

Transforming Schools as Learning Organisations Analysis of Leadership Practices

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Abstract

School leadership has gained considerable importance in recent years for improving student learning outcomes by transforming schools into dynamic learning communities. As the roles and responsibilities of school leaders continue to expand, administrators are increasingly expected to be reflective and responsive to students' academic performance and overall school effectiveness. Consequently, enhancing school performance requires developing schools as self-sustaining organisations capable of continuous growth and improvement.

However, prevailing policies, structures, and organisational cultures in India largely position schools as institutions that primarily implement government directives rather than function as autonomous learning organisations. This administrative orientation often limits innovation, collaboration, and creativity. To operationalise the concept of schools as learning organisations, the present article examines school leadership practices that support organisational learning and transformation. The findings suggest that aligning leadership practices with the reforms envisioned under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering community participation are critical pathways for transforming Indian schools into vibrant learning communities.

By situating school leadership within a conceptual framework that links leadership roles with the transformation of learning environments, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on school reform and organisational learning in the Indian context.

Keywords: School Transformation, Learning Organisation, School Leadership, Self-sustaining Schools, Learning Landscape

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of schools as learning organisations has gained increasing attention among researchers, policymakers, and educational administrators. According to Brandt (2003), a learning organisation is capable of adapting to a changing external environment, fostering innovation, and improving student learning outcomes. Traditionally, schools were expected to equip students with essential academic skills. However, contemporary education systems are tasked with preparing learners to navigate rapidly evolving technologies and uncertain futures (Banerjee and Duflo, 2012).

In addition to the cognitive and academic competencies, students must develop strong social and emotional foundations to succeed in today's highly dynamic global economy (Fullan and Quinn, 2015). While enhancing problem-solving abilities and cognitive capacities remains crucial, many school systems face persistent challenges in responding to students' changing needs. As Schleicher (2015) notes, many schools continue to resemble institutions of past, with limited pedagogical innovation and insufficient teacher capacity to address diverse learning demands.

Indian schools face additional challenges arising from the resource constraints, socio-economic disparities, and variations in teacher preparedness. Although, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly

emphasises on collaborative culture, teacher professional development, and leadership as a catalyst for change—educational administration in India continues to be predominantly compliance-driven. As Sindhi (2016) observes, this administrative orientation prioritises conformity over creativity, thereby restricting the transformative potential of policy reforms. To address these challenges, school leaders must adopt a visionary role that supports distributed leadership, teacher empowerment, and community engagement. Integrating global leadership theories with contextualised Indian practices is essential for transitioning schools into sustainable learning organisations.

FRAMEWORK ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

School leadership is conceptualised as a dynamic and evolving process that shapes learning environments and provides equitable opportunities for all learners. Drawing on the work of Leithwood (1998) and Senge (1990), school leadership is viewed as a critical agent that connects cultural norms, institutional processes, and structural mechanisms to transform schools into learning organisations.

Leadership extends beyond administrative management and routine operational tasks. Contemporary perspectives emphasise distributed leadership, collaborative cultures, and adaptive strategies aimed at redesigning educational institutions. Harris and Jones (2018) highlight

the role of school leadership in setting the strategic direction of learning organisations. Nowadays school leaders increasingly adopt inclusive, technology-enabled, and transformative approaches to promote equity, innovation, and teacher development (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020; Banoğlu *et al.*, 2023).

Further research underscores the importance of fostering collaborative professional cultures and continuous learning among teachers (Papazoglou and Koutouzis, 2019; Karanikola *et al.*, 2019). Reports by the OECD (2021, 2023) recommend balancing inclusive learning practices with teacher well-being to build resilient and sustainable learning cultures. Within this framework, school leadership is redefined as a central force, driving professional growth, systemic change, and the evolution of schools into self-sustaining learning organisations.

CONSTRUCT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

A Learning Organisation (LO) is characterised by a shared vision, mission, and purpose that emphasise continuous improvement and the systematic development of people. Central to this vision is the creation of collaborative structures that support reflection, dialogue, and collective problem-solving. Regular team meetings and professional interactions have been identified as effective mechanisms for strengthening organisational learning and coherence (Welsh *et al.*, 2021).

Across the literature, two recurring themes dominate definitions of learning organisations: transformation and continuous learning. