

## **CHAPTER 6**

# **THE EXTENT TO WHICH INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS ARE LEARNING ORGANISATIONS**

### **OVERVIEW**

This chapter builds on earlier work that reviewed the key characteristics of Learning Organisations, with particular reference to schools. Analysis of the Learning Organisation Survey that was designed specifically for this study provides insight into the extent to which Independent Schools are Learning Organisations, and the role that leadership can play in developing a Learning Organisation (the second and third research questions).

The Learning Organisation Survey was administered to a wide cross section of Independent Schools in greater Sydney to obtain a clearer view of the current status of Independent Schools as Learning Organisations, and the role of leadership in developing a learning culture (described in the next chapter). It is not the brief of this thesis to determine a “cut off” score for schools to be classified as Learning Organisations, or to ascertain whether or not the Independent Schools surveyed were Learning Organisations. The primary purpose of the thesis has been to identify trends that ensue from the survey data, especially within the context of their corresponding categories. In particular, this should enable the schools to more easily identify the specific areas that need focus.

Schools surveyed have been placed into three groups – boys’ schools; girls’ schools; and coeducational schools. Although the sample is by no means comprehensive, certain trends in relation to school type may become apparent. The survey data has been analysed according to the Learning Organisation categories that were developed earlier by the researcher (see Chapter 6). These categories are: Vision; Positive Thinking; Risk Taking / Openness to Change; Communication; The Importance of People; Resources; Leadership; Professional Development / Learning; and Cumulative Learning Organisation Totals.

In general the categories in which the schools surveyed fared strongest were Vision and Leadership; the Resources and Professional Development / Learning Power categories were the weakest; and the categories which scored in the intermediate range were Positive Thinking, Risk Taking / Change, Communication, and the Importance of People. A brief summary of the survey results is provided in the following table. The key for the remarks on Table 3 are:

High:	75% or more
Intermediate:	65% -- 74%
Low:	Less than 65%

Table 3

Summary of Survey Results

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>BOYS' SCORE</b>	<b>GIRLS' SCORE</b>	<b>COED. SCORE</b>
Cumulative total	177.32	159.05	191.35	183.25
Remarks	Intermediate	Low	Intermediate	Intermediate
Vision	26.45	24.42	27.57	27.61
Remarks	High	Intermediate	High	High
Positive thinking	22.97	20.45	24.12	24.67
Remarks	Intermediate	Low	Intermediate	Intermediate
Risk taking / change	30.54	26.91	33.58	31.44
Remarks	Intermediate	Low	High	Intermediate
Communication	20.62	18.97	21.70	21.36
Remarks	Intermediate	Low	Intermediate	Intermediate
Importance of people	24.62	22.00	26.86	25.20
Remarks	Intermediate	Low	High	Intermediate
Resources	22.01	19.69	23.97	22.58
Remarks	Low	Low	Low	Low
Professional devt / learning	38.60	33.98	41.90	40.40
Remarks	Low	Low	Intermediate	Intermediate
Leadership	60.60	54.52	65.04	62.83
Remarks	High	Intermediate	High	High

Vision is a current buzzword from the business world that is prominent in educational circles. Leaders in Independent Schools are revered in many ways, are in positions of great influence, and generally highly regarded. This is consistent with scholars such as Bhindi who argue that there is a relationship between leadership and deep rooted organisational cultures (1995). These factors may in part explain the generally positive responses to questions relating to Vision.

Schools are notoriously constrained in the area of Resources, and perhaps this is also an area where they are less business-like. For example, it is difficult to effectively measure and reward “good” teaching on an individual basis. Professional Development / Learning Power is closely related to the resources issue and the fact that it is often very difficult to get time out from lessons / school. Many people still consider Professional Development to be strongly linked to in-services, neglecting the informal learning that can occur on a daily basis in the staffroom and in the classroom itself.

