

## **A LEARNING ORGANIZATION JOURNEY OF 11 YEARS**

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Elif Gokcigdem has contributed through her elaborate editing.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this case story is to review from various points of view and share the dynamics underlying the successful practices of Learning Organization Practice Teams that have been going on for 11 years at Çimsa. We believe that sharing experiences can significantly contribute to the development of learning organization practices and we extend our gratitude to those who have come up with, promoted, and coordinated the idea of SoL Field Book.

Let's start our journey by getting to know Çimsa.

### **HISTORY, CHARACTERISTICS AND SUCCESSES**

Çimsa, one of the leading companies of Turkish industry, was established in 1972. Currently Çimsa is operating through 5 integrated plants in Mersin, Eskişehir, Kayseri, Niđe and Afyonkarahisar; a grinding facility in Ankara, and cement packaging facilities in Malatya and Marmara Terminals with a staff of nearly 1000 people. Çimsa is also internationally active in the manufacture of cement with terminals in Hamburg (Germany), Trieste (Italy), Sevilla and Alicante (Spain), Famagusta (T.R.N.C.), Constanza (Romania) and Novorossiysk (Russia).

Çimsa follows technological developments and innovations closely. In addition to being amongst the top three brands in the world in white cement, Çimsa is also developing and manufacturing special products such as antibacterial white cement, self-cleaning and pollution reducing white cement, and calcium aluminate cement.

With the awareness of being a member of a challenging sector with a high risk of work-related accidents, Çimsa is intensively engaged in **Occupational Health and Safety**. In order to increase Occupational Health and Safety awareness, and to create better working conditions at Çimsa, **Green and Safe Plant Project** was put into practice. Çimsa has delivered an outstanding success in the Blue Helmet Occupational Safety Competition, winning the top three safety awards.

It is imperative for Çimsa to Integrate sustainability into the entire spectrum of its operations. The steps that are taken in this area are listed below.

#### **2007 - 2010:**

- First GRI Report was prepared at B level.

- Dust emission decreased down to 23% with the investments made.
- 3.6% of energy consumption is started to be met from alternative waste fuel consumption.

#### **2011 - 2012:**

- First GRI Report was prepared at B+ level.
- Electricity Generation from Waste Gas Project established in Mersin for an investment of 21.8 million USD was commissioned.
- The plant was established to meet 50% of electricity generation at 1st and 2nd furnaces.
- With the Hot Disc project realized in Eskisehir for 7.7 million USD fossil fuel consumption in the 2nd facility was decreased by 21%.
- Kayseri Cement Plant was awarded with the Eco-Friendly Product Certificate for the first time in Turkey by Institut Bauen und Umwelt in accordance with ISO 14025 and the new European Norm EN 15804.

#### **2013:**

- Our sustainability report covering 2012 was published in December. This report raised the bar; GRI report at A+ level was drafted.
- The first Turkish company that joined Cement Sustainability Initiative.
- Electricity Generation from Waste Gasses facility in Mersin generated 21.7 million Kws electricity in the midyear period of 2013.

Fossil fuel consumption was decreased by 22% in Eskisehir in the midyear period of 2013.

#### **WHY DID WE INITIATE LEARNING ORGANIZATION PRACTICE TEAMS AT ÇİMSA?**

##### **(MEHMET HACIKAMİLOĞLU – GENERAL MANAGER, ÇİMSA)**

In 2004 when we first began the Learning Organization practices at Çimsa, the company was functioning with only a plant in Mersin, ready mixed concrete plants, and a grinding facility in Kayseri. At the time, we were engaged in various practices for adopting a culture based on team work and continuous improvement because we believed that through collective intelligence we would get more permanent/sustainable results with less energy. Such a culture was also important with respect to our growth targets. We had worked on problem solving and improvement through the improvement groups and quality circles we had established, trying different methods. These activities surely helped; we achieved a problem solving culture and reached some solutions in a short time. Yet, we couldn't attain a team spirit, a sense of ownership, and most important of all, consistency that we were aiming for.

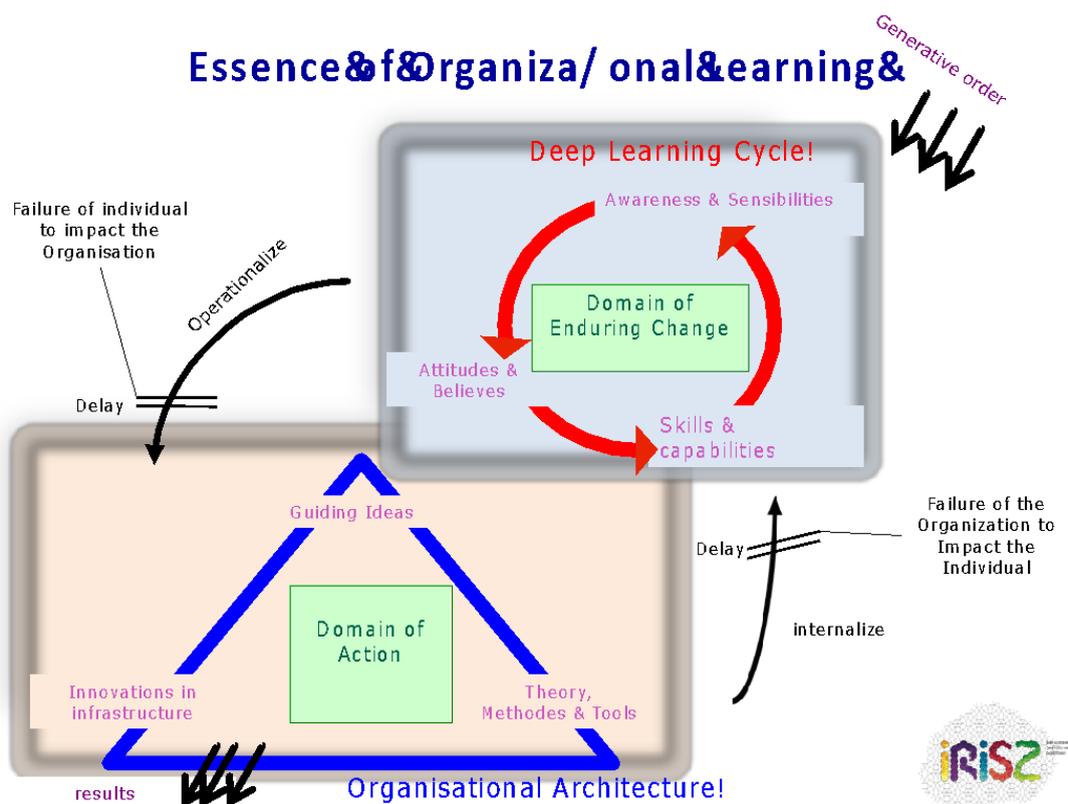
We were introduced to Learning Organization through Beksa from Sabancı Group of Companies. Just like us, Beksa had engaged in many activities for continuous improvement and they had received the European Total Quality Award in 1997. Then, seeing the weakening of motivation

and ownership in their continuous improvement groups and quality circles, they had initiated Learning Organization team practices. By 2004, Learning Organization approaches had been adopted by the management and staff, and even by their children. The results attained by the Learning Organization Practice teams in Beksa, such as the disappearance of hierarchy between titles; everyone taking turns in being the team leader; building a shared vision/goal; and the formation of teams who really listen and understand each other, and as such, can examine and solve everyday problems with different and fresh points of view; exactly corresponded to what we, as top management, desired to realize in Çimsa. In addition to corporate results, the fact that it would trigger improvement in the private lives and self-competence of our staff played an important role in our adoption of the Learning Organization.

### **METHODOLOGY OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION PRACTICE TEAMS (EVRİM ÇALKAVUR DURMUŞ – LEARNING ORGANIZATION PRACTICE TEAMS CONSULTANT-COACH)**

My husband and colleague M. Yavuz Durmuş and I work as Learning Organization Practice Teams Consultant-Coaches. We have been a part of the Cimsa's Learning Organization journey for the past eleven years, since its inception. Both of us can contentedly state that very good results have been achieved both in terms of business outcomes and of corporate culture within Çimsa. On behalf of Yavuz and myself, I would like to discuss the Learning Organization Practice Teams methodology we use at Çimsa, which is currently considered a "best practice" by other corporations with respect to the reflections of Learning Organization Practices on business outcomes and corporate culture. The effects of and the results brought forth by the methodology are in direct correlation with the competence and contributions of those using it. I will try to familiarize the reader with the methodology and then let our teammates from Çimsa explain the way they used it and the results they achieved.

One of the most important aspects of "Learning Organization Practice Teams" is that they focus on minimizing delays. Before we discuss with how this is done, let's re-visit the "Essence of Organizational Learning" model.



### **LEARNING ORGANIZATION PRACTICE TEAMS AND DELAYS**

The delays shown in the diagram above play an important role in why many corporations discontinue with the learning organization practices they have initiated. Delays in the reflection of personal development on business outcomes and corporate culture; and, likewise, delays in the reflection of business outcomes and improvements in corporate culture on personal development and achievements may pose an obstacle in the way of a learning environment, especially today when people tend to expect everything to happen at once. Therefore, employment of a method to minimize such delays has become essential for organizations to initiate, extend and sustain their practices.

In establishing the “Learning Organization Practice Teams” method we used at Çimsa, we focused on creating a field for learning, transformation and development whilst minimizing delays. A significant aspect of our approach was that it was based on learning by doing and the association of learning to business outcomes. I would like to begin by explaining how the process was structured.

### **The Learning Organization Practice Teams Process**



First, 1 to 4 project topics are determined by the top management of the company and consultant-coaches. The criteria used in the choice of topics are as below:

- Ability to elicit solid business outcomes (bottom-line results) in 5-6 months
- Being within the scope of the team
- Significance and priority for the company

For each project topic, teams of 7 to 9 are formed. Team members are chosen from among those who are directly involved with, can provide input for, and will be affected by the consequences of the related topic. Maintaining a horizontal combination bringing together different departments and a vertical combination bringing together different positions/levels enables the team to represent the whole and intensifies the effectiveness of learning. Here, one must also take into consideration that these team members are going to be the Learning Organization Practice Team Coaches of the second phase. Top management members involved in the practice personally speak with each team member in order to explain what is expected of them, and to stress the importance of participation/contribution and continuity. At this stage, new team members may be found to replace those candidates who decide not to participate in the practice. Members of the staff and management who are presently not chosen for the pilot project teams are informed as to how the practices are going to expand in days to come. Explaining that nobody is excluded is essential for ensuring future support and minimizing resistance.

A seminar is conducted for the purpose of familiarizing the pilot teams with the five disciplines of learning organizations, thus initiating practices on the project topics. Learning takes place in weekly meetings and during the process. Team members face obstacles while working on reaching the targets they have set in relation to a topic such as boosting sales, increasing productivity, lowering energy costs, or reducing waste. In order to overcome these obstacles and reach their targets, they practice upon learning organization disciplines. Recognizing and comprehending their own mental models as well as those of others, to turn their targets into shared goals, focusing on permanent solutions rather than quick fixes with side effects, and getting support are of great importance on the way to achieving their goals/shared vision.

At the end of a 5 to 6-week process, the bottom-line results, success stories, and stories of personal mastery experienced during the process are shared with the whole company. This way, the delays in the reflection of personal and team skills and capacity development on business outcomes and vice versa have been significantly shortened, and the correlation between the two clearly revealed.

At the end of the first phase, some members of the existing teams who have volunteered and been approved by the management take the Learning Organization Practice Teams' Coach seminar and are trained to act as Learning Organization Practice Teams' coaches for the new teams formed in the second phase. Consultant-coaches continue to work with these internal coaches and the top management members we call sponsors. The internal capacity increases with each new phase. As the internal capacity and competence increase, teams may be formed on different, more difficult and longer term topics. Department teams or teams that naturally evolve over an arising problem or difficulty may come into existence. There can even be situations where practices include the families and children of employees.

### ***Balance of the Abstracts (Measurables) and the Concrete (Immeasurables)***

There's a very important reason why the methodology we use is named "Learning Organization

Practice Teams". All our experiences show that learning takes place through practice. In other words, we do not learn something first and then do it. We learn as we do and do better as we learn. However, the existing education system has conditioned us to separate learning from doing. We are schooled within a testing system that requires us to learn first and then measures our learning. For this reason, the getting into action phase in real life may be perceived like the testing system. Fear of making mistakes and not being able to succeed may postpone or totally prevent action. When we act, sooner or later, we make mistakes; and, ignoring the fact that mistakes are precious opportunities for learning, we may give up.

In Learning Organization Practice Teams performances, it's important to think together and try to understand different parties in order to understand the current reality and to plan how to realize the vision; but only on condition that these are backed up with action and practice. The major factor in ensuring this is the use of all Five Disciplines (Mental Models, Personal Mastery, Shared Vision, Team Learning, and Systems Thinking) together.

Our work before the Learning Organization Practice Teams process have shown us that focusing too much on a single discipline or tool and perceiving it as a magic cure-all prescription will lead to blockages and disappointments. We have experienced the ineffectiveness of only having dialogue sessions while ignoring systems thinking, analyzing the problem as a whole around observable data, and taking actions. We have also experienced the difficulty of generating solutions when dialogue, and social and emotional intelligence are ignored and focus is set only on data and system structures or action. Therefore, it was of critical importance that the five disciplines and tools were not perceived as out of reach, utopic, or a highly intellectual pursuit; but were considered with applicable in everyday life.

Teams getting the training on the five disciplines, setting ambitious targets on their project topics and setting out with enthusiasm could easily go back to their old habits, or focus on a few tools they were familiar with and ignore the others when faced with the difficulties of everyday life. Such a process could lead to a mental model like *"Yes, these all sound good and important, but they are abstract and it takes too long to get a result. However, in real life, we have tangible problems that need to be dealt with immediately."* This could result in loss of belief in the Learning Organization. Over the years, we have developed an approach that enabled the use of all five disciplines together without losing focus. We use simple methods which prevent return to everyday habits and ensure the internalization and experimentation with five disciplines on real-life projects. The aim of these methods is not to impose restrictions on the teams; on the contrary, to prohibit restrictions everyday habits may bring and to prevent them from returning to their comfort zones from the learning zone, where real learning takes place. Before beginning the practice, we ask the team members promise that they will stay committed to these methods. We emphasize the fact that from time to time, due to leaving their comfort zones, they may find it difficult and strange to work with these methods but learning can hardly take place without leaving one's comfort zone. Let's mention some of these simple practices:

Meetings are held once or twice a week for six months, and begin with each team member and guest, if any, sharing "how they feel". The content of these disclosures may include a development in health, work, or personal life; an issue which makes them happy or unhappy; or their feelings about the course of the team. Every meeting is concluded with the question "How do you think this meeting went?" We don't want anyone to leave these meetings with a feeling or opinion that they have kept to themselves. These two simple "how" questions have a magical effect. They enable people to see each other as fellow humans rather than only as colleagues; they enable them to "connect" with each other, and not feel lonely, or left out. Team members begin to share and new friendships are formed. Those who feel rather uneasy attending meetings in the beginning, most often state that they feel much better as they leave. There are team members

who keep in touch and continue socializing years after their teams have parted.

