

The Level of the Trained School Principals' Fullfilment of Uncertainty Behaviors Within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) System

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to determine the level of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors of the school principals who attended the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system. The inclination level of those principals toward exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors analyzed within the scope of this study in accordance with the variables of age, gender, seniority in management, education level. Study is designed in descriptive review model in order to determine the current condition. 58 school principals and deputy school principals who were chosen as the study group from 29 vocational education institutions which were chosen as *pilot*. A data collection tool which was developed by the researcher consisting 16 items and 3 open ended questions was applied to the study group. T-test, Levene test, LSD test, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were applied in the analysis of the data obtained. The inclination level of the dissemination education seminar attendant school principals' exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors differs in accordance with seniority and education level variables at a medium level.

Key words: Uncertainty avoidance • Organizational culture • Training organizations • Educational leadership • School principal

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty is a component of nature and covers organizational life and communication. Many organizations try to survive under chaotic, complicated and uncertain conditions and are fostered to experience that avoiding uncertainty causes more unknowns for them to deal with. Leaders cannot neglect uncertainty anymore and have recognized organizations' carrying on under unstable environment. Globalization and rapid advancement of technology are to different processes of change threatening conventional thoughts of organization which includes detailed planning, job descriptions with distinct boundaries and organizational goals.

Avoidance of uncertainty, on the other hand, is a concept which is often discussed and studied by natural scientists and social scientists. The term uncertainty has been discussed within the scope of physics, mathematics and philosophy and even in social sciences. Avoiding uncertainty, showing resistance against it and having no tolerance for uncertainty cause increase in number of the rules within the organization. In order to cope with uncertainty, organizations may resort to get feedback from different sources such as; superiors, spiritual chiefs, counterparts and communication. According to some studies conducted on uncertainty, it is also suggested that communication be one of the most effective methods for coping with it.

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As being an organizational fact, the essence of avoidance of uncertainty are getting feedback, keeping environment under control and making predictions, making effective plans -more importantly- executing the planning as well as renewing it, making Research and Development (RandD) studies and encouraging organizational change and development.

Uncertainty as a Concept and Avoiding Uncertainty: Human being hasn't figured out reasons of some of the phenomenon in his life at the present and most of them apparently will be remained undecoded at least for the near future. One of the popular and basic assumptions introduced by the theories developed with conventional thinking and experimental context is the belief of being able to reach the precise knowledge. However, the real life is full of contingencies and risks. Individuals, groups and the whole society should take risks and uncertainties into consideration for decision making process within vital and intellectual fields. Unpredictability characteristic of a particular situation make the term uncertainty come into prominence. Because of this fact it is difficult for most people to adapt to contingencies and uncertainties.

One of the elements determining human behavior is definitely those experienced contingencies. In order to perceive this uncertainties properly, a distinction between the characteristics of the real context and the perceived one might be done. Because perception changes in accordance with the position the individual occupies in the organization. In addition to his position; his level of education, upbringing style and his hierarchical level in the organization also might affect his perception of the environment and uncertainties. This difference makes certain distinctions in the perception level of uncertainty and this may affect organizational culture [1].

Organizations' adapting themselves to uncertain conditions and behaving effectively under these circumstances may differ in accordance with their capabilities. Individuals within the organizations with low level of avoiding uncertainty attach great importance to knowledge and their level of sharing knowledge increase. Principals of this kind of organizations behave more flexible under uncertain and knowledge lacking conditions. Flexibility, enabled through uncertainties and experienced changes in the organization becomes of vital importance for its survivability. Entrepreneur behaviors of exhibited by the principals with low uncertainty avoiding indications affect the subordinates positively and give employees the opportunity to take risks easily [2].

