The Role of Training, Documentation of Experience, and Management Counseling in Management of Vocational Schools in Tehran

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Abstract: The focus of this Research was to study the role of training, experience documentation, and management counseling in running vocational schools which are an important part of the educational system. This paper points out the lack of efficacy in current educational planning toward established objectives. Identification of the strengths and weaknesses of current plans will help educational directors in future planning and better achievement of their educational objectives. Study population of this study included 109 active superintendents from all vocational schools in Tehran during academic year 1386-87 (2007-2008). Data collection was conducted by administrating a questionnaire. Validity of this questionnaire was measured by using SPSS software. Cronbach alpha coefficient obtained for this study was 90%.

Introduction

Organizational survival in today's world highly depends on management abilities to efficiently utilize knowledge, skills, innovation, and capabilities.

Peter Drucker believed that mangers are the most valuable asset of an organization who are generally in short supply (Drucker 1954).

Competent, Knowledgeable, and capable managers are better able to achieve organizational objectives by applying their inherent abilities, professional knowledge, and occupational experiences. They are able to increase organizational effectives while using less resource. Successful function combination or segregation and introduction of complex and challenging changes in an organization depend mostly on management's leadership skills and experiences (Nazem 1382).

In today's societies, especially in industrial world, education is fundamental to growth and development. Educational systems in these countries and investment in educational infrastructure have greatly contributed to their progress. Educational systems are responsible for training skillful and proficient human resources as the most important resource required for growth and development.

Educational system makes trained and educated human resource available to different segments of society including education, research, industry, cultural, and economic sectors. A look into factors contributing to progress in industrial world can help everyone to realize that training and management have had more profound effects on economic growth than investment money and capital alone.

Alaghband in an article about training managers and leaders for educational system concluded that one of the main contributor to success of managers is their professionalism (Alaghband 1372). However, management knowledge alone is not sufficient to develop competence in managers. Rather, they need to learn and develop a collection of professional skills.

Some scholars believe that the future educational systems should rely less on academic education and focus more on practical training. This requires educational and training systems which provide more opportunities for hands on training (Moheb 1373).

Nevertheless, Robins believed that work experience alone could not indicate productivity. In other words, there are no reason to assume that in similar situations those employees with long work experience in given jobs could be more productive compared to others who have less experience. Shiasi in an article titled "Desired Management in Education" discussed the current problems in the third world and argued that relying on specialized knowledge, applying theoretical principles, and using slogans would not resolve any of those problems. Finding solution to those problems, he continued, require practical experience and innovation. An ideal manager is the one who can bring practical knowledge and experience to work place. (Shabasi 1371) Experience is the best educator. However, experience is most effective when it is reviewed and improved (Lock 1373)

Management has an important role to play in education system. An effective manager has management knowledge and sufficient experience. Such mangers continuously improve their experience and knowledge base in consultation with management experts. Educational system should promote effective management to guarantee continual progress.

Research Significance

Education has turned from a simplistic world and is currently pursuing more complex objectives. The traditional educational system is no longer capable of introducing change, creating growth, and producing progress.

Cultural-civilization eminence and dynamism coupled with constant failure to reach desired educational objectives demand the decision making process in educational system to become more objective, foresighted, and judicious. The individuals having the main responsibility for educational planning shall take up this vital task.

Education personalities especially those with managerial responsibilities shall play an important role in improving educational programs. Investment on programs to train managers for different levels education system, including school superintendents, should be viewed as a sound investment in education system.

Development, approval, and implementation of suitable programs for attraction, training, and assignment of capable candidates shall be considered a fundamental undertaking for an advancing educational program.

Therefore, it is important for managers to go through continuing education in order to learn about the basic principles, theories, and modern techniques of management. Managers shall better be able to perform their functions by applying management arts, sciences and experiences.

New managers are initially too concern about what is going around them and, therefore, lose initiative. The reality of management positions and responsibilities are usually different from personal expectations. The differences mostly stem from statements and facts and from prior perceptions and where action begins. These differences lead to many conflicting problems demanding too much of management energies to resolve.

Most managers prefer a static, accommodating, and defined work environment with clear objectives, given resources, and simplified assessment procedures. However, they the realities they encounter on the job do not match their expectations.

Some managers never learn from the realities they face in the organization. Yet, others spend a good part of their time trying to turn the real world to match their mental perspectives.

The body of research conducted recently to uncover the current problems in school management show that they have roots in management shortcomings including lack of managerial capabilities, lack of sufficient knowledge about regulations and guidelines, unfamiliarity with management responsibilities especially by junior managers, and inability to solve current problems.

Failure to value training, to learn from past experiences, and to seek help from management experts involve risks which are far more damaging than resource and funding limitations.

This research focused on vocational schools because of their important role in training skillful human resources for economic, social, and cultural development projects. This branch combines education with practical training.

Vocational school directors shall comply with the new scientific findings. Otherwise, they shall face many complications and predicaments in running their school systems. When vocational school managers lack hindsight and sufficient training they would be unable to cope with their problems given the limited resources and facilities.

Research Questions

Questions considered for this research are listed below:

1. Do the current training programs offered by Ministry of Education to new recruits and elder employees contribute to better performance by vocational school directors?

2. Do vocational school directors believe utilizing others' experiences would lead to better performance?

3. Does Ministry of Education facilitate vocational school directors in Tehran to utilize experiences gained by their colleagues?

4. Do vocational school directors believe experience documentation have any significant effects on their performance?

5. Do vocational school directors think counseling with management experts would have any positive effect on their management practices?

6. Has Ministry of Education planned on using management experts in solving problems at vocational schools?

Research Methodology

This research was undertaken to survey opinions of vocational school directors on the questions raised by this study. The methodology used for this research was survey during a given time period in order to get the facts from existing situation and, consequently, capture reality without intervention or inference.

Study population of this research included acting vocational school directors in all 19 districts of Tehran for academic year 1386-1387 (2007-2008). A total of 109 directors were selected from a list provided by Tehran Office of Ministry of Education.

Researcher intended to study the views of vocational school directors on the consequences and risks of not having sufficient training, experience, guidance, and counseling.

Sampling method used in this study was clustered random sampling in order to keep the ratio of participating directors in each one of the district (N) versus the study population (n).

Study used a questionnaire designed by researcher for this study. The questionnaire contained 30 closed-end questions selected and arranged by using 5-point Likert scale.

Every individual question was measured by Cronbach's alpha for consistency and reliability. Validity of questionnaire was measured by SPSS software. Alpha coefficient was 0.90 indicating the questionnaire was valid and sufficiently reliable.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze answers to study questions, after summing up answers and grouping them based on Likert items, single variable chi-square test was applied to determine the distribution pattern. The frequency distribution was cross tabulated for each question for the final analysis.

Analysis of Question one:

Do current training programs offered by Ministry of Education to new recruits and elder employees contribute to better performance of vocational school directors?

After summing up answers to this question, single variable chi-square was applied. Frequency distributions of answers to this question were cross tabulated with expected answers and chi-square analysis of the results.

These tables show that at 99% degree of confidence the distribution of answers is not normal. Consequently, the answers having the highest frequencies determine the answer to question one. As "low" and "very low" answers have the highest frequency (i.e. 64%), therefore, we can conclude that

programs offered by Ministry of Education to new recruits and elder employees have very low effect on performance improvement of vocational school directors.

Analysis of Question two:

Do vocational school directors believe utilizing others' experiences would lead to better performance?

Table 1-1: Frequency Distribution of Actual versus Expected Answers to Study Question One

Variables	Frequency	Percent of Frequency	Expected Frequency	Difference
Very low	3	3.5	17.2	-14.2
Low	52	50.5	17.2	34.8
Average	29	33.7	17.2	11.8
High	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Very high	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2

Table 1-2: Chi-square Test for Uniformity of Answers to Question One

Chi-square	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
120.744	4	0.00

Table 2-1: Frequency Distribution of Actual versus Expected Answers to Study Question Two

Variables	Frequency	Percent of Frequency	Expected Frequency	Difference
Very low	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Low	2	2.3	17.2	-15.2
Average	12	14.0	17.2	-5.2
High	58	67.4	17.2	40.8
Very high	13	15.1	17.2	-4.2

Table 2-2: Chi-square Test for Uniformity of Answers to Question Two

Chi-square	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
128.070	4	0.00

These tables show that at 99% degree of confidence the distribution of answers is not normal. Consequently, the answers having the highest frequency determine the answer to question one. As "high" and "very high" answers have the highest frequency (approximately 83%), therefore, we can conclude that vocational school directors put high value on using others' experiences as a means to improve performance.

Analysis of Question three:

Does Ministry of Education facilitate vocational school directors in Tehran to utilize experiences gained by their colleagues?

Table 3-1: Frequency Distribution of Actual versus Expected Answers to Study Question Three

Variables	Frequency	Percent of Frequency	Expected Frequency	Difference
Very low	17	19.8	17.2	-0.2
Low	47	54.7	17.2	29.8
Average	20	23.3	17.2	2.8
High	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Very high	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2

Table 3-2: Chi-square Test for Uniformity of Answers to Question Three

Chi-square	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
82.605	4	0.00

These tables show that at 99% degree of confidence the distribution of answers is not normal. Consequently, the answers having the highest frequency determine the answer to question one. As "low" and "very low" answers have the highest frequency (approximately 75%), therefore, we can conclude that Ministry of Education provides little help to facilitate vocational school directors in Tehran to utilize experiences gained by their colleagues.

Analysis of Question four:

Do vocational school directors believe experience documentation have any significant effects on their performance?

Table 4-1: Frequency Distribution of Actual versus Expected Answers to Study Question Four

Variables	Frequency	Percent of Frequency	Expected Frequency	Difference
Very low	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Low	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Average	4	4.7	17.2	-13.2
High	60	69.8	17.2	42.8
Very high	20	23.3	17.2	2.8

Table 4-2: Chi-square Test for Uniformity of Answers to Question Four

Chi-square	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
147.605	4	0.00

These tables show that at 99% degree of confidence the distribution of answers is not normal. Consequently, the answers having the highest frequency determine the answer to question one. As "high" and "very high" answers have the highest frequency (approximately 93%), therefore, we can conclude that vocational school directors believe experience documentation has significant effects on their performance.

Analysis of Question five:

Do vocational school directors think counseling with management experts would have any positive bearing on their management practices?

Table 5-1: Frequency Distribution of Actual versus Expected Answers to Study Question Five

Variables	Frequency	Percent of Frequency	Expected Frequency	Difference
Very low	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Low	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2
Average	11	12.8	17.2	-6.2
High	50	58.1	17.2	32.8
Very high	23	26.7	17.2	5.8

Table 5-2: Chi-square Test for Uniformity of Answers to Question Five

Chi-square	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
97.256	4	0.00

These tables show that at 99% degree of confidence the distribution of answers is not normal. Consequently, the answers having the highest frequency determine the answer to question one. As "high" and "very high" answers have the highest frequency (approximately 85%), therefore, we can conclude that vocational school directors think counseling with management experts will have positive effects on their management practices.

Analysis of Question Six:

Has Ministry of Education planned on using management experts in solving problems at vocational schools?

Table 6-1: Frequency Distribution of Actual versus Expected Answers to Study Question Six

Variables	Frequency	Percent of Frequency	Expected Frequency	Difference
Very low	16	18.6	17.2	-1.2
Low	59	68.6	17.2	41.8
Average	8	9.3	17.2	-9.2
High	2	2.3	17.2	-15.2
Very high	1	1.2	17.2	-16.2

Table 6-2: Chi-square Test for Uniformity of Answers to Question Six

Chi-square	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level
135.279	4	0.00

These tables show that at 99% degree of confidence the distribution of answers is not normal. Consequently, the answers having the highest frequency determine the answer to question one. As "low" and "very low" answers have the highest frequency (approximately 87%), therefore, we can

conclude that Ministry of Education have quantitatively planned for using management experts in solving problems at vocational schools.