**Social Network and Appreciation:** When teams analyze the current reality, or during implementation, they ask for the opinions and support of all relevant parties to make them a part of the social network. The team expands with the social network built around 7-9 people. The team sends a written “Thank You” note as an acknowledgment to each person who joins the network, informing also top management of the company and the manager the person directly reports to. During interim and final presentations, members of the social network are acknowledged by name, thus acknowledging their individual role in the overall success.

As a result of this, learning organization teams and coaches do not compete with each other or others within the corporation; neither do they run any contests or choose winners. Collaboration and unity are foundational. Vision and success are shared and celebrated collectively.

Teams with fast developing social networks often experience improvement in results even before they actually begin the implementation as a result of the vision/goal of the team becomes a shared vision of its social network.

**Cause and Effect Map and Implementation Chart:** These two tools enable the five disciplines to be methodically implemented on the project topic, and make up the main structure of the practice.

The implementation chart and cause and effect map are constructed around the shared vision of the team. Team members thoroughly examine the obstructions on the way to their shared vision using a cause and effect map. For example, if their vision is to lower the energy consumption, they write “energy consumption is higher than our target” at the center of the cause and effect map. Then they connect the causes of the problem in the center, and proceed with writing root-causes for each cause. If a cause affects more than one other cause, it gets connected to all those, thus revealing the points of leverage. When teams aim a venture such as developing a new product instead of handling a problem, the cause and effect map gains a context which enables risk analysis and progress monitoring. Tasks related to causes are assigned in the implementation chart.

We have some rules to be followed when writing down the causes. It is essential for everyone to speak, to fully comprehend what each person says, and to reach a mutual understanding before putting down the related cause and/or task. Every cause that team members come up with is examined with “the ladder of inference” approach. In the cause and effect map, we write not our subjective assumptions but observable data which lead us to those assumptions. In order to do this, we first elaborate and thoroughly examine data. If necessary, in order to broaden the perspective when examining a particular cause, a large number of people may be invited; and, in addition, data from the field may be collected. For such invitations and data collections, tasks are assigned on the implementation chart and the outputs of each task are followed individually in relation to the cause and effect map.

Let’s elaborate the use of cause and effect map with the example of a team that has worked on inventory optimization. An extensive cause and effect map was used for the solution of the issue. Here we will talk about a limited part of that cause and effect map which will set an example. It was difficult to keep track of the amount used for some of the frequently used materials with excess in inventory. The team detected one reason for this excess as “demand for more than needed”. A member said, “There’s excessive demand because people are insensitive and the purchasing department doesn’t put enough pressure on them”. If these were to be accepted without further questioning and written in the cause and effect map, and tasks aimed at solving them were to be assigned, the team could head toward solutions which would make it difficult to

place purchasing orders, prolong the process for control purposes, and create friction between production and maintenance staff and purchasing. However, the team, following the rules of cause and effect map and being aware that the statement “people are insensitive and the purchasing department doesn’t put enough pressure on them” was in fact a mental model at the top of the ladder of inference, assigned tasks aimed at testing this mental model around observable data. First, they spoke to the people who requested the materials in question, those who worked in purchasing, and those who calculated inventory costs. Studying previous orders, purchases and inventory records, they tried to elaborate and understand the data further down the ladder of inference. As a result of these studies, they reached two different reasons that caused the current reality. The purchasing department, based on their previous experiences, assumed that the demand was more than the actual need and purchased less than the amount requested. Those filling the order forms in turn assumed that less than what they asked for would be purchased according to their past experience, so they requested more than they needed. In other words, they were in a vicious circle. Furthermore, the purchasing department was trying to keep the merchandise cost low by placing bulk orders. On the other hand, production and maintenance teams tried to keep extra materials in their departments so that they would not be affected by the delay caused by the purchasing department trying to collect all the requests before placing such bulk orders; just like why they asked for more than they needed, they were trying to avoid the additional cost any disruption in manufacture would bring about. These materials kept in departments were unrecorded. Although they were individually in small quantities, added up to a significant total in time but were unnoticed by the other departments that needed them because they were not seen in inventory records. Therefore, demands and the quantity in inventory kept getting higher. Another underlying cause detected by the team was that the users of the materials in question did not know the inventory costs. Unrecorded inventory also made it impossible to calculate the real costs. For these reasons, they decided to bring together the departments who demand the materials, who did the purchasing and who calculated the costs. Past prejudices could further upset relations instead of creating solutions together. It was essential to engage in skillful discussion in the meeting where discussions would be based on deep listening and balancing advocacy and inquiry and suspending assumptions by focusing and exploring observable data. This required serious preliminary preparation. The team began with calculating the cost of the unrecorded inventory in departments. They also collected data related to hold-ups in production due to lack of that material and calculated the costs of those hold-ups. Then they brought together all the related parties. The meeting began with team members sharing the data in detail; this way, they prevented potential mutual accusations. Observable data enabled the departments to understand each other’s points of view and see the problem as a whole. They reached consensus on the importance of lowering inventory cost without interrupting production. Further during the process, they carried out the cause and effect map together to extend the causes of the problem and see the bigger picture; they also included suppliers in the process. In the end, they altogether celebrated the success of the new system they designed, developed and implemented together to achieve their shared vision. What had previously kept them from such a practice were the mental models they had developed by their past experiences. If they hadn’t come together and tested those mental models around broader data, they would keep on appealing to quick fixes with side effects. They would find themselves trapped in an increasingly worsening “Shifting the Burden Archetype”.