Hofstede [3] who analyzed avoiding uncertainty as one of the subdimensions of national culture described four different dimensions of national culture and classified nations according to these dimensions. Mentioned four dimensions are:

- Power distance
- Avoiding uncertainty
- Individualism / socialism
- Masculinity / femininity

Considering Hofstede's classification, it can be assumed that there will be differences between organizations as well where there are differences between countries from certain aspects including culture and apprehension. He also signifies that each society suffers at different level from trying to cope with uncertain future and this has close relation with the stress level of the society. He also studied avoiding from uncertainty by questioning stress and tension level of the work place, importance of rules in daily life and inclination toward avoiding stress inflicted by job change.

As it is seen in Table 1 below, there are many rules and feeling of concerns prevailing against unstructured conditions within the organizations that are trying to avoid uncertainty. Within the organizations with low level of avoiding uncertainty, on the other hand, uncertainties are accepted as inevitable and individuals are more ambitious to take risks.

Table 1: Characteristics of people with high level of avoiding uncertainty

Characteristics
Low level of perception on prosperity level regarding health, occupation and family issues
Infirmity coping with difficulties and external powers
A feeling of inefficiency about affecting lives, superiors, authorities...etc. And whole world in general speaking
Less capability in affecting local political decisions
Having almost no ambition regarding professional promotion
Negative attitudes towards younger employees
Causing deliberate delays against eager young employees who strive to get position where they will be in charge
Preferring group decision and negotiations to individual decision making
Preferring specialty oriented jobs to the managerial ones
Inclination toward competing with colleagues
Pervasion of anxiety by expression of feelings and unexpected reprimands
Perceiving compromises with rivals as hazardous

Source: [4]

Cooperation and companionship play important role in forming social communion (consensus) in educational organizations. Dynamic process of school culture enables the emergence of strong abilities. Each teacher internalizes common goals and objectives within educational organizations. Thus, school transforms into a cultural structure where quality and higher standards exist. Teachers incline to realize common affections within the direction of successful efforts and to cooperate with the sense of interpersonal considerations [5].

Educational managers should secure control and should keep employees' spirits high in case of an unexpected thing happens. School personnel and students should not get affected by uncertainty. Educational manager, as also being a leader, should give his followers the chance to become aware of their mistakes. Besides, this will lead to the efficiency in organizational communication. He should also make use of this opportunity to remind his followers of the possibility of experiencing chaotic events and contingencies at any time. Motivating his followers and taking risks may lessen negative effects of the probable consequences which might be caused by those risks. This also becomes an important issue on promoting the quality of educational organization from the aspects of giving effective education and developing himself in terms of creativity and progressiveness [6].

Importance of the Study: Identifying school principals' level of coping with uncertainty in schools, where leadership and management are remarkably crucial, will definitely enable people studying in this field to apprehend avoiding uncertainty thoroughly. Educational managers should take over under contingencies and should take necessary precaution steps for their followers not to be affected negatively by those uncertainties. This study presumably comes into prominence from the aspects of giving effective services by promoting the service quality in educational organizations as well as educational leaders' creativeness and self-improvement within the process. This study also comprises the very clues concerning educational and developmental progresses which urge the leader to acquire necessary attributes. Making remarkable contribution to related literature in Turkey and ascertaining the present situation regarding the determination of level of principals' avoiding uncertainty are among the aims of this study. It is also intended to encourage and motivate the individuals to establish team spirit, collective studying, sharing and collective learning by promoting their level of coping with uncertainty in order to make schools earn characteristics of a learning organization.

Restrictions: This research is restricted to the study group chosen during the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system in 2006-2007 Academic Years.

Problem Statement: At what level do the dissemination education seminar attendant schools principals in the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system are inclined to exhibit uncertainty avoiding behaviors, does the level of the inclination differ in accordance with the variables of age, gender, seniority in management and level of education? How do the dissemination education seminar attendant school principals in the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system perceive the uncertainty avoiding fact in schools?.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design of the Study: This study which tries to reveal the avoiding uncertainty behaviors of school principals of vocational education institutions within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system in the direction of the perceptions of the study group is designed in descriptive review model aiming to determine the current condition.

