POSITIVE THINKING

The power of positive thinking is often underrated. It is perhaps one of the simplest categories of the Learning Organisation, but also one with more subtle nuances. Concepts such as viewing mistakes as learning opportunities, the seeking of continuous improvement, ready acceptance of change and a leadership culture where praise is given as readily as retribution (if not more), all require an underlying theme of positive thinking if they are to be at all successful.

Kline and Saunders (1993) argue that "promoting the positive" is one of the fundamental early steps that an organisation must take if it is to develop into a successful organisation. Wick and Leon (1993) suggest that learning ideally should be fun. Fundamentally, positive thinking is required as the foundation for developing a moving, exciting, collaborative learning culture where all members of the organisation feel that their input will be valued. An organisation that emphasises the centrality of its people cannot hope to be successful in the long term if it does not inculcate the power of positive thinking into every level of its operation.

The category of Positive Thinking had the third lowest average score (66%) out of all the categories. As will be discussed later, leadership clearly has a role to play here, as it is undoubtedly the leaders who can encourage or inhibit a culture of positive thinking with their very actions. 't' testing indicated that the boys' schools in the sample had statistically significantly lower average scores than both the girls' and coeducational

schools in the category of Positive Thinking. The girls' and coeducational schools had

average scores that were very similar, and there was no evidence that there was a

statistically significant difference between their mean scores (see Table 6). Figure 6

below depicts the individual school responses to the questions that were related to

Positive Thinking.

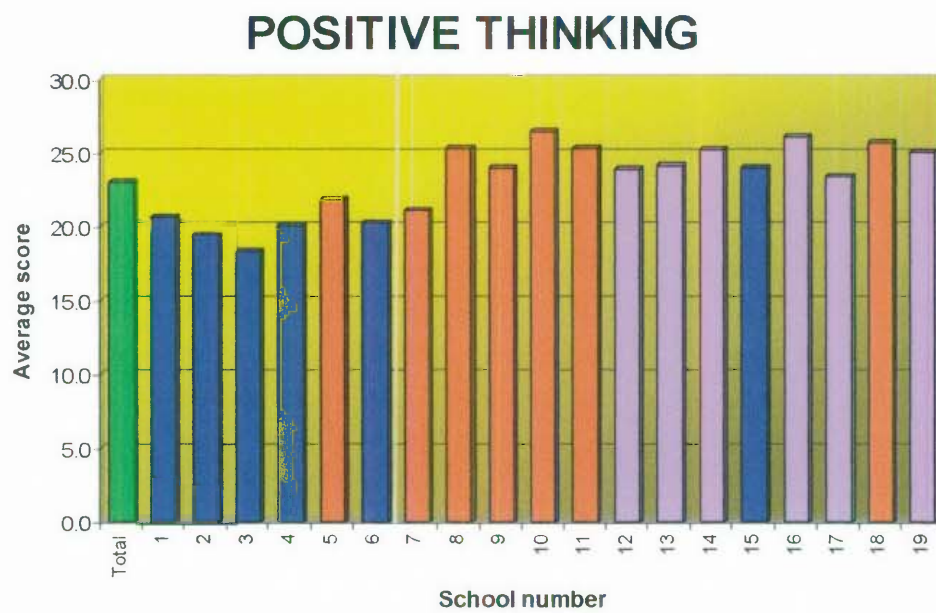Figure 6   Results for the Positive Thinking Category

POSITIVE THINKING

Table 6   **POSITIVE**
                                     THINKING

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	Variable 1 (Boys')	*Variable 2(Girls')*
Mean	20.4531	24.1230
Variance	11.8390	19.1471
Observations	64	61
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	114	
t Stat	-5.1958	
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	

	Variable 1 (Boys')	*Variable 2(Coed)*
Mean	20.4531	24.6698
Variance	11.8390	10.6629
Observations	64	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	113	
t Stat	-6.7855	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000	
t Critical one-tail	1.6584	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0000	
t Critical two-tail	1.9812	

	Variable 1 (Girls')	*Variable 2(Coed)*
Mean	24.1230	24.6698
Variance	19.1471	10.6629
Observations	61	53
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	110	
t Stat	-0.7620	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.2239	
t Critical one-tail	1.6588	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.4477	
t Critical two-tail	1.9818	

Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 33 from the survey relate to the category of Positive Thinking. Question 2 asked whether mistakes were viewed as learning opportunities that could lead to improvement, a crucial underlying requirement for any successful Learning Organisation. Many schools were not so positive in the manner in which they viewed mistakes. The average response score was 3.33 (67%), which is somewhat surprising since teachers tend to be more in tune with learning from mistakes.

Question 3 and 4 sought to find out whether the staff generally felt that there was a better way to do something, and that these better ways to do things were actively sought out. Ideally, both of these questions would have had high scores. This would have indicated that nothing is perfect, that everything can be improved upon and that new ways to do things are continuously sought out – one of the true measures of a Learning Organisation.

Seven schools had average scores that were noticeably higher for Question 3 (overall average of 3.27) than for Question 4 (2.97). According to the school types, the boys' schools in the sample had lower average scores in Question 4 (with relatively high scores in Question 3). Only two schools had scores that were noticeably higher for Question 4. This tends to indicate that the staff members of many schools do not think that things are being done very well, and that there is no great urgency to improve the prevailing situation. This attitude: cynicism or complacency should be of deep concern for school leaders. Both graphs are shown on the following page for comparison.
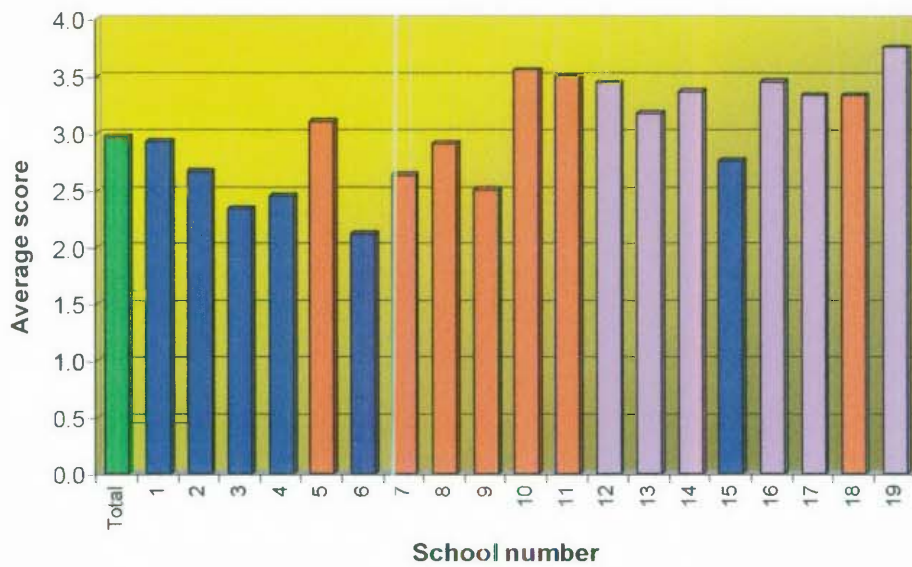
Figures 7 (top)   The staff generally feel that there is a better way to do something