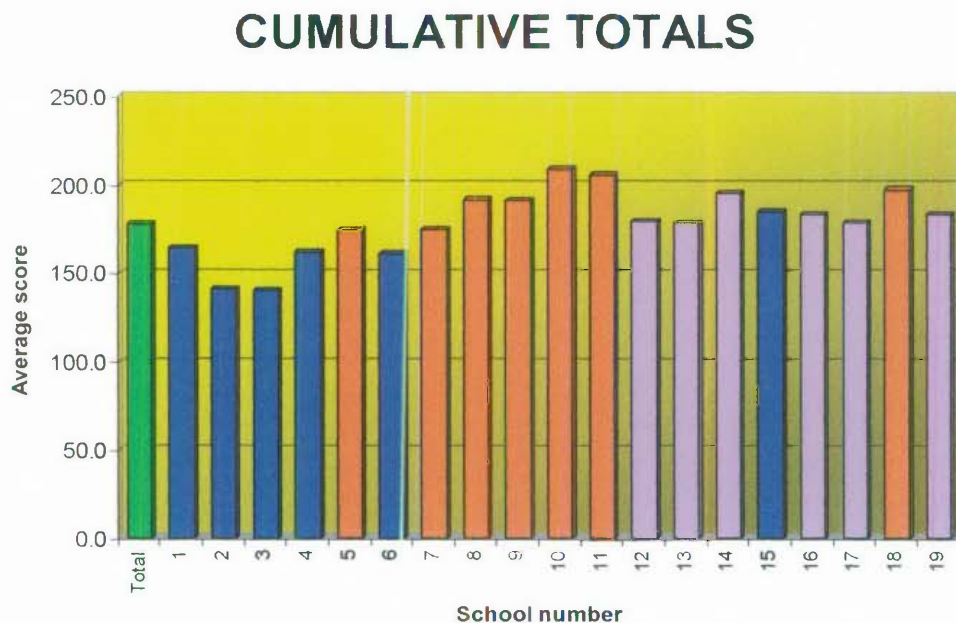
The ensuing discussion will therefore be embedded in the context of the Learning Organisation categories. Where graphs are present they are colour coded for easier analysis. Each school’s average response is graphed individually, and can be compared to the overall average response to the relevant question or category. Additionally, the total average is coded green, boys’ schools are coded blue, girls’ schools are coded red, and coeducational schools are coded purple. Where reference is made to ‘T’ tests, these

have been carried out in the context of the three school types (boys', girls', coeducational).

## CUMULATIVE TOTALS

Figure 1 below represents the overall survey data gathered (before categorisation). This is designed to give an overall picture of the individual school responses to the survey. It can be seen that the highest scoring schools averaged total scores of over two hundred (which equates to a score of around eighty percent). On the other hand, the lowest scoring schools were well below this, barely reaching average scores equivalent to fifty percent.

Figure 1 Cumulative survey totals for individual schools



The data suggests that the girls' and coeducational schools in this sample fit the proposed Learning Organisation model more closely than the boys' schools. In almost every

question they collectively scored more highly than the boys' schools. Coeducational schools were more variable in their scoring, and were in the intermediate range in most areas. Most of the girls' schools appeared to score highly in this survey. 't' testing confirmed these observations (see Table 4). There was found to be a statistically significant difference between the Cumulative Total mean scores for both the girls' and coeducational schools, when compared to the boys' schools involved in the study. The difference between the girls' and coeducational schools was less clear (that is, it was significant at a one-tailed level but not at a two-tailed level).

Table 4

**CUM. TOTALS**

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	<i>Variable 1(Boys')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Girls')</i>
Mean	159.0469	191.3525
Variance	624.5454	796.7195
Observations	64	61
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	120	
t Stat	-6.7628	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000	
t Critical one-tail	1.6576	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0000	
t Critical two-tail	1.9799	

	<i>Variable 1(Boys')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Coed)</i>
Mean	159.0469	183.2453
Variance	624.5454	501.0637
Observations	64	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	114	
t Stat	-5.5207	
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	191.3525	183.2453
Variance	796.7195	501.0637
Observations	61	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	111	
t Stat	1.7086	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0452	
t Critical one-tail	1.6587	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0903	
t Critical two-tail	1.9816	



The two schools with overall scores noticeably below the average were both boys' schools (scoring around 54%). Both of these schools were below the sample means for each category of the Learning Organisation Survey. The two schools whose cumulative totals were significantly higher than the average were both girls' schools. Similarly they scored above the sample average for each of the categories in this questionnaire. These two schools certainly fitted the Learning Organisation model proposed very closely.