Study Group: Instead of determining population and a sample to represent the population, a study group consisting volunteer school principals of vocational secondary education institutions within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system was determined considering the aim of the study and the possibilities of the researcher. This study group includes dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system attendant school principals of 29 vocational education institutions which were chosen as *pilot*. 58 school principals and deputy school principals who were chosen to assist in developing fields and to apply those developments in their schools attended Dissemination Education Seminar Program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system. The characteristics of study group considering the purpose and possibilities of the study are as follows; (1) it includes the school principals and deputy school principals of schools within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system; (2) Chosen principals are the ones who attended the dissemination education seminar; (3) it includes the principals who attended the seminar in 2006-2007 Academic Years.

Collection of Data: Considering the research problems in order to reveal current conditions, a literature review was conducted. To find answers to the research problems an instrument of data collection was also developed. Referring to studies conducted on principals' behaviors pertaining avoiding uncertainty through this literature review, items regarding determination of those behaviors were composed. In the last section of the questionnaire, three open ended questions were also asked in order to determine the uncertainty avoiding behaviors were perceived by the school principals in the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system and in their schools as well as realizing how those school principals perceive the level of uncertainty avoiding behaviors. Those questions are; (1) "As being a principal, do you think school principals should exhibit uncertainty avoiding behaviors in schools?", (2) How would you consider legal and administrative regulations in schools for school principals' exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors at a minimum level?", (3) "Have you noticed any difference in your attitudes toward exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors after the dissemination education seminar you attended?".

Data Analysis: Since determining principals' level of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors is the main purpose of this study, items were formed in Likert type and it was also tried to be ascertained to what extent the principals agreed on each item. Content validity of the data collection tool was ensured based on expert opinion and it was configured with necessary amendments regarding the content, expression and spelling in the direction of the received feedbacks. Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 23 items of uncertainty avoiding behaviors scale was found 0,841. It was applied to all participant principals during dissemination education seminar within SVET in August 2007.

After reliability and validity factor analysis studies pertaining expected behaviors of school principals by assessing them with "never (1)", "seldom(2)", "sometimes (3)" "often (4)" and "always(5)" for each item determining the frequency, percentage, arithmetic average and standard deviation; t-test, Levene test, LSD test, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were applied in the analysis of the data obtained.

Average Ranges Regarding Level of above Mentioned School Principals' Exhibiting Uncertainty Avoiding Behaviors Are as Follows:

16 ≤ \bar{x} < 29 Very low

29 ≤ \bar{x} < 42 Low

42 ≤ \bar{x} < 54 Medium

54 ≤ \bar{x} < 67 High

67 ≤ \bar{x} < 80 Very high

A sample of 31 persons was chosen to test the validity and reliability of the scale. After assuring its evaluating what it is supposed to evaluate, the scale was applied to the study group of 58 persons.

Qualitative data obtained through three open ended questions which are in the last section of the questionnaire were asked to get the answers for the third research problem and are grouped within this direction. Afterwards, grouped data was transferred to the computer context and was analyzed.

Findings and Interpretations: Findings obtained within the scope of the research and their interpretations are given below.

Findings and Interpretations Regarding the First Research Problem: The average score of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors of school principals who attended dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system was found 53, 3276. The standard deviation is, 9, 26415. Considering the average of the total scores, it can be asserted that the inclination level of the dissemination education seminar attendant school principals' exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors is medium.

Findings and Interpretations Regarding the Second Research Problem: *Age* of the school principals who attended the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system found out to be non diagnostic regarding their level of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors.

Gender of the school principals who attended the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system found out to be non diagnostic regarding their level of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors.

There is a significant difference between the groups considering the *management seniority* of the attendant school principals from the aspect of their inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors. To be more precise, inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors found out higher for the dissemination education seminar attendant school principals with 6-9 years, 14-17 years and 18 years and more management experience than the ones with 2-5 years and 10-13 years management experience. It can be inferred from this finding that principals with 2-5 years experience are more inclined to take risks, to put their idealized thoughts into practice and they are not yet affected by organizational culture. On the other hand, senior school principals' adopting the organizational culture and bureaucratic structure in the course of the time and their preference for working in the same institution might urge them to avoid risks and contingencies. The principals, among dissemination education seminar attendants, with 10-13 years management experience are less inclined to exhibit uncertainty avoiding behaviors because of certain reasons, such as; reaching a significant level in their career and the job satisfaction along with it, opportunity for different positions for the same level and their better understanding of organizational culture.

Education level of the school principals who attended the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system found out to be determinant regarding their level of

exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors. It can be inferred that the academy graduated principals are more inclined to exhibit uncertainty avoiding behaviors than the university graduated ones. This might lead us to the judgment of “the higher a school principals’ education level is, the less is he inclined to exhibit uncertainty avoiding behaviors”. University graduated seminar attendant school principals’ being more convenient under uncertain conditions than academy graduated principals could be explained through the formation education they had been given in university days and their having the power of knowledge and competence instead of their status and positions.

Findings and Interpretations Regarding the Third Research Problem: The school principals who attended the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system indicated that they did not feel convenient with and competent for not exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors in their workplaces. They explain this situation with bureaucratic structure of their schools. In other words, they did not perceive themselves at decision making position in cases with risks and contingencies and they bounded this fact to strictly outlined missions and responsibilities by certain regulations and rules.

According to the school principals, their inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors is not bound up with the schools’ structures only; this is also because of principals’ values, habits and cultures. This demonstrates that they identify the level of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors with not only organizational culture (here school culture) but also overall social culture from a wider point of view.

There was no significant difference found statistically concerning uncertainty avoiding behaviors they perceived in themselves at the end of dissemination education seminar they attended. 78% of participant school principals indicated there was no difference concerning level of exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors at the end of the seminar contrary to what had assumed for. This might be due to seminar’s not lasting long enough and its deciduousness. Furthermore, it can also be asserted that the attendant school principals left their education period far behind to realize behavioral change considering how multidimensional the concept of avoiding uncertainty is.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The inclination level of the dissemination education seminar attendant school principals’ exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors differs in accordance with seniority and education level variables at a medium level. This can be accepted as a demonstration of seminar’s inefficiency considering the period the school principals attended to and differentiation of their inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors.

The bureaucratic structures of the schools and their culture have diverse effect on their level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors.

There is a significant difference between the groups considering the *management seniority* of the attendant school principals from the aspect of their inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors. However, the principals with 10-13 years management experience are less inclined to exhibit uncertainty avoiding behaviors because of certain reasons, such as; reaching a significant level in their career and the job satisfaction along with it, opportunity for different positions for the same level and their better understanding of organizational culture.

There is no significant difference between found considering the *education level* of the attendant school principals from the aspect of their inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors. This could be explained through the formation education they had been given in university days.

The inclination level of the exhibiting uncertainty avoiding behaviors of the school principals who attended the dissemination education seminar program within the Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (SVET) system is not bound up with individual issues only. In addition to them, the school culture as well as the social culture has certain effects.

Recommendations: Following recommendation could be could be benefitted from concerning the findings and results of this study;

- There should be a multidimensional analysis (with individual, organizational and social dimensions) done preparing the contents regarding the behaviors which are tried to be gained by the educational leaders in in-service trainings and seminars.
- Being multidimensional, uncertainty avoiding behaviors could be acquired by the prospective principals in undergraduate and graduate period of their lives and for a longer period of time. Thus, it would be more effective in acquiring the desired behavior change.
- Because there is a connection between uncertainty avoiding behaviors and education levels; education level should be taken into consideration promoting a principal within the Turkish Educational System.

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