As the example also shows, a cause and effect map cannot be carried out any further without using tools of mental models such as the left column, the ladder of inference and skillful discussion; and, in addition, **team learning** and **systems thinking** disciplines. Furthermore, it requires the alignment of **personal visions and masteries** with the shared vision of the team.

During the initial meetings, there are very few causes connected to the main problem or topic in the cause and effect map because, as explained above, the five disciplines must be used to

explore the causes to reach the underlying variables for these causes. Arrows are used to display the relations between the causes. While implementation tasks are assigned for the root causes, tasks to collect data may continue for exploring the root causes of others. The data are not always in the form of numbers and graphics. Most of the time, they are collected through on site visits, invitations to team meetings, observations and pilot practices. Each action is monitored by follow-up tasks to see whether the cause has actually been removed or not and whether there are any side effects. A substantially wide social network is activated again to accomplish this. If the follow-up tasks fail to yield positive results, the cause is reexamined. Mental models are questioned one more time. As for actions with positive results, sustainability tasks are assigned. A cause and effect map, rather small at the beginning, may turn into a huge drawing in following months. Data collecting, invitation, appreciation (sending thank you notes), implementation and sustainability tasks can be followed on the implementation chart. Teams share the team files containing cause and effect map and implementation charts with coaches, sponsors and all the team members every week. This way, all parties of the Learning Organization Practice Team can follow the actions and share their thoughts and data and contribute.

After a while, the cause and effect map begins to look huge and complex. Yet, in spite of the complex look, even someone who knows nothing about the topic can get the whole picture when explained on the cause and effect map. However, the habit of using systematic and categorized visual tools like fish bone diagram may lead the team to categorize the causes without analyzing the problem and to ignore the relations between them. As these categories are mainly mental models created by past experiences, they may hinder to understand the current reality and to see leverages. At that point, it is the responsibility of coaches to explain to the team that the complicated visuality of the cause and effect map results from the fact that it is an image reflecting the dynamic and interrelated connections within the existing system; and to prevent the team from returning to their comfort zone using the tools they are most familiar with. The five disciplines are implemented and internalized all through this process.

A cause and effect map made in the past is not valid for a problem that is experienced currently. The existing reality and fundamental solutions have to be discovered together all over again each time because the underlying causes and dynamics may be totally different even though the symptoms of the problem seem to be the same as in the past.

In time, team members begin to apply the thinking of cause and effect map in dealing with other business or personal problems without even being aware that they do so. Our capacity to create the common future we desire is generated through accepting that there are no ready-made answers-prescriptions and embracing uncertainty and learning together all over again in view of the dynamism of life. This is exactly why it is essential to become a “learning” organization instead of a “knowing” one.

### ***Sustainability of Learning Organization Practice Teams and Human Resources Systems***

Associating Learning Organization Team Practices also to the performance appraisal system and career planning systems along the process is important with regard to its long-term sustainability.

For instance, a performance appraisal system that supports Learning Organization Practice Teams promotes cooperation and expanding social relations/networks rather than only competition. A performance appraisal system that focuses on only being better than each other instead of achieving together, on the other hand, causes silos and barriers and competition between departments and blocks the Learning Organization Practice teams which try to build a culture of cooperation and collective thinking aimed at a shared vision.

Our experiences in career planning systems show that being a member of or coaching a Learning Organization Practice Team works as a powerful executive training program, and managers gone through this system play a crucial role in sustaining and expanding the learning organization culture within the corporation.

All in all, “it’s structure that determines behavior”. When failed to associate to critical corporate systems such as performance appraisal and career planning, the developing learning organization culture in a corporation is bound to show symptoms of inconformity and maladaptation to the existing structure. At that point, either the corporation improves the systems through learning, or the learning organization practices wind down.

### ***Roles and Responsibilities within the Learning Organization Practice Teams Process***

The function of a **Learning Organization Practice Teams coach** is to support the implementation and internalization of the five disciplines in project practices. Therefore, a coach, whether consultant or internal, is not a knowing person who tells others what and how to do but someone who flows with the process and the team; who is responsible for creating a learning environment and who shares this responsibility with the team; in short, a “Learning Organization Practice Team coach” is also a person who is learning.

Internal coaches begin as members of Learning Organization Practice Teams, and later become practice team coaches. Thus, the internal capacity is built and the number of employees and managers who can apply the learning organization disciplines on solid business problems increases.

Another sine qua non of the practices is the top management of the corporation. **Top management assumes an active role in this learning environment as project sponsors.** They initially accept responsibilities such as monitoring team reports, attending team meetings from time to time and supporting the teams. Thereby, they also practice the five disciplines and become learning role models.

