vital significance. Leadership has a large impact on the other Learning Organisation categories described in the previous chapter, particularly in Independent Schools where their influence is greater. Without commitment from the leadership, a school has no hope of embracing the Learning Organisation philosophy effectively.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was threefold:

1. To determine the key concepts of the Learning Organisation philosophy that is developing increasing prominence in recent literature, particularly in the business world.
2. To examine the extent to which Independent Schools in the greater Sydney region fit the Learning Organisation model.
3. To examine the role that leadership can play in the development and implementation of a Learning Culture in Independent Schools.

Document analysis was the methodology used to address the first problem. Based on this analysis, a Learning Organisation Survey was developed and tailored more specifically to educational institutions, to address the second and third problems identified above.

Nineteen randomly selected schools participated in the study, with twelve surveys being sent to each of these schools (thirty were invited to participate, with twenty originally agreeing). There was a relatively even spread amongst boys', girls', and coeducational schools for the study. Fifteen of the schools returned seventy five percent or more of the individual survey responses. A number of Learning Organisation categories were developed for the study: Vision, Positive Thinking, Risk Taking / Openness to Change, The Importance of People, Resources, Professional Development / Learning Power, and Leadership. These categories, along with the Cumulative Totals for the survey, were then

analysed and discussed within the context of school types (boys', girls', and coeducational). Statistical analysis took the form of 't' tests for two samples assuming unequal variances.

The results that were gleaned from the survey are best considered from two viewpoints. Of the Learning Organisation categories, Vision and Leadership fared most strongly, whilst Resources and Professional Development / Learning Power were the weakest (the other categories were in the intermediate range). The girls' and coeducational schools involved in the study significantly outperformed the boys' schools in every Learning Organisation category. Five of the six highest scoring schools were girls' schools – these schools could certainly be described as fitting the proposed Learning Organisation model.

The findings are significant for a number of reasons. From this study, it is clear that Independent School Principals are highly regarded and well respected throughout their school communities. They particularly shone in areas that considered personal qualities, and in their realisation of the considerable importance of Vision: its existence, and the communication and development of a wider commitment to it. The areas that scored most poorly were Resources and Professional Development / Learning Power. These results, together with the results of the categories that scored in the intermediate range, provide interesting implications for Independent School Principals. Learning does not appear to be emphasised enough in many of the schools involved in the study, regardless of the availability of sufficient resources. Many of the schools could do much to improve their communication strategies, and the manner in which they view and treat their people.

It should also not be very difficult for schools to perform better in the areas of positive thinking and the way they approach change. Regardless of whether or not a school wishes to fully embrace the Learning Organisation philosophy, these results are of significance to all school leaders seeking to improve and survive in today's competitive marketplace.

The results of this survey are also of much relevance to Independent School Councils, in terms of their selection criteria for new Principals. Government School Principals should also be able to glean significant pointers from the results of the survey, particularly in today's climate of devolution / localisation of responsibility.

The limitations of the study have already been alluded to, as they relate to the chosen methodology. The chief limitation of surveys is that supplementary information cannot be collected and misunderstandings clarified. However, they are effective instruments when used for the gathering of a relatively large amount of standardised data, across a broader spectrum of organisations. The original intentions of the study were to follow up the survey with a number of mini-case studies. This would have enabled the collection of more enriched, qualitative data. However, the large amount of survey data collected, together with the time and personal constraints of the researcher, meant that this did not eventuate. Nonetheless, the study has served as a first in terms of the concept of the Learning Organisation in an educational context.

As a result of the study, a number of suggested areas of further research have arisen. Case studies of relevant schools should be carried out to complement the large amount of quantitative data that has been collected in this study. This would enable the gathering of richer qualitative data providing greater meaning and insight. It should also explain why, for example, the boys' schools performed so poorly in the survey. It is also clear from the results of the study that further research needs to be undertaken to examine the leadership styles of Principals in the differing types of schools involved in the study. This should particularly focus on the relationship between the school learning culture and the quality of leadership.

The relevance of the Learning Organisation philosophy is clear to institutions wishing to develop patterns of lifelong learning amongst their students. In summary, the Independent Schools studied were found to be at different stages of evolution in their "learning journey". Over all they were deemed to have scored in the intermediate range in the Learning Organisation Survey. A number of schools involved in the study could be described to closely fit the Learning Organisation model, while many other schools performed poorly. The Learning Organisation categories that scored highly were Vision and Leadership, while Resources and Professional Development / Learning Power did not score well. Leadership has a considerable impact on many other Learning Organisation categories. By school type, the girls' and coeducational schools displayed the strongest learning cultures, with boys' schools being outperformed in every Learning Organisation category. The Learning Organisation philosophy has much to offer educational institutions in their quest for continuous improvement as they move forward into the next millennium, striving to meet the challenges of a changing society, where knowledge is

increasingly being seen as power. The ability to learn is crucial for success in the future for both individuals and for organisations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

For organisations that profess to instil amongst their ‘products’ a desire for lifelong learning, there is much to be gained from the development of a Learning Organisation philosophy. Where staff are expected and encouraged to learn, and are treated with value and respect, continuous improvement and openness to change is more likely to be an integral aspect of the school culture. If the leader sets the example as the head learner, staff will be more likely to take on board the notion that learning is an essential, daily activity that must be infused into every aspect of life.

During this study a Learning Organisation model was developed. Clearly there needs to be a strong focus on leadership and learning, particularly during the early stages of the Learning Organisation quest. However, vision, communication, resources, risk taking, openness to change, positive thinking and recognising the true value of people were all developed as important Learning Organisation categories in the model. These factors were deemed to be essential as the Learning organisation journey gathered momentum.

Future research may need to further develop and refine these categories. Other categories may also need to be developed, for example, peer mentoring and performance evaluation. Perhaps more attention needs to be given to learning theories and methods at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The question of whether or not there is a theoretical basis for the lower performance of the boys’ schools in this study compared to the girls’ and coeducational schools also needs to be investigated further.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The implications of this study for practice can be broken up into the three target groups that are most affected by the findings of the study. A Learning Organisation philosophy is of relevance in today's changing society, where the employment market is placing a high value on the ability to learn (and people are no longer staying in the one job for life). The Independent School market is becoming more competitive, and successful schools in the future will not be able to rely solely on reputation and the support of alumni. They will need to be flexible and adaptable in order to effectively meet the changing needs of people, and will need to earnestly seek continuous improvement. Whilst doing this, however, they must always remember that they are at heart human service organisations.

The major implications for teachers are clear: learn, share this learning, and be prepared to change as this learning is utilised.

For Principals the concepts that have been developed within the context of the Learning Organisation philosophy are very significant. Leaders need to be culture shapers, role models as learners, promote change, develop and communicate a vision, and treat people with the respect that they deserve. Shared or collaborative leadership concepts are appropriate for Learning Organisations, where people are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions. Leaders need to support and expect learning at all levels of the organisation. They should be open in their communications with staff members.

There are also implications for School Councils. One of their most important tasks is the selection of new Principals. By taking into account the Learning Organisation philosophy when they develop their selection criteria, School Councils can go a long way towards determining whether their school is going to be a school that moves forward or stagnates. They also need to be aware that for all of this learning to occur, be shared amongst staff and infused into daily school life, resources must be provided to accomplish this.

MacNeill and Silcox (1996: 32) concur with this view and provide a fitting finale to this study, arguing that

The key to bringing about long term, meaningful change in Australian schools is embedding the Learning Organisation model into the schools' strategic plans and operations.