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Organizational learning and extra effort: The mediating effect of job satisfaction

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Organizational learning is related to job satisfaction and extra effort.
- For extra effort to occur there must be high levels of job satisfaction.
- Job satisfaction mediates between organizational learning and extra effort.

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the relationship between school organizational learning (SOL), teacher job satisfaction (TJS), and teacher extra effort (TEE). Data were collected from 1474 teachers in 104 elementary schools in Israel, and aggregated at the school level. Results of structural equation modeling (SEM) demonstrated that TJS is a significant predictor of TEE and functions as a mediator between SOL and TEE. These findings provide a deeper understanding of how SOL can serve as a significant link between TJS and TEE, which may ultimately enhance teaching and learning effectiveness and emphasize the need to assimilate OL processes into schools.

1. Introduction

Schools today, like other organizations, face a number of issues including a rapidly changing environment, increasing complexity, greater uncertainty, new challenges and demands for innovation, accountability and change (Stefl-Mabry, Radlick, Doane, & Theroux, 2007; Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005). Moreover, it has become clear that sustained school improvement requires a system-wide solution, which is at the same time practical and effective on a large scale. Furthermore, the capacity to learn is considered a key index of an organization's effectiveness and its potential to innovate and grow (Birenbaum, Kimron, & Shilton, 2011; Jerez-Gómez, Céspedes-Lorente, & Valle-Cabrera, 2005; Opfer, Pedder, & Lavicza, 2011).

In a business context, organizational learning is described as a process that expands the organization's ability to accomplish effective actions by directly and systematically improving its performance and results (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Chiva & Alegre, 2009; Lipshitz, Friedman, & Popper, 2006). As for the school context, a survey of 1212 teachers in England was conducted in order to examine school-level factors that supported teachers' learning. Results indicated that 55.6% of the variance in teacher learning was explained by teacher involvement in decision making, the communication of a clear vision, support for professional learning, auditing expertise, and a support network. In addition, findings showed that these factors had a statistically significant relationship with the teachers' levels of inquiry and learning (Pedder, 2006). In this regard, Pedder (2006, p. 175) stated that: "If schools are to embody the conditions that optimize and sustain the quality of teachers' and pupils' learning, they need to develop the processes and practices of learning organizations."

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Increasing evidence suggests that schools functioning as learning organizations improve their effectiveness (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Fullan, 2002; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998). Therefore, some researchers view learning organizations as a necessary strategy in order to effect large-scale change and improvement (for example, see Birenbaum et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1998; Opfer et al., 2011). Moreover, in terms of professional development, such schools prefer to regulate their own learning processes rather than become dependent on external regulation, and engage in a constant review of their own practices in order to improve them (Schnellert, Butler, & Higginson, 2008; Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 2000).

Empirical research investigating the business sector demonstrates a relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction. For instance, research among 25 Pakistani organizations found that an organizational learning culture has a strong positive impact on employee job satisfaction (Sabir & Kalyar, 2013). Another empirical study focusing on information technology employees revealed that an organizational learning culture produced significant influences on job satisfaction and the motivation to transfer learning (Egan, Yong, & Bartlett, 2004, p. 295).

In the school context, teachers reported feeling very satisfied when their work gave them "a sense of self-esteem," provided them with "opportunities for self-development," gave them "a feeling of success," and allowed them "to participate in determining school practices" (Bogler, 2001, p. 676). The most significant factors associated with job satisfaction are having an interesting job, the feeling that one is helping other people (and society in general), a job that allows the worker independence, and positive relationships in the workplace (Clark, 2005; Skalli, Theodossiou, & Vasileiou, 2007). Similarly, teachers who are engaged in SOL activities and are supported by the school leadership and a positive learning culture have a sense of control over the process of change as it evolves (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003).

Current theory and empirical data in the business context seem to provide strong support for the notion that job satisfaction affects performance (Edwards, Bell, Arthur, & Decuir, 2008). In a review of 221 primary studies, Harrison, Newman, and Roth (2006) revealed that evidence supporting the satisfaction–performance relationship was stronger than evidence supporting the performance–satisfaction relationship in terms of temporal sequencing. Moreover, an empirical study of 444 employees holding a variety of jobs in a large manufacturing plant in southeastern Texas in the United States indicated a significant, positive relationship between overall job satisfaction, task and contextual performance (Edwards et al., 2008).

In response to the limited findings yielded by research on the satisfaction–performance relationship, some researchers advocated extending the performance domain to include behaviors that assisted the organization in its mission and went beyond delineated role expectations, namely, extra effort (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Extra effort is often needed to bring about significant organizational change and improvement (Geijsel et al., 2003). "Motivation toward extra effort represents the inner desire or willingness of employees to exert additional time and energy to achieve organizational goals" (Webb, 2007, p. 58). Although results from several studies conducted mostly in business contexts indicated that satisfied employees are more likely to contribute more effort in their workplaces (Locke & Latham, 1990; Weatherly & Tansik, 1993), the relationship between job satisfaction and extra effort remains unclear.

Similarly, in the educational realm, despite accumulating evidence indicating that higher performing schools function as learning organizations (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002), this connection has hardly been examined. More specifically, it seems that in an era of accountability, and while school leaders and teachers are being asked to try harder to improve school effectiveness, satisfied teachers who work together as a team (developing goals and solving problems) will be more likely to devote extra effort to strengthen student achievement (Leithwood, 1992; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006).

Despite the important contribution of SOL, TJS and TEE to school effectiveness, systematic empirical evidence of the relationships between these three variables is lacking. Hence, this current study is an attempt to examine the relationship between SOL, TEE, and TJS, and to establish whether TJS mediates the correlation between SOL and TEE. Based on this focus of inquiry, implications for research, policies, and practices will be discussed.

2. Research context

Although school reform has been a recurring theme during the last century, many schools have failed to improve student levels of achievement or produce better teaching practices, operating efficiencies, or accountability (OECD, 2004). The efforts of implementing new programs and reforms have not yet yielded the anticipated results (e.g., the *No Child Left Behind Act*, as presented in Hursh, 2007).

One possible reason is the current accountability systems that have emerged recently in several countries (e.g., England, Spain, United States and Israel; see Avalos, 2011). In the quest for more accountability, which includes measuring performance with high-stakes assessment tools as well as control and regulation over how professional development operates (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006; Skerrett, 2010), many policies have greatly hindered the success of teacher education. In this context, a more critical stance was taken regarding the emphasis on performance-based accountability in school reform, which linked certain incentives to student achievement as measured by test performance. These incentives were subsequently employed as a means of improving student achievement through the establishment of standards and performance-based accountability mechanisms. For example, the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* of 2001 (Pub. L. 107–110) combined explicit expectations for student performance with well-aligned tests to measure achievement. Schools and districts that did not make adequate progress were subject to intervention. This reform was designed to measure performance but failed to provide guidance to school leaders and teachers on how to improve instruction and performance (Coburn & Turner, 2012; Halverson, 2010).

Moreover, while increasing evidence emphasizes that the workplace learning environment is a relevant factor (Collinson, 2010), schools that support teacher learning and foster a culture of collegiality and continuous improvement respective to the needs of the school and the students, are better able to improve teacher instruction and student achievement (Collinson, 2010; Louis, 2006). However, teachers often select professional development courses from a number of options available from a highly disparate set of providers (Day & Leith, 2007; OECD, 2009) that are largely fragmented and often unrelated to student and school needs. In this regard, for instance, the professional development of teachers in England is generally ineffective and lacks school-level systems and supports (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Furthermore, teachers in the lowest performing schools reported less professional learning opportunities, and participated in activities that were short in duration (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). It seems that teachers in these cases experience professional development as episodic, superficial, and disconnected from their own teaching interests or problems in teaching practices (Little, 2012). In contrast, teachers in high-performing schools tend to participate