**Human Resources Department assumes a very important role in organizing, expanding and monitoring learning organization practices, and integrating them to the existing systems within the corporation.**

**As consultant-coaches**, our role in the past 11 years have been in a continuous change parallel to the Learning Organization spirit. In the early years, we have focused on one-to-one coaching of the teams, trying to increase the number of people who can apply the five disciplines of the learning organization in their professional and personal lives. Today, we are focusing on the process of supporting the development of internal coaches, on systems for the sustainability of the Learning Organization Practices in the cooperation, and on searching together for solutions to new problems brought about by corporate needs. We place emphasis on bringing a new perspective, sharing our experiences in other corporations, and learning together.

While the time we spent at Cimsa decreased over the years, the depth of our experience and the power of learning together have increased. We have become a team that speaks the same language and shares the experiences and stories accumulated over the years. Currently, Çimsa is not just a corporation for Yavuz, and I, where we offer consulting services. It is a corporation that we deeply care for, and feel at home as our working relationship is based on mutual respect, love, and sharing.

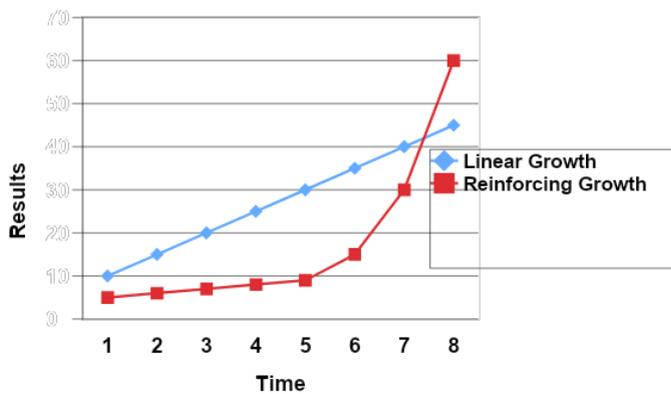
## AN EVALUATION OF ÇİMSA'S JOURNEY OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN ITS 11<sup>TH</sup> YEAR (MEHMET HACIKAMILOĞLU – GENERAL MANAGER, ÇİMSA)

Looking back at these past 11 years, I see that we have realized important changes and accomplishments. Being an executive myself, I would like to begin my story with the top management's perspective. First of all, Learning Organization is not a structure in which some people (top management) know, and the others learn and do what they are being told. It's a structure that prioritizes listening, understanding, and collective thinking; a structure in which we learn continuously and together. We, managers, have an impatient side that wants things to happen then and there, and this may hinder learning and change. During this process, I personally experienced how important patience is for change. For example, we hastened to extend the results we achieved with the two teams we established in the first year and increased the number of teams to five in the second year; but we weren't able to pay as much attention to them as we should. Therefore, in later years, we didn't have more teams than we could handle. Through this learning experience we decided to keep this process in a slower but stable pace.

At the point we are now, I see myself and all our management team responsible of the field/garden where learning and change will take place. That is, I totally agree with Peter Senge that a manager needs to think and act like a "gardener" as he describes in his book "The Dance of Change". We need to focus to the limits to growth in our garden, provide water and light and deal with weeds and be patient in order to allow the seeds of change to flourish. We cannot order a plant to grow all at once without giving it the necessary time and place to thrive. Similarly, we are aware that we can get nowhere by just simply asking people or companies to change.

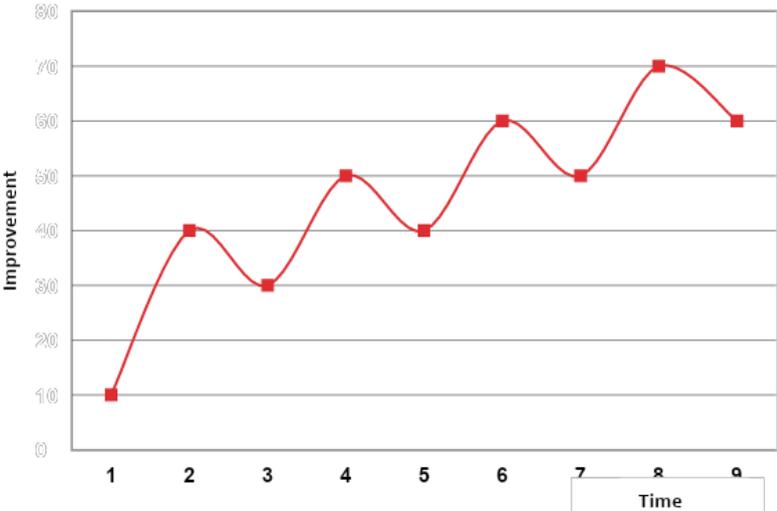
This is not to say that we are free to sit back and laze around. On the contrary, as the management team, we have a dynamic mission which requires us to care for each learning organization practice team and to personally implement the five disciplines and their tools; to listen, understand and share; to allow no compromise regarding the use of learning organization tools and disciplines; to follow the results closely; to acknowledge achievements and to learn from failures; and to acknowledge and appreciate the social networks leading to success.

The results of the Learning Organization practices display a reinforcing growth rather than linear, as seen in the graph below.



For this reason, you have to continue patiently in the early years, and then to work on sustaining the momentum and never to think that you have already learnt it all and give up.

As managers, you must be aware of two main threats. The first is, as I have explained above, your impatience may cause the seeds to dry up before they get a chance to grow. The second danger is the withering of a green garden due to your taking growth for granted and neglecting your garden. When you closely examine the development process, you will discover that the improvement graphic progressing upward with time in fact fluctuates as shown below.



The fluctuations in the process are perfectly natural, but, if you fail to notice and act on the downward movements, you may begin to slip backward with great speed and come to a point where people will say, “This hasn’t worked, either”. We continue with our yearly learning organization topic-member determination and planning meetings; refreshment programs for management; learning organization practice teams seminars and meetings; coach development processes; and sharing and acknowledgment meetings without skipping a single one. In this way, we can turn the downward movements into upward ones. And, in the meantime, we regard each decline as a new opportunity for learning.

During the past 11 years, we have established many learning organization practice teams for a variety of purposes such as optimizing inventory costs; minimizing energy costs; optimizing internal transportation costs; decreasing energy consumption with reference to decreasing the consumption of compressed air; developing a solid waste burning system; improving productivity; minimizing malfunctions and breakdowns; extending preventive maintenance; maintaining quality and lowering input costs; improving quality; dedusting; resolving customer complaints; improving customer relations; converting an artificial pond on our plant site into a wildlife habitat and nesting area for migratory birds; organizing personal development programs for the children and families of our employees; and organizing family communication programs for the local community. As a result of these, we have together enjoyed many solid achievements including savings totaling millions in Euros; a better and safer work environment; decrease in

carbon dioxide emission; stronger customer relations; and a production staff who can view things from the customers' perspective. We can also add to this list the personal gains achieved by the members of our teams and by their social networks while performing their own jobs during the process.

Our organization's most valuable achievement in these 11 years has been our collective internalization of the mental model "*We can achieve better results through working together.*" Members of our Learning Organization Practice Teams first explore personal and corporate mental models. They question the way they approach a problem and the course they follow in defining the problem. They review the observable data underlying their mental models. This is the point where the real change begins. With the support of social networks, they expand the observable data, and self-criticize when these data do not support their thoughts.

Another important achievement is the ownership of Learning Organization by employees from all levels and the use of the disciplines and tools in their everyday lives. Examples like beginning meetings with the question "How are you?"; the left hand column, the ladder of inference, using the notions of quick fixes and side effects in everyday language, and the use of cause and effect map for problems are indicators that the concept of Learning Organization Practice Teams is far beyond being just a problem solving tool.

Our employees refer to the Learning Organization tools for solving problems in their private lives, too. The use of the cause and effect map by an employee of ours and his child to solve the academic failure of the child, and the results they achieved constitute a very pleasing example to me.

## **EVALUATION OF THE 11<sup>TH</sup> YEAR FROM THE HUMAN RESOURCES PERSPECTIVE**

### **(BİLGEN ÇAĞLI - ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER, CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES)**

Learning Organization Practice Teams draw attention as they are owned and continued by our plants, plant managers, in short, by the field. As the Human Resources Department, we help with the organization, coordination and follow-up of Learning Organization practices. Our Learning Organization project coordinator monitors the teams and works on a one-to-one basis with plant sponsors (plant managers and other executives), team coaches and consultant-coaches. The coordinator also informs top management regularly.

I began to work in Çimsa only a year ago. From a newcomer's point of view, the most important thing I noticed was the positive and supportive environment created by the Learning Organization practices. The positive atmosphere created in the annual sharing and celebration day held by the Learning Organization Practice Teams at the end of the year in which they shared their experiences and achievements had a motivating effect on everyone, including us top managers. We all need this positive environment and the sharing that rejuvenate us and lift our spirits; in other words, we need that space. This platform created by Learning Organization Practice Teams is very important to our Human Resources Department because our goal is to

improve the relations between our employees and to create the environment for them to realize their potential.

Another point that drew my attention was how everyone embraced and loved conducting learning organization work. Most of our plant sponsors were members or coaches in the early teams. Employees are being introduced to the concept of Learning Organization as soon as they joined Çimsa. Therefore, they had developed a common language and approach.

Now I would like to let our project coordinator Mine Hanyalı, who is closely involved with the teams and coaches, tell you about her points of view.

## **LEARNING TO LEARN**

### **MİNE HANYALI – LEARNING ORGANIZATION PROJECT COORDINATOR**

I took part in learning organization practice teams first as a team member, and then as a team coach. Currently, I am the Learning Organization Practice Teams project coordinator. Working with teams, coaches, sponsors and consultant-coaches is an experience that enhances my abilities and makes me happy. In this dynamic process, we have new discoveries every year. There is no end to learning.

Commitment to the Learning Organization disciplines and tools is a very important factor in achieving personal, cultural and bottom line results. All the learning takes place by means of the disciplines and tools (the ladder of inference, the left column, skillful discussion, social relations/networks, developing a shared vision, cause and effect map, implementation chart, awareness of the side effects of quick fixes, etc.). Coaches and sponsors play an important part in this regard. Coaches and sponsors always emphasize that achieving results by using the disciplines and tools of learning organization is much more important than just achieving the results. The use of those tools is one thing we never compromise.