Figure 8 (bottom)   These better ways to do things are actively sought after

Question 3
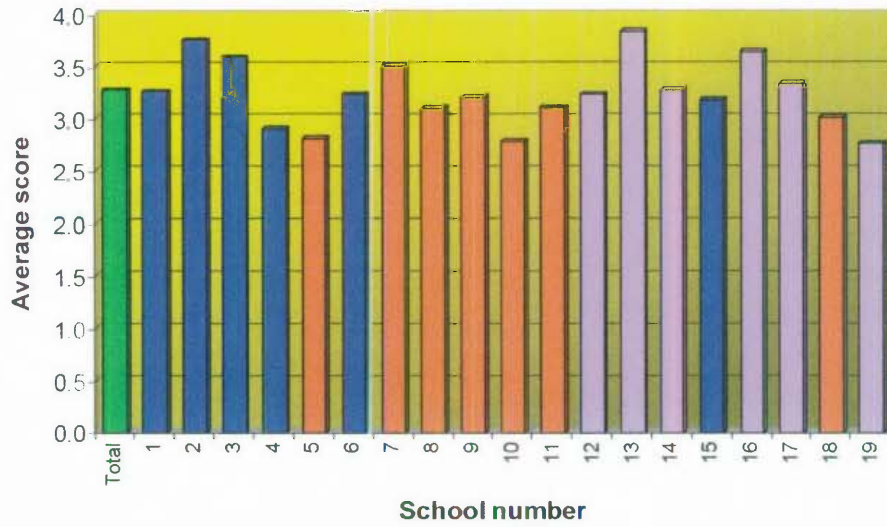
Question 4

Questions 6, 7 and 8 relate to the concept of embracing change in one form or another. Many schools are notoriously and anecdotally seen as resistant to change, sticking to tried and tested methods of education in the face of rapid technological and social change.

The responses to the questionnaire item asking if there was a willingness to break old patterns of thinking were on average very low. Almost half of the schools surveyed had an average score of around 50% for this item, while three girls' schools had average scores of about 70% (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9   There is a willingness to break old patterns of thinking

Question 6
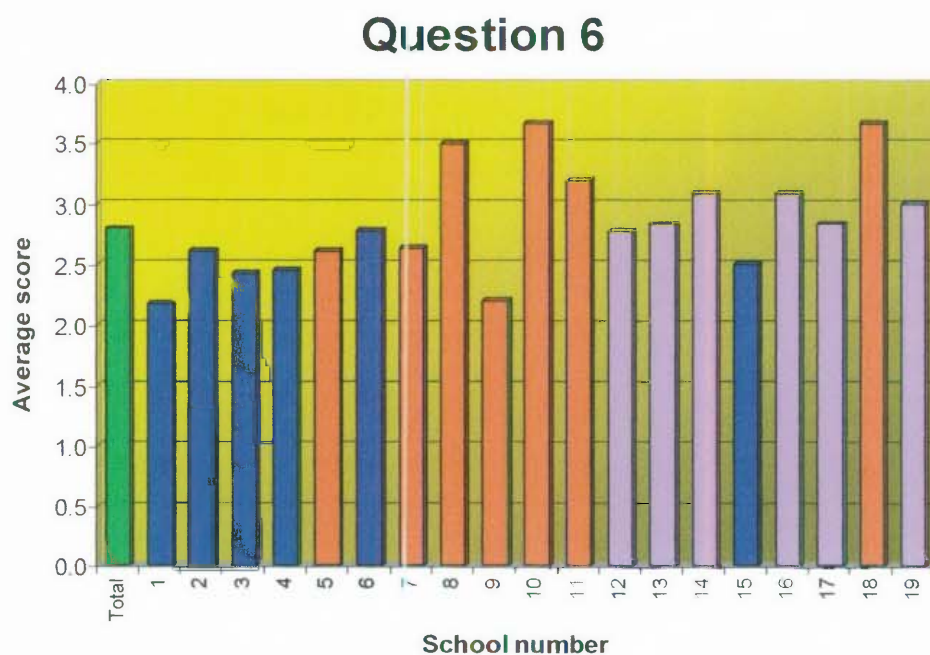
The next item referred to changing daily work patterns (average score 59%). Here the responses were more polarised. Half of the schools tended to have very low scores (all of

the boys' schools, with one exception), with the other half having noticeably higher

average scores (about half girls' schools and half coeducational).

Figure 10   New ways of organising and managing daily work are encouraged
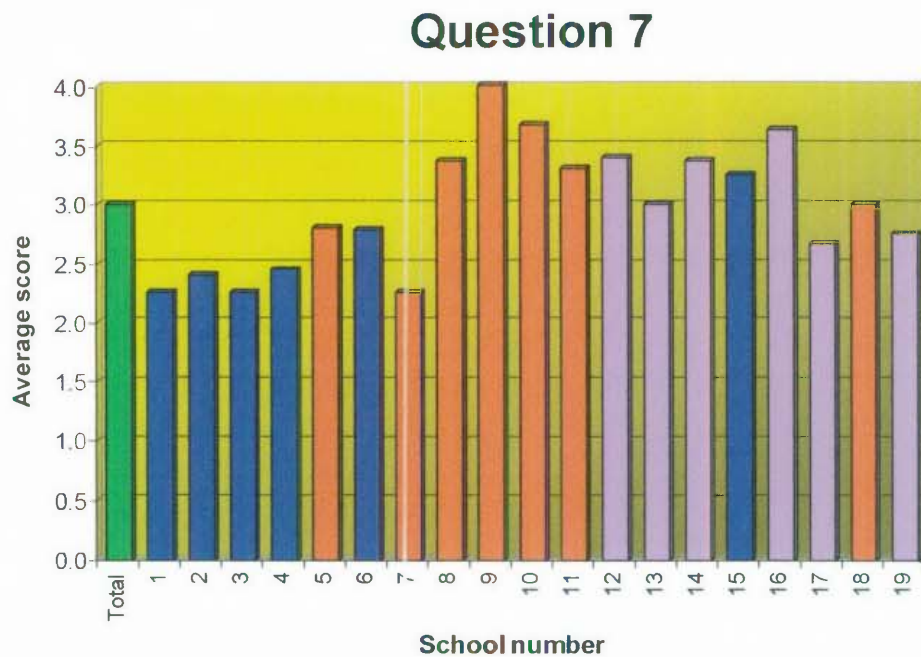
Question 7

Question 8 had a surprisingly high average score (75%) when compared to Questions 6

and 7. Eleven of the nineteen schools had an average response of 4 (80%) when asked if

the Principal actively supported innovations. Again a number of boys' schools had very

low average scores for this question.

Figure 11   The principal actively supports innovation
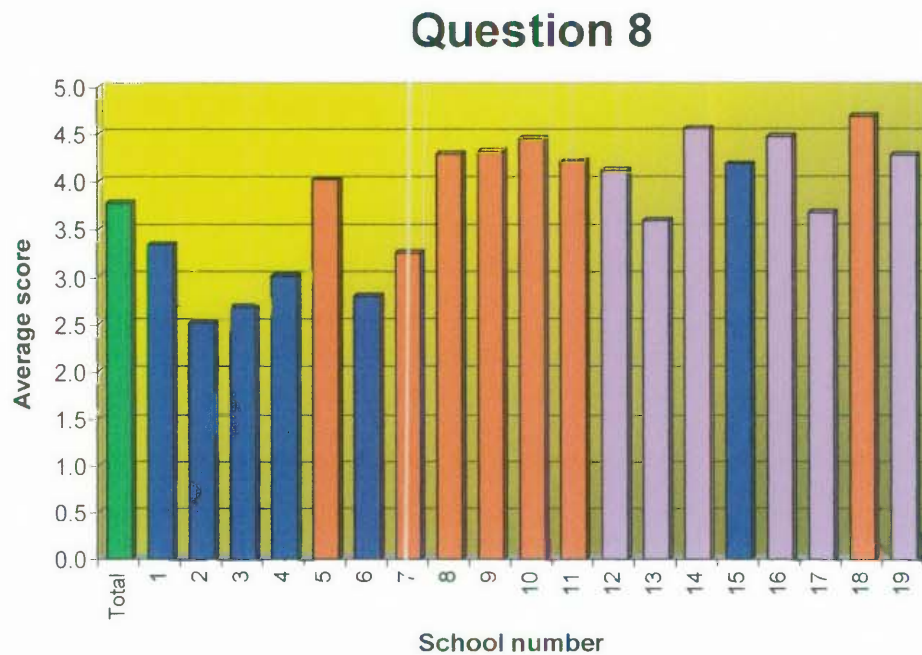
Question 8