The results of the last three schools in the survey need to be treated very cautiously. These schools had a lower response rate to the survey, which may have prevented the formation of a clearer, more accurate image of the school in question being presented.

In summary, it could be concluded that many of the Independent Schools involved in the study do fit the proposed Learning Organisation model. These schools are predominantly girls' and coeducational schools. At the same time, many clearly do not. These schools are predominantly boys' schools, indicating specific areas that need improvement in their "learning journey".

Presentation and analysis of survey data according to specific Learning Organisation categories now follows.

## VISION

Vision or visionary leadership has already been identified in the literature as a vital element in the development of a successful Learning Organisation today.

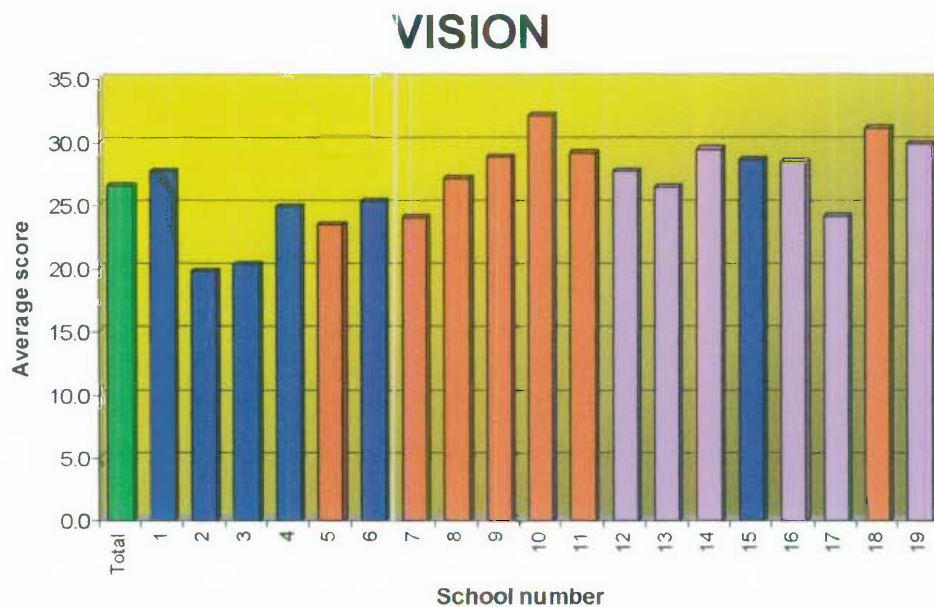
“A vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organisation, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists.” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985: 89).

The link of the leader to a vision is explicit throughout the literature. In fact, Conger (1989: 29) defines vision “as an idealised future goal that the leader wishes the organisation” to achieve. Other authors argue, however, that vision can/should be developed by the greater school community (see for example Chance, 1992). What is clear is that the leader must communicate the vision effectively and passionately, and that the vision needs to be shared by the members of the organisation for it to come to fruition.

“Building a shared vision” is one of Senge’s (1990) five models of a Learning Organisation. Kline and Saunders (1993) refer to “mapping out a vision”; Wick and Leon (1993), Watkins and Marsick (1993) and others also focus extensively on the importance of building or developing a shared or collective vision.

A shared vision comprises values and mission statements that many people are truly committed to, because they can relate to it. It needs to be negotiated, reaffirmed, communicated and enacted. Shared vision becomes an integral part of the daily school life. Figure 2 depicts the collective results for the questions categorised as relating to Vision.

