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Learning from Successes and Failures  
through a Non-Formal Education Organizational Climate  
in a Municipal Youth Council

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## Abstract

This study investigates learning processes within non-formal educational frameworks, focusing on learning from successes as compared to learning from failures, in a youth leadership group of a municipal youth council. Learning processes were investigated in relation to the organizational climate in the study group. Previous studies have found that learning from failures is the most common way of learning in various organizations and formal educational institutions, while learning from successes is the common way of learning in non-formal educational frameworks (Kahane, 2004).

The non-formal organizational climate is defined as having unique characteristics (Kahane2004,), positing the individual at the center of learning and emphasizing youth leadership development in the community and in society. In these frameworks, learning takes place as part of daily routines and is oriented at experiencing successful activities. Youth leadership development takes place in many non-formal education programs, the *Youth and Student Councils* organization being the leading program in the field. This organization acts in an organizational climate whose purpose is to educate youth elected to participate in the program that promotes democratic and independent youth leadership (Rozenblum & Hermon, N.D.).

Studies have found that unsuccessful activities create the need to learn from failures, but a sense of failure leads to denial and seclusion and undermines the learner's self-confidence, which makes learning from failures very hard (Schechter, 2010). On the other hand, one of the problems of learning from successes is the sense of complacency and overconfidence that might follow it (Ellis et al., 2006) claim that learning from successes inspires a positive atmosphere and its beneficial effect helps to examine the mistakes done on the way to succes as well. Learning from successes paves the way to observation and learning from failures too. Learning from successes and failures together has been found to be helpful in improving performance, as compared to learning from failures alone (Ellis et al., 2006). An organizational climate that provides conditions allowing for learning from successes (Rosenfeld, Sykes, Dolev & Weiss, 2002) paves the way to learning from failures as well (Ellis et al., 2006). The *Youth and Student Councils* organization serves as a case study for learning from successes and from failures in a non-formal organizational climate. Hence, we chose a municipal youth council from that organization to examine the characteristics of learning in such a climate.

**The research method** chosen for this study is qualitative. This method enables us to expose many new phenomena related to learning in an organizational climate of a non-formal framework developing youth leadership. We examined the way the participants sense these experiences against the background of the group organizational climate, to clear the way for more research in the field.

In addition, the qualitative method is flexible and allows for the use of various research methods that lead to the discovery of much data that was unavailable previously. These open new venues for the research of topics not yet studied.

The study participants comprised 24 youngsters, 10 boys and 14 girls at the ages of 13-18, new and veteran members of a municipal youth council group active in a city in the center of the country. The group operates as a leadership group that represents young people vis-à-vis the authorities, acts as an elected council on behalf of the city schools and is subjected to the *Student and Youth National Councils organization*. The research tools included weekly observations on a youth group during one year of their activity, semi-structured interviews with group members, comprising participants acting as members of the group board of directors and participants who had no managerial role. As additional tools we used cellular messages exchanged among group members as well as group documents such as protocols, censorship reports and work procedures.

**Data collection** related on the following guiding questions: 1. In what way does learning from successes and from failures find its expression in the framework of the group? 2. How does the group as a whole cope with the experiences of success and failure in the framework of the organizational climate, while relating to the individual and the group experiences of learning? The first categories were taken from the literature, and then branched out into additional categories based on the findings.

**Data analysis**, based mainly on Gross (1995), included creating categories, examining connections between categories, identifying repeated words and constructing a theoretical conceptual model, in order to expose the characteristics of learning from successes and from failures and identify the organizational values embedded in the organizational climate.

The **main findings** show that the organizational climate is highly important to the promotion of learning processes, as previously indicated by Morgan (2016) and Samuel (2012). There are two kinds of research findings:

1. Findings relating to the organizational climate include the values at the base of the organizational climate of the municipal youth council, norms of conduct and the physical characteristics. These testify that there exists a non-formal organizational climate in the study group. In accord with the Ras pyramidal model (Raz, 2004) as well as Schein's theory (1985), the findings show that the organizational climate includes values of communal vocation of service to the collective, group sense of unity and individual responsibility for what takes place in the group.
2. Findings relating to the learning indicate that learning processes in the study group have three common characteristics, both in the case of success and in that of failure in a given

assignment: motivation, wish to acquire additional tools and ability to cope. On the other hand, in the case of an unsuccessful or a failed assignment, we did not find the behavior characteristic of disappointment and seclusion, behavior that might indicate denial, leading to the avoidance of feedback and learning. However, we did find a characteristic of self-efficacy only in the process of learning from a positive feedback, when the assignment was successful. The participants' reports indicate that this is a collective sense of efficacy that derives from the organizational climate and promotes the organizational strength among the members of the group.

The **research conclusions and discussion** point out that the research findings are underpinned by the theoretical literature that testifies that the organizational climate of non-formal education promotes learning (Lamm, 1974; Kahane, 2004). The current study demonstrates that in the framework under study, the municipal youth council, a process of learning from both successes and failures takes place. In contrast to findings of previous studies (Shapira, 2011; Sitkin, 1992), we did not find characteristics inhibiting learning from failures. The learning characteristics of both experiences are identical. The additional characteristic of a sense of self-efficacy was found only in learning from successes.

In relation to the organizational climate in the municipal youth council, we found that the sense of self-efficacy derives from the values of the organization, characterized as public vocation, group unity and individual responsibility that together create a sense of collective efficacy in all group members (Bandura, 1997; Weick, 1984). This sense of collective efficacy promotes a sense of organizational strength that empowers the group members against failures, and thus enables a process of learning in the case of failure as well (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, Lengnick-Hall, 2011).

Our **research conclusions** emphasize the importance of the non-formal organizational climate and its contribution to the integrated process of learning as a whole. By means of creating an organizational climate that promotes learning from successes, learning from failures becomes possible as well. In relation to the organizational climate, the sense of self-efficacy derived from learning from successes turns into a collective sense of efficacy, thus promoting an organizational empowerment of the group in the face of failures.

The **contribution** of this study lies in its emphasis on the function of managing an organizational climate that promotes all the characteristics of learning in the group. The non-formal organizational climate is unique in its ability to promote learning from both successes and failures. In addition, this study suggests that an non-formal organizational climate enables group members to solidify their sense of self-efficacy derived from experiences of successes into a sense of collective efficacy that contributes highly to the organizational strength of the group.