Research Outcome
First Question:

Do current training programs offered by Ministry of Education to new recruits and elder employees contribute to better performance of vocational school directors?

It is possible to conclude that the current training programs offered by Ministry of Education to new recruits and elder employees make no improvement in performance of vocational school directors.

Apparently, Ministry of Education does not strategically manage the funding appropriated for training toward best utilization of its human resources. Therefore, Ministry of Education would be better to focus more on human resource management and revise its programs towards more effective organization and motivation of its personnel.

Second question:

Do vocational school directors believe utilizing others' experiences would lead to better performance?

This study showed that vocational school directors value the experiences gained by their counterparts. They believe programs such as attending conferences and visiting successful schools would be instrumental in helping them learn from others' experiences. Survey showed that vocational school directors believe gathering programs which help them exchange and share views and experiences are required and welcomed.

Third question:

Does Ministry of Education facilitate vocational school directors in Tehran to obtain and utilize experiences gained by their colleagues?

Participants in this study believed that programs offered by Ministry of Education for them to share their experiences and learn from others concentrated more on quantity and forgetting quality all together. Therefore, these programs are not as effective as they should be.

Fourth question:

Do vocational school directors believe experience documentation have any significant effects on their performance?

From outcome of this survey it is possible to conclude that documentation of directors' experiences can positively affect management practices at vocational schools.

Fifth question:

Do vocational school directors think counseling with management experts would have any positive effect on their management practices?

Vocational school directors strongly believed that counseling with management expert can help them solve many existing problems in their school.

Has Ministry of Education planned on using management experts in solving problems at vocational schools?

Vocational school directors expressed a need to consult with management expert and think such services should be made available to them (according to answers to question five). Yet Ministry of Education's planning on making management counseling available to vocational schools focuses more on number of such services rather than their quality.

Continual increase in management counseling services to educational institutions, especially in industrial world, can only make the need for such services apparent.

Suggestions
1. Programs offered by Ministry of Education to new recruits and elder employees should be organized in such a way that provide the required training programs with opportunities for professional discussions, criticisms, active participation, hearing opinions of colleagues, professional analysis of problems, participative learning, and learning from experiences of others.

2. If one of the objectives established for programs offered by Ministry of Education for training new recruit and elder employee is to bring managers up to date about progress and development in scientific and knowledge based arena, then, the training programs should make close ties with certain universities and schools especially educational training schools to benefit from their knowledge and facilities in an attempt to extend the benefits expected from such programs.

3. Given the importance of educational planning, effective utilization of training opportunities requires careful attention to development of training programs that match the needs of attendees. This requires needs analysis of potential participants in the proposed training programs. A suitable needs analysis approach should reveal who needs what type and how much of training.

It is recommended to apply ISO 10015 standards as an effective management tool in this process. Implementation of this standard can give assurance to top level officials at Ministry of Education that on the job training programs enjoy high effectiveness and

carry the lowest possible risks. These standards will give further assure to officials that the resources (financial, organizational, human resources) are effectively and efficiently utilized.

4. It is recommended that training programs should invite outstanding instructors and trainers to the programs. These individuals should be knowledgeable in their fields and be familiar to school management problems. An evaluation program should be designed to assess the performance of instructors and trainers on continuous basis. The evaluation program shall improve quality and increase efficiency of the on the job training programs.

5. The responsible persons for the training programs are advised to go beyond theoretical aspects and pay more attention to practical issues in on-the-job training programs. They should concentrate more on practical training by arranging workshops and visiting programs to create opportunities for exchange of management experiences.

6. Use senior managers in their third decade of service to serve as counselors to junior managers.

7. inistry of Education is advised to facilitate employing management consultants by school superintendents.

8. Any senior manager who leaves service for retirement takes away many years of experience. Ministry of Education can benefit from these valuable experiences by creating a formal documentation process to capture this valuable resource and make it available to all interested individuals within educational system.

9. A rewarding system envisioned by Ministry of Education intended to promote experience documentation among senior managers can greatly assist in creating a useful collection for mangers to use.

10. A website administered by Ministry of Education together with an electronic management journal can provide mangers in education system with much needed management knowledge and experience.

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