Figure 2 Results for the Vision Category



The overall responses to Vision were consistently high. The overall average score was seventy six per cent, which ranked Vision as the equal highest scoring category. Thus, it could be concluded that Independent School leaders strongly realise the critical importance of vision in today's increasingly competitive educational market. The schools which score well and appear to have built a shared vision for the school

community were generally also the higher scoring schools with regard to their Cumulative Totals.

What was perhaps a little surprising was that generally the girls' (average score 27.57) and coeducational schools (av. 27.61) achieved higher average scores for the Vision category. The boys' schools (av. 24.42) did not perform as well. Two of the boys' schools had particularly low scores in this category relative to the other schools. 't' testing of the average scores for Vision showed that the girls' and coeducational schools both had statistically significantly higher average responses than the boys' schools. However, there was no evidence of a statistically significant difference between the average scores for the girls' and coeducational schools (see Table 5).

Table 5

## VISION

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	<i>Variable 1(Boys')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Girls')</i>
Mean	24.4219	27.5656
Variance	30.9779	27.6623
Observations	64	61
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	123	
t Stat	-3.2468	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0008	
t Critical one-tail	1.6573	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0015	
t Critical two-tail	1.9794	

	Variable 1(Boys')	Variable 2(Coed)
Mean	24.4219	27.6132
Variance	30.9779	18.5446
Observations	64	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	115	
t Stat	-3.4947	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0003	
t Critical one-tail	1.6582	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0007	
t Critical two-tail	1.9808	

	<i>Variable 1(Girls')</i>	<i>Variable 2(Coed)</i>
Mean	27.5656	27.6132
Variance	27.6623	18.5446
Observations	61	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	112	
t Stat	-0.0531	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.4789	
t Critical one-tail	1.6586	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.9577	
t Critical two-tail	1.9814	

The researcher had expected the boys' schools to perform better in this area (especially in comparison to other areas), as their leaders tend to be the traditional dominant, story telling hero figures who continually espouse the virtues of their "own" school culture, history and achievements. Perhaps this relates to the need to build a truly shared (and not imposed) vision, consistent with authentic leadership.

It is feasible that the leaders of many of the girls' and coeducational schools in this study saw themselves as designers or facilitators, working with the members of their organisation to build a shared vision to take the school into the next millennium. Perhaps some of the schools that did not score highly in the Vision category had leaders that were seen more as crusaders than designers (see Senge, 1990: 340).

A number of individual questions in the survey are clearly and explicitly linked to the Vision category. These are Questions 28, 36, 37, 38, 39, 51, and 52. A brief review of selected, relevant data is worthwhile here to provide insights into the concept of Vision in Independent Schools.

The responses to question 28, for example, are closely linked to the individual school leader. A number of the coeducational and boys' schools scored well above the average (3.63). A relatively large proportion of schools had very good responses to this question, and only a very small number of schools had what could be termed poor responses. This

suggests that leaders are getting better at communicating their visions for their organisations.

There was a group of linked questions on Vision that by necessity had to follow on from each other. Question 36, which asked if the school had a clear vision or mission statement, was one of the highest scoring questions, with an overall average score of 4.03 (81%). More than two-thirds of the schools involved in the survey had average scores of over 80%, indicating that many participants confirmed that the school had a vision statement. Response patterns for this question tended to relate to individual schools. All of the schools that scored highly in the Learning Organisation survey (cumulatively) scored highly in this question, although scoring highly in this question did not necessarily mean that schools scored well as Learning Organisations. Nevertheless, it indicates that at least some of the groundwork for the development of a Learning Organisation philosophy has been done. The much lower average scores for Question 37 (3.40) on shared vision indicates that the major task for these leaders is to now engender greater sharing of and commitment to their stated missions. Parity or congruence between key organisational and individual goals here is essential for the success of the organisation. An organisation can be diverse in the people that it employs, but it must aim to have complementarity between those core values that fundamentally underline the culture of the school. The following graphs depict the responses to these questions.

Figure 3 The school has a clear vision (mission statement)

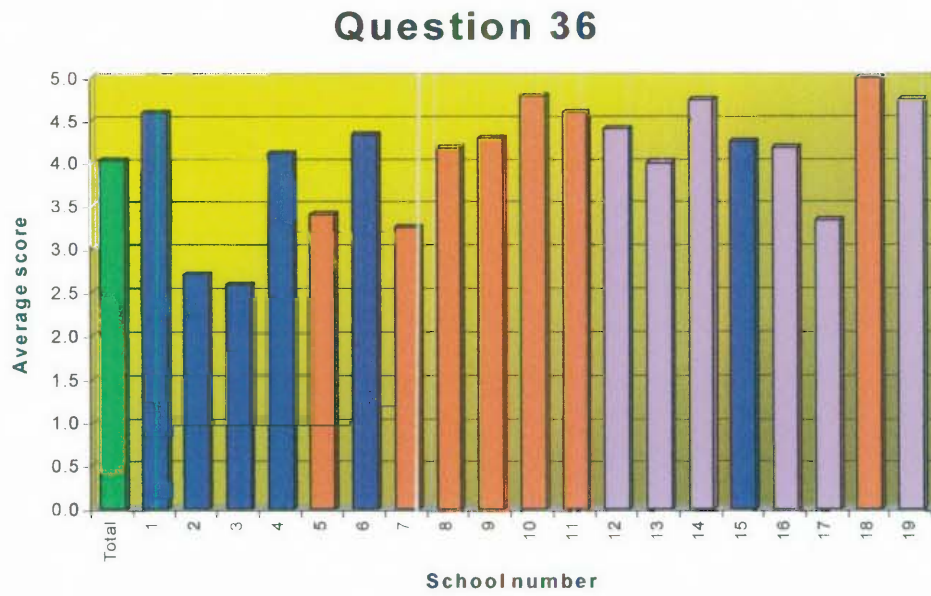
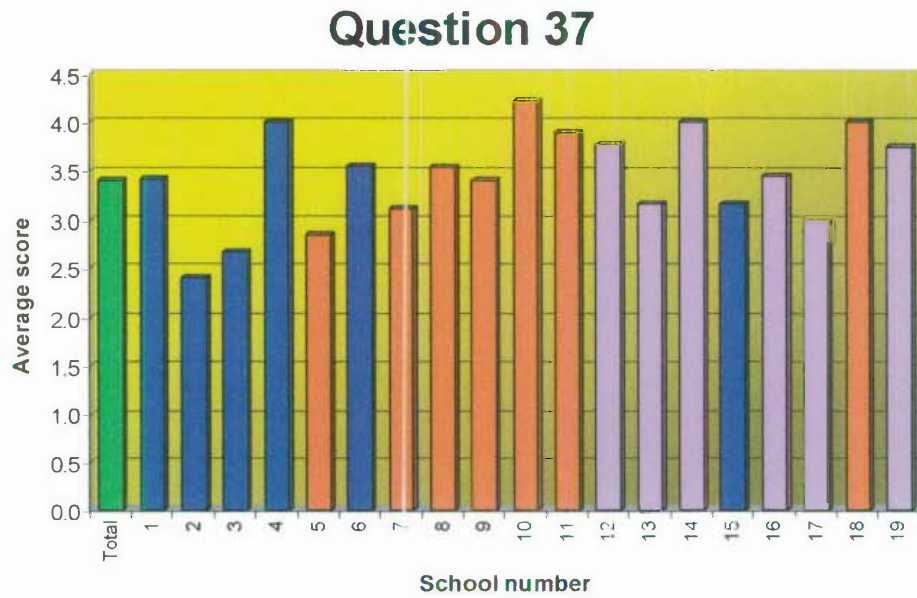