When these three questions (Q6, 7 and 8) are looked at collectively there are a number of possible scenarios that come to mind:

-   Principals of Independent school's encourage autonomy and individual responsibility
-   Principals of Independent Schools' tolerate, and even encourage change but do not tend to promote change themselves
-   Principals, but not the staff body as a whole, are open to change.

From the researcher's perspective all three of these scenarios appear to be equally valid.

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Question 33 referred to the issue of the Principal giving praise when a job was well done. This was a very high scoring questionnaire item (3.86). It would appear that Independent School leaders are beginning to realise the value of recognising meritorious effort, although once again the boys' schools (3.44) in this sample had lower responses. The girls' (4.07) and coeducational (4.13) schools generally had the highest average scores for this question – perhaps this could be related in part to the commonly held perception that female leaders are better communicators and better team builders. The responses to this question are clearly illustrated in the graph below.

Figure 12   The principal gives praise when a job is well done
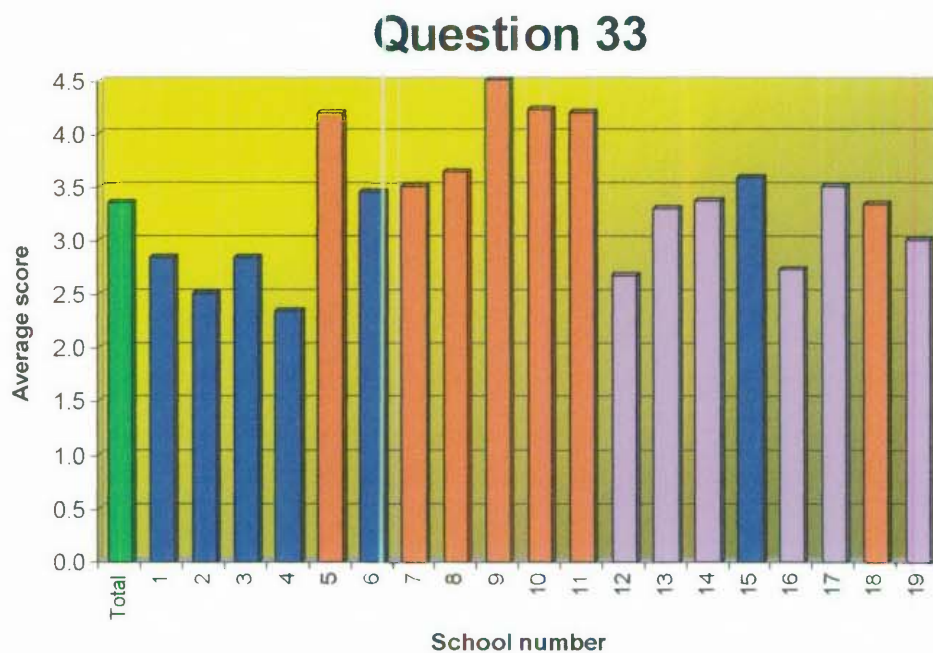
Robinson (1996), in his application of sports coaching principles for business, emphasises the importance of motivation, enjoyment, building confidence and a positive

approach. One of Covey's (1989) seven habits of highly effective people is that of "thinking win/win". People who are happy and committed to the cause tend to be more productive. Having a Positive Thinking approach as an organisational core value can engender employee motivation and performance. The area of Positive Thinking is one in which the Independent Schools involved in this survey need to improve.