I believe that two aspects of Learning Organization are especially important from the point of Human Resources Department. The first is the personal development of employees. The second is organizational/corporate development. These two aspects interactively affect each other. It is quite difficult to define the limits or draw a graph of this interaction. Employees with a high level of personal mastery turn the company into a Learning Organization, and a company that is a Learning Organization in turn, improves the personal mastery of its employees.

An employee participating one of the Learning Organization Practice Teams first gets to know the feelings of the others in the group. Thereby, he/she reaches out to the team members by being aware of the situation they are in. Everybody within the team listens to each other and refrains from accusing or judging one another when expressing their opinions. This enables them to establish a new style of communication. Furthermore, aptitude for team work; commitment to fulfilling the tasks; and motivation for work are evidences we observe for each team member.

To achieve their shared vision/target, team members ask for the opinions and support of all related parties. This way, even employees who aren't part of a Learning Organization Practice

Teams are introduced to the disciplines and tools of Learning Organization. Acknowledgement (Thank you notes) of all contributors by the teams also adds to the positive environment.

The number of Learning Organization Practice Team members and coaches increased over the years and this enabled Learning Organization to become a culture. The table below displays the number of teams established to date. At the bottom of the table, you can see the cumulative increase in the numbers of teams, members and coaches. These add up to much higher numbers when the social networks of the teams are taken into account.

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Plant	Mersin (2)	Mersin (5) Ready-mixed Cement(1)	Mersin (2) Kayseri (2) Eskişehir (2)	Mersin(3) Kayseri(2) Eskişehir(3) Niğde(1) Ankara(1)	Mersin(2) Kayseri(1) Eskişehir(1) Niğde(1) Ankara(1)	Mersin(2) Kayseri(1) Eskişehir(1) Niğde(1) Ankara(1) Istanbul(1)	Mersin(2) Kayseri(1) Eskişehir(1) Niğde(1) Ankara(1) Istanbul(1) Ready-mixed Cement (1)	Mersin(2) Kayseri(1) Eskişehir(1) Niğde(1) Ankara(1) Ready-mixed Cement (1)
Total Numbers								
Number of Teams	2	8	14	24	30	37	45	51
Number of Members	20	70	130	211	259	303	389	435
Number of Coaches	6	21	39	55	67	76	90	104

I would also like to discuss our plans and thoughts about the future. In the past two years, the monthly coach meetings, which we began upon the request of our coaches were highly beneficial. We organized two-day meetings every month in which all our coaches and our consultant coach came together to share their experiences, discuss their learnings, and the needs, and the actions of their teams, and to deepen their understanding of the learning organization disciplines and tools. These meetings enabled our coaches to master the learning organization in a deeper level. These meetings were also very helpful in increasing synergies amongst our plants that are in different locations, through the coordination of actions and learning from each other. Therefore, we plan to continue with these meetings in the future.

Especially this past year, the plant teams shared not only the results they achieved, but also their social network heroes who supported them in this achievements in their monthly presentations and bulletin-boards in their plants. All the feedback we received strongly suggested that we should go on with our practices with increased emphasis on expanding and acknowledging social networks of learning.

The best aspect of our Learning Organization journey is that learning never ends and never becomes monotonous. As we master the five disciplines, instead of becoming “knowing persons”, we become even more open, willing and excited to learn. We can explore the problems by suspending our mental models/assumptions; can come up with better solutions; and unite to co-create our desired future.

About the authors:

### **Evrin ÇALKAVUR DURMUŞ**

Evrin Çalkavur Durmuş has been working as a Learning Organization consultant since 1995. Her extensive experience and knowledge on Learning Organization practices, combined with the valuable contributions of M. Yavuz Durmuş, resulted in the creation of a unique “Learning Organization Practice Teams” program.

Calkavur Durmus’ book titled “Journey of the Learning Organization – A Tale of Success” was published by Remzi Publishing in 2006. Later, she co-authored with M. Yavuz Durmus: “Seven Flowers of the Garden of Life” and “Living Without Competing,” which were also published by Remzi Publishing in 2008 and 2009 respectively. A board game designed by the same co-authors was titled “Banyan Games: The Blue Planet,” and was introduced by Remzi Publishing in 2009.

Currently, Mrs. Çalkavur Durmuş joins forces with M. Yavuz Durmus to actively participate in “Learning Organization Practice Teams” in various corporations and institutions throughout Turkey.

Born in 1969, Çalkavur Durmuş studied Business Administration at Bosphorus University, and received her Master’s degree in at İstanbul University.

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### **Mehmet HACIKAMILOGLU (General Manager)**

Having completed his undergraduate studies at the Department of Civil Engineering at Boğaziçi University, Mr. Mehmet Hacıkamiloğlu later completed International Business Expertise program at Istanbul University, and the Executive-MBA program at Sabancı University. His career in Sabancı Group began as a Facility Manager at Betonsa, and continued as an Investment and Planning Specialist in the same company. Mr. Hacıkamiloğlu served as Strategy Development and Planning Manager in Akçansa from 1997 to 1999 and as Company Manager in Agregasa from 1999 to 2001. After his service as Finance Coordinator in Akçansa for two years period, he started to work as Deputy General Manager (Financial and Administrative Affairs) in Çimsa. Mehmet Hacıkamiloğlu was appointed General Manager in Çimsa on 01.07.2006 and still holds this position.