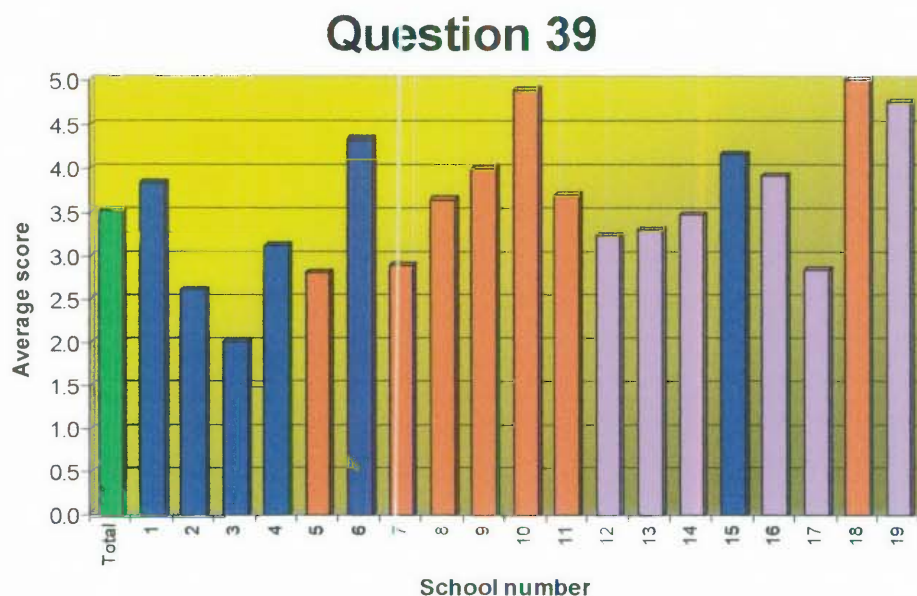
Figure 4 This vision is understood and shared by the organisation's staff members





Question 39 asked whether the vision was developed after consultation with the staff and members of the wider school community. The average score for this question was slightly lower at 3.51 (70%), although one of the girls' schools averaged 4.89 (98%). The lower than average responses to this question are not very surprising and may be related to the previously discussed debatable need for vision to be developed in this manner. The length of tenure at the school may have had an impact on responses to this question, as many participants may not have been at the school when the vision was first developed. The lower score for the question relating to sharing / commitment to the vision, however, may be linked to the way in which the vision was developed. Greater ownership is often gained where there is involvement in its development. The responses to this question are represented in the graph below.

Figure 5 This vision was developed after consultation with the staff and members of the wider community



Question 52 is considered a fundamental ingredient to the Learning Organisation philosophy proposed by the researcher. It asked whether continuous improvement is aimed for at all levels of the school. The average score of 3.93 (79%) was surprisingly high relative to other areas. This could indicate that improvement is sought after continually, but the best ways in which to seek it are not necessarily being employed. That said, it is far better to have the right general goals and thinking in place, and then set to work to develop the daily work habits needed to achieve these in time. The positive responses to this question indicate that schools are at least moving in the direction of the Learning Organisation philosophy, even if only at a sub-conscious level. Many of the questions with lower averages were more related to organisational policies and practices. Thus, it could be argued that the majority of schools in this sample are at least moving to develop into a successful Learning Organisation.

Vision is undoubtedly a vital component of the successful Learning Organisation. Authors, almost without exception, highlight its importance, particularly in the manner in which it is communicated and shared. Organisations looking forward clearly need to develop a vision. Leadership is a crucial element in analysing the effectiveness and understanding of an organisation's vision. Ideally the vision becomes part of the overall school culture and an integral component of daily school life. The link between organisational and personal vision is also significant – they need to be complementary without being identical (see Bolman and Deal, 1995; and Robinson, 1996).

Generally the responses in the Vision category of this study were very positive. Only a couple of Independent Schools in this study are lagging behind in this area. It is worth noting the importance of having a vision that is responsive to changing commercial requirements. Continuing the process of development, communication and commitment to the organisation's vision is sure to benefit the Learning Organisation.