Teacher Evaluation as a Catalyst for Organizational Learning

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate how the Teacher Evaluation program prompted organizational learning in the context of Taiwan. In order to enhance teacher professional quality and growth, a program of teacher evaluation was launched by the Ministry of Education since 2006. The program was designed as formative in nature, aiming for professional development of teachers. Owing to the lack of studies examining the link between teacher evaluation and school improvement, a qualitative case study was used as the approach to explore the context, processes, and consequences of using evaluation to facilitate organizational learning at a high school. Cognitive and cultural perspectives were used to analyze the individual, team, and organizational level of learning stimulated by evaluation.

Descriptors: school improvement, organizational learning, evaluation

Introduction

After decades of development, the meanings and contents of evaluation keep

evolving. In the context of educational reform, evaluation is used not only for judging

the performance, but for enhancing the competence of teachers and facilitating the

improvement of schools. Thus, evaluation is related to improvement, development,

and capacity building. Together with the concept of 'mainstreaming' evaluation

(Sanders, 2002), evaluation, rather than a temporal, additional task, is expected to be

part of school life and an important mechanism for promoting organizational learning.

In Taiwan, Teacher Professional Development Evaluation (TPDE) is now a

core policy in elementary and secondary schools initiated by the Ministry of

Education since 2006. A professional growth-oriented approach was utilized to

evaluate teacher performance. Although the policy is an intervention from outside,

with the emphasis of voluntariness and the spirit of site based development, schools

have much room to decide and design, to function it in multiple levels. However,

most researches of TPDE concentrate only on teacher level, lacking a big picture to

see the relationship between teacher evaluation and school improvement and limiting

the potential of evaluation use.

Evaluation use has been discussed for years. Besides using the findings to help

improve, process use, the effects or influences of evaluation process, is one of the foci

of recent studies (Amo & Cousins, 2007; Patton, 2007). Because evaluation may

result in many organizational outcomes and may have an important connection with

organizational learning (Chen, 2007; Cousins, 1998), taking the organizational

learning perspective to explore what and how evaluation can influence teachers, teams,

and school organization as a whole can broaden the horizons.

Conceptual Framework

The empirical researches of organizational learning have been drastically

increased since 1990s. Many researches take a learning perspective to explain the

performance and behavior of organizations (Bapuji & Crossan, 2004). To

conceptualize organizational learning, we can analyze the types or levels of learning

(Argyris & Schon, 1996; Senge, 1990), the developmental stages of organizational

learning (Tan & Chen, 2006), compare the processes and outcomes (Crossan, Lane, &

White, 1999；Lam, Chan, Pan, & Wei, 2003), or distinguish prescriptive theories

from descriptive theories of organizational learning (Tsang, 1997). After reviewing

the literatures, we propose three important issues as the basis for analysis.

Firstly, as to the distinction between organizational learning and learning

organization researches, Tsang (1997) suggests that organizational learning theories

are to find out "How does an organization learn?" emphasizing scientific rigor.

Contrastively, learning organization theories are concerned with "How should an

organization learn?" targeting practitioners and usually based on authors' consulting

experience. The fifth discipline proposed by Senge (1990) is the classical case.

Secondly, concerning the processes and outcomes of organizational learning,

Lam et al. (2003) reformulate Senge's work and propose a model which resorts to

organizational learning processes and outcomes to construct a two-by-two typology.

Crossan, Lane, and White (1999) divide organizational learning into three levels, each

with its processes and outcomes. In individual level, with the processes of intuiting

and interpreting, the outcomes are experiences, images, metaphors, language,

cognitive map, and conversation/dialogue. In group level, the process of integrating

results in shared understandings, mutual adjustment, and interactive systems. In

organization level, institutionalizing brings routines, diagnostic systems, and rules and

procedures.

The third issue is one of the core debates of organizational learning, which is

about the theoretical perspective applied. The cognitive perspective focuses either on

learning by individuals in organizational context, or explains organizational action by

the model of learning for individuals. To understand organizational learning as

"learning by organizations," Cook and Yanow (1996) emphasize the critical role of

culture in organizational learning and formulate the cultural perspective as a

supplement.

Based on the above analysis, the conceptual framework of our research is as

follows:

Theoretical perspectives. We apply both cognitive and cultural approaches to

analyze the learning of organization members and to understand how organization

members learn organizational values and beliefs through artificial artifact.

Levels of organization learning. Organizational learning happens in three

different levels. In the individual level, learning happens when they change, no matter

explicitly in behavior or implicitly in cognitive or affective aspect. In the group level,

organizational learning may change the pattern of members' interaction and dialogue.

In the organization level, organizational learning can result in changes in

organizational memory and institutions.

Methods

We took a qualitative case study as the approach to inquire the context, processes, and consequences of using evaluation to facilitate organizational learning at a high school (School P), which was chosen as the site for it has been successful in implementing TPDE program and its principal (Principal P) regards the program as a component integrated in the school development plan.

Having approximately 160 teachers and 4,000 students, School P has been launching action plans to increase its competitiveness since 1990s. Relevant measures of teacher evaluation were adopted and tested afterwards. Accumulating 12 years of experiences, school P attended TPDE program starting from 2006, which resulted in school improvements. Thus, how the school used evaluation to trigger organizational learning kindled our interest to investigate. Three methods, observation, interview and documents analysis, were employed to collect data. There were 9 observations conducted and 17 staffs, including the principal, school administrators and teachers, were interviewed. Besides, the school development plans, TPDE proposal, and meeting minutes et al., were documents for analysis.

Preliminary Findings

<u>Teacher Evaluation was implemented in the school context of crisis consciousness</u>

Because of its geographical location, School P had students mostly from lower

social economic status. In addition, the tendency that fewer babies were born creates

tremendous pressure for the school. How to recruit enough and quality students

became a significant task for the principal. Recognizing the key role of teacher in

schooling, Principal P introduced changes to school with the expectation of enhancing

teacher quality. Consequently, TDPE program was one of the initiatives.

Based on past experiences, School P did the teacher evaluation with

orderly tempo. Two groups were set up for administrative responsibility. The chairs of

different subject departments were empowered as teacher leaders to lead discussions

of evaluation criteria and classroom observations. Furthermore, professional learning

community was used as a tool to facilitate teacher evaluation.

<u>Teacher Evaluation triggered learning of the individual, team and organizational level</u>

The evaluation data of self-assessment, classroom observation as well as

students survey assisted individual teacher to know their teaching performance, which

catalyzed reflections and furthermore improve practices. Using data to inform

instruction was another capacity the staff learned from the evaluation process. At the

individual level, personal mastery of evaluation knowledge and skills, and even the

positive attitude toward evaluation were observed. At the team level, more dialogues

of teaching issues shaped mutual understanding among the faculty. And the

mechanisms for team learning were formed. For example, the topics for discussions

every week in the subject department meeting were planned at the beginning of the

semester. The meeting gathering was not just talking about technical problems;

instead, it became a community of learning. With regard to the organizational level,

the institutional arrangement conducive to professional development took shape

gradually. The administrative groups to implement teacher evaluation, and the

professional learning community to facilitate teacher growth were examples. Besides,

the routines and procedures were changed, which might be seen in the addition of pre-

and post-observation conferences to the original system. New culture emerged that

teaching competence could be a new criteria to define the relationship between

different roles other than the hierarchical duties of administration. In other words, the

director of academic affairs might be a mentee because of his teaching performance

no matter what the administrative post he assumed.

<u>The participation feature of TPDE facilitates shared understandings of organizational learning</u>

From the cultural perspective, social interaction is the key concept of organizational learning. The process of TPDE offers opportunities for participation and interaction. Using the approach of peer observation, teachers might be the evaluand as well as evaluator. They got involved in discussing the school-based evaluation plan, exchanging ideas about evaluation goals, criteria and methods. Through the process, teachers developed shared understandings about what is effective teaching.

<u>TPDE brings individuals learning together resulting in institutionalizing consequences of organizational learning</u>

In the process of implementing TPDE, teachers usually worked in pairs or in groups. After attending training workshops, subject department meetings, and professional learning community, and conducting classroom observations, teachers learned and were familiar with the routines and procedures of evaluation. Moreover, they understood how to use evaluation to make improvements. This know-how became a part of organizational knowledge shared by school participants. The cultural

knowledge was transmitted through artifacts of rituals, symbols and language guiding members to act.

       In summary, this study builds the linkage between teacher evaluation and school improvement, which was scarcely done in the past. The research findings indicated that teacher evaluation was a catalyst for organizational learning. From the cognitive perspective argued by Senge (1990) and Crossan et al. (1999), personal mastery of evaluation knowledge and skills were observed in the individuals. Shared understandings were shaped in groups concerning what constitutes effective teaching and how to use evaluation to inform practices. Furthermore, from the cultural perspective proposed by Cook and Yarrow (1996), the cultural knowledge of know-how linking evaluation and improvement appeared and was used as guiding principles for school participants. This study integrating cognitive and cultural perspectives infuses a quite different insight into the current empirical works of organizational learning.

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