

# Principals' Openness to Change in Malatya, Turkey

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## *Principals' Openness to Change in Malatya, Turkey*

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**ABSTRACT:** When change is deemed necessary, principals' attitudes towards changes are significant for successful restructuring of schools. This study aimed to ascertain the extent to which principals in Malatya, Turkey, are open to change. A questionnaire was administered to 156 elementary and secondary school principals in Malatya, Turkey. This questionnaire consisted of 18 items describing and measuring principals' openness to change on three dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. Results showed that principals were eminently open to the changes in every dimension regardless of demographic characteristics.

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**Keywords:** school reform, principals, attitudes towards change, Turkey.

Change is not a new concept. Fourteen years ago Fullan (1993) argued that what is new about change is the increased depth in our understanding of the term. Louis, Toole, and Hargreaves (1999) argued that change is an established concept and it is, both in meaning and in practice, very close to notions of improvement, implementation, and reform.

In an educational context change may be explained as restructuring or developing schools or the need for fundamental reforms (Dimmock, 1996; Mestry & Grobler, 2004; Sugrue & Furlong, 2002). To change is not "to try to eliminate" all the difficulties that schools have, but to plan to innovate considering internal and external change pressures (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001, p. 300). This is because, as Shimahara (1998) points out, "formal education is a function of society, and, although it is a conservative cultural agent, it gradually changes in response to societal demand" (p. 730).

As stated by Hargreaves (2002), "we live in a world of endless and relentless change" (p. 189), and "in a complex and fast-changing society" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 693). Societal changes include the changing nature and patterns of employment, population, and demographic changes, technological change, and globalization (Chapman, 1996). The change imperative is equated with progress and impacts schools (Caldwell, 2000; Hodgkinson, 2001; Uline, 2001). In addition to implementing their instructional duty, schools, as leading organizations, are required to adjust to change and this in turn is expected to change the society (Rosenblatt, 2004). Furthermore, as Fullan (1993) observed:

society expects its citizens to be capable of proactively dealing with change throughout life both individually and collaboratively in a context of dynamic and multicultural global transformation. Of all the institutions in society, education is the only one that potentially has the promise of fundamental contribution to this goal (p. 4).

In a similar way, Leithwood, Jantzi, and Mascall (2002) affirmed, "education became a hot button for public attention because it was and still is considered to be at least part of the solution to many of ... social and economic problems" (p. 8).

Schools, as the core of education, are subject to inescapable internal and external change pressures (Campbell, Corbally, & Nystrand, 1983; Fink, 2003; Fullan, 1993; Goodson, 2001; Hallinger, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004; Harris, 2006; Oplatka, 2005). Therefore, schools are required to cope with change while educating individuals. We could label this duty of school as we like; it is reform, innovation, planned change, or improvement, and it is conclusively "more than a simple rise in a school's achievement test scores" (Waite, 2002, p. 161). Whatever the change, it is clear that the principal is a central figure in the leadership of change (Fullan, 1992, 1999, 2001).

## Principals and change

According to Hargreaves (2000), "change puts some people in the spotlight" (p. 1). In the field of education, principals, who have long been expected to make changes and innovations in their schools, are at the centre of reform and school restructuring (Clarke, 2000; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Lakomski, 2001; Oplatka, 2003). Furthermore, Law and Walker (2005, p. 62) postulated that change creates challenge for the principal. According to Fullan (1996) "We have gone through the phases of the principal 'as administrator' and principal 'as instructional leader' to a broader and more fundamental notion of principal as change agent" (p. 701). Strong leadership and management are required to cope with the change problems and to create potential opportunities to make major reforms (Fullan, 1996; Wallace, 2004). In essence, effective school leaders are central to school reforms or improvements (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Dimmock, 1999; Fullan, 1992; Fullan, 2000a; Fullan, 2002a; Hallinger, 2004; Harris, 2002; Harris, 2004; Jones, 1999; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Ryan, 1997; Retallick & Fink, 2002; Timperley & Robinson, 2001; Vandenberghe, 1998). Moreover, school leaders play a key role in the implementation of educational reforms and school development projects (Cheng 2003; Fullan, 2002b; Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin, & Fullan, 2004). Principals are actively engaged as initiators or facilitators of massive changes and improvements in their schools. Only principals who are well equipped to handle a complex and rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms, and every improving school has a principal who is good at leading improvement (Fullan, 2000b; Fullan, 2002; Fullan & Stielgelbauer, 1991; Louis, 2003).

Since principals are central to preparing and organizing schools for change, it is important to be aware of how open principals are to change (Harris, 2001). It stands to reason that if principals are resistant to change then, far from leading as change agents, principals may impede the capacity for change (Beycioglu & Aslan, 2007; Dinham & Scott, 2002; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Timperley & Parr, 2005).

As Fullan (1992) points out, we have to look deeper and more holistically at the principal. Giving holistic consideration to the principal implies that there must be consideration of the personal, developmental, and psychological dimensions of change (Hargreaves, 2005). Change requires "a complex interplay of our thinking and emotions" (Gunter, Brodie, Carter, Close, Farrar, et al., 2003, p. 222).

In organizational and educational change, personality, personal development, and attitudes of individuals towards change are among the most significant determining factors of successful and sustainable reforms. Therefore, a principal's perception or belief about change is important when a school faces change (Goodson, 2001). In our opinion, description comes first, and for this reason we should know principals' attitudes towards change before we propose changes in schools.

In Turkey, where there is a centralized educational system, the Ministry of National Education paints the picture of educational landscape in schools. The Ministry makes all policy decisions and controls implementation (Akyuz, 2001; Ozden, 2000). In this very centralized context, even the metaphors the participants used in a research by Silman and Simsek (2006) presented centralized characteristics of the Turkish school system.

On the one hand "changes in schools have been criticised for being largely piecemeal and fragmented and they have not generally touched core educational practices" (Aksit, 2007, p. 1-7), but on the other hand, as a candidate for membership of the European Union, Turkey faces essential changes in many public organizations such as schools to meet the educational objectives of the EU. Turkey is "seeking to improve its schools to better respond to higher social and economic expectations" (Grossman, Onkol, & Sands, 2007, p. 139). Therefore, school restructuring is one of the issues on the educational agenda of Turkey.

There have been various studies of principals and change in Turkey. Previous studies investigated the need for change, as the first phase of any change or restructuring attempt in schools. For example, Alic (1990) studied organizational change needs in general high schools. Another study was conducted by Sayiner (1997) to measure innovation needs in Anatolian high schools, a secondary school type which students can be enrolled in after an examination. The results of these studies showed that innovation in schools was needed, and participating principals admitted it. Furthermore, Beycioglu and Aslan (2007) investigated the need for organizational innovation in public elementary schools and discovered that principals firmly accepted the need for organizational change in public elementary schools.

According to the Turkish literature on change in schools, there has been the need for changing or restructuring schools, and principals share this idea. However, the knowledge base is not very clear about school members' openness to change, which may be accepted as the second phase of successful school restructuring. In view of the fact that there is a lack of research concerning principals' attitudes toward change, it was necessary to study whether principals were open to change before any change proposals in this context of a strongly felt need for change in Turkey. Therefore, this study, as an addition to the related knowledge base, aimed to ascertain the extent to which

principals in Malatya, a city in the eastern part of Turkey, were open to change on three personal dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. Additionally, we aimed to see if there were relationships between principals' demographic characteristics and their openness to change. Based on the theory and research on principals and change which marked the need for change (e.g. Amaro, 2001; Beycioglu & Aslan, 2007; Dinham & Scott, 2002; Ercetin & Demirbulak, 2002), we hypothesized that the principals in elementary and secondary schools would be open to change on all three dimensions, but were curious to see whether there would be significant differences among principals' attitudes towards the changes from the point of demographic characteristics.

## **Methodology**

Relying on statistical procedures, we aimed to conduct a study describing principals' attitudes and identifying statistical relationships from a representative sample, resembling the total population consisting of 808 principals. A descriptive study which utilizes questionnaires/surveys enables researchers to describe current conditions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Karasar, 2002). Therefore, using a questionnaire to obtain a set of quantitative data which could be administered to groups seemed the most suitable method.

### *Participants*

Since there are only three private schools in Malatya, we decided to exclude those schools from the study. The population of the study was 808 principals working for public elementary and secondary schools in Malatya. The representative sample of the study was 156 principals. One hundred and fifteen of them were working for elementary schools, and 41 were principals at secondary schools.

A two-part survey questionnaire, the second part of which consists of 18 items, was used to elicit responses from principals. In the first part, there were demographic questions about the participant principals. There were 46 graduates of two-year post secondary education, 100 graduates, and 10 postgraduates in the study. When they became principals, 86 of them were classroom teachers, 37 of them were teaching social sciences (history, language, music, geography, painting, etc.), and 33 of them were math and science teachers.

While we were conducting the study, 52 of the principals were working in the villages, 32 of them were in a township, administrative district within a city, and 72 were in the centre of the province. Sixty principals had less than 6 years of experience in the principalship, 37 principals had experience between 7 and 12 years, 32 of them had between 13 and 18 years, and 27 principals had beyond 19 years of experience.

### *Instrumentation*

We used a questionnaire with a scenario which measures principals' openness to changes typically found in school restructuring. The questionnaire, Change in Organizational Culture, with a five-point Likert type item scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) was developed by Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings, and Pierce (1989). The instrument was modified in 1993 by Huang, who added a scenario describing changes in schools, thereby making the instrument suitable for use with school principals (Klecker & Loadman, 1999, p. 216). According to Dunham et al., (1989) such an instrument could be used to ascertain whether the participants were open to any proposed change before the introduction of an organizational change. They also point out that "various instruments have been developed which measures attitudes toward change in general or toward changes in a particular area such as work related activities, but none, however, have been fully validated" (pp. 3-4).

Owing to the fact that there has not been any systemic and sustainable school restructuring either in Turkey or in Malatya, and only proposed change could be measured in the context of this study, we considered this instrument to be suited to our research for the purpose of measuring principals' openness to change in elementary and high schools in Malatya, Turkey. The scenario preceding the questionnaire describes many of the changes advocated in school restructuring literature (Klecker & Loadman, 1999, p. 223). Participants responded the questionnaire after they had read the scenario which aimed to measure their attitudes to proposed change in the scenario. The questionnaire consists of 18 items that measure principals' attitude towards the changes (see Appendix A).

Dunham et al. (1989) explained attitude toward change as "a person's cognitions about change, affective reactions to change, and behavioral tendency to change" (p.4). Dunham et al. described affective reactions towards change as an individual's tendency to enjoy changes in organizations; cognitive reactions to change as an individual's recognition that the change is occurring and that it tends to benefit an organization and its members. Finally, the behavioral dimension measures the extent to which a person would take action to support or initiate change. Klecker and Loadman (1999) revised the scenario used in this study to use it with elementary, middle, and high school principals (see Appendix B).

The total questionnaire alpha reliability for this study was 0.85. The reliabilities for the dimensions were as follows: Affective was 0.71; cognitive was 0.47; behavioral was 0.90.

*Procedures*

Three hundred surveys were posted to randomly selected schools in the district (between February 15 and 25, 2006), and 156 were returned by the end of May 2006. Values of responses to the items ranged from 1 to 5. A score of 5 indicated that the participants strongly agreed with the changes, and a score of 1 indicated that they strongly disagreed. The questionnaire included five negatively stated items (3, 4, 7, 13, and 18) that were reverse scored. Statistical analysis including reliability, t-tests, and analysis of variance were computed by using the SPSS. The data were collected from 156 public elementary and secondary schools.

**Results**

*Principals' openness to change*

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which the participating principals were open to change. The mean of the surveys was calculated to test the main hypothesis. The mean for 156 participants' answers was 4.22. The mean score was clearly above the mid-point of the scoring range (1 to 5). This indicated that the participants were significantly open to change. The mean on the affective subscale was 4.22, indicating that the principals' feelings about change were positive. On the behavioral subscale, the mean (4.18) showed that the principals would take actions when faced with change. The highest subscale mean (4.25) was on the cognitive subscale, as it was in Klecker and Loadman's (1999) study. This suggests that the principals agreed with the idea of changing/restructuring their schools (Table 1).

Table 1

Principals' openness to change on three dimensions

Dimension	n	M	SD
Cognitive	156	4.25	.84
Behavioural	156	4.18	.79
Affective	156	4.22	.73
Total	156	4.22	.67

Principals report that they enjoy and benefit from changes in organizations and they tend to take actions to support or initiate changes.

*Differences between elementary school principals and secondary school principals' openness to change*

In order to verify that there was a significant difference between elementary school principals and secondary school principals' openness to change, a t-test was used. The mean for elementary school principals was 4.22 and for secondary principals, it was 4.20 (Table 2).

Table 2

Differences between elementary school principals and secondary school principals' openness to change

Principals	n	M	SD	t	P
Elementary school principals	115	4.22	.68	0.15	0.87
Secondary school principals	41	4.20	.65		
P> .05					

The difference in means was not statistically significant. Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no meaningful difference between elementary school principals and secondary school principals' openness to change.

Differences among principals' openness to change from the point of demographic characteristics

*Programs they finished.*

In order to test whether there were differences among principals' openness to change from the point of programs they finished, One Way ANOVAs with a Scheffe follow-up test was used (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3

Differences among principals' openness to change from the point of programs they finished

Programs	n	M	SD
Classroom teachers	86	4.26	.70
Social sciences	37	4.26	.65
Math and science	33	4.05	.60
Total	156	4.22	.67

Table 4

*ANOVA*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	1.125	2	.562	1.23	.295
Within groups	69.847	153	.457		
Total	70.972	155			
P> .05					

The mean for classroom teachers was 4.26, for social science teachers, the mean was 4.26, and it was 4.05 for math and science teachers. The result of ANOVA indicated no difference.

**Years of experience in the principalship.**

To test whether there were significant differences among principals' openness to change depending on years of experience in the principalship, we used One Way ANOVAs with a Scheffe follow-up test. The mean for the principals who had under 6 years of experience was 4.31, and the mean for those who had 7-12 years of experience was 4.12. The mean for the principals who worked between 13-18 years was 4.27, and the mean for those who worked for beyond 19 years was 4.07 (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5

Differences among principals' openness to change from the point of years of experience in the principalship

Years of experience	n	M	SD
Under 6 years	60	4.31	.63
7-12 years	37	4.12	.65
13-18 years	32	4.27	.77
Beyond 19 years	27	4.07	.66
Total	156	4.22	.67

Table 6

*ANOVA*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	1.613	3	.538	1.17	.320
Within groups	69.359	152	.456		
Total	70.972	155			

P> .05

The difference in means was not statistically significant and did not agree concerning our hypothesis.

**Work region (village, township, the centre of the province).**

To test whether there were differences among principals' openness to change in various work regions, we used One Way ANOVAs with a Scheffe follow-up test. The mean for the principals who worked in the centre of the province was 4.08, and the mean for those who worked in the townships was 4.33. The mean for the principals who worked in the villages was 4.27 (Table 7 and Table 8).

Table 7

Differences among principals' openness to change from the point of work region.

Region	n	M	SD
Centre of province	52	4.08	.64
Township	32	4.33	.58
Village	72	4.27	.72
Total	156	4.22	.67

Table 8

*ANOVA*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	1.617	2	.809	1.78	.171
Within groups	69.355	153	.453		
Total	70.972	155			

P&gt; .05

In opposition to the hypothesis, the means were not statistically significant.

#### ***Level of Education.***

To verify whether there were differences among principals' openness to change from the point of level of education, One Way ANOVAs with a Scheffe follow-up test was used. The mean for the principals who were graduates of a two-year post secondary education degree was 4.20, and the mean for those who had a bachelor's degree was 4.22. The mean for the principals who had a postgraduate degree was 4.23 (Table 9 and Table 10).

Table 9

Differences among principals' openness to change from the point of level of education

Level of education	n	M	SD
Post secondary	46	4.20	.73
Bachelors	100	4.22	.62
Post graduate	10	4.23	.93
Total	156	4.22	.67

Table 10

*ANOVA*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	.013	2	.007	.014	.986
Within groups	70.959	153	.464		
Total	70.972	155			

P&gt; .05

Opposite to the hypothesis, the means were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

### *Principals' openness to change*

The results of this study supported the main assumption. Results showed that the principals were eminently open to changes on three dimensions. These results demonstrated that the participating principals' openness to change was on a high level, and they were likely to become involved in school restructuring. Their responses showed that the principals thought the proposed changes would be worthwhile for the schools, and that they would do their best to facilitate the changes.

We also looked at the differences between elementary and secondary school principals' attitudes towards changes. Based on the results of the t-test, it can be concluded that there was not a direct relationship between participants' school type and their openness to change.

### *Principals' openness to change from the point of demographic characteristics*

We assumed that there would be relationships between principals' openness to change and their demographic characteristics (programs they finished, years of experience in the principalship, work region, and level of education). The findings showed that there were not any significant differences.

## Conclusion

It was clear in the study that participants were open to the proposed changes and both elementary and secondary school principals shared the same opinion. There were no differences between the participating principals' openness to change. However, certainty that principals are open to change is merely a starting point, and in itself provides little practical direction regarding "what the principal could or should do" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 152). With this in mind, it is suggested that future studies about change and principals in Turkey should consider principals' knowledge of implementing changes and making the changes sustainable. In addition, since the current study focused on principals, future research could explore the viewpoints of a broader range of stakeholders in order to examine a broader range of thinking about change in schools. For example, it could be of interest to explore the perceptions of teachers, students, and families, in relation to principals' openness to change. The key findings of this study clearly suggest that principals in Malatya, Turkey, are open to change. As such, this is a positive indicator that school leaders are likely to be receptive to proposed school restructuring.

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## Appendix A

### QUESTIONNAIRE

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1. I look forward to change at work.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Change usually benefits the organization.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I usually resist new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I do not like change.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Most of my co-workers benefit from change.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am inclined to try new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Change frustrates me.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Change often helps me perform better.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I usually support new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Changes tend to stimulate me.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Other people think that I support change.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I often suggest new approaches to things.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Most changes are irritating.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Change usually helps improve unsatisfactory situations at work.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I intend to do whatever possible to support change.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I find most change to be pleasing.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I usually benefit from change.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I usually hesitate to try new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix B

### SCENARIO FOR INSTRUMENT

**Instructions:** Please read the following scenario, and then respond to the questions on the reverse side of this page as you think about the proposed changes described in the scenario.

X School has a strong tradition of high-standardized test scores and high attendance rates. Teachers are used to the school administrative operation. Recently, a principal was appointed as the new principal of the school. He/she is enthusiastic about initiating some changes in the school. One of the changes the principal proposes is to adopt a new school motto, "Growth through Self-management." He/she believes teachers and students should be given more legitimate authority to decide their own school lives. He/she maintains the school should be managed by its teachers, students, and parents, not by administrative authority only. One of the ways this commitment to decision making will be demonstrated is to have a monthly "town meeting" for all involved to air opinions and concerns.

Another important change the principal seeks is to ask teachers, staff, and parents to select their own representatives to form a Teacher-Staff-Parent (TSP) committee. He/she is a member of the committee but does not chair it. The TSP committee's mission is to collectively manage and improve the school's operational system. The committee

members will meet regularly twice a month. School policies must get approval from the committee, and the whole staff must vote on important issues regarding personnel, program, and budget. The principal will implement the school policies developed by the committee rather than make unilateral policies. The committee can change decisions that he/she proposes so long as the faculty and parents will support the new decision. The third change is to adopt peer- and parent-evaluation to supplement but not replace administrator-evaluation. He/she proposes that teachers selected from each grade should work with parent representatives to evaluate teachers' performance and school outcomes. Such an evaluation team can develop criteria and procedures based on group consensus. Their evaluation results will be used for in-service training and tenure. In addition, he/she plans to implement a "student management" ideal. A student court, consisting of a group of students with two advisory teachers, will be formed to implement student-proposed regulations and to deal with appeals on disciplinary issues. He/she plans to recommend a seasoned teacher to be one of the advisory teachers because of his/her reputation for fairness. Furthermore, the school's annual recognition assembly will be changed to a class-centered celebration. Each class, based on its members' decision, can design their own recognition programs, awards, and can invite their own guests. The principal is excited about the proposed changes. He/she believes these changes will enhance the school's tradition of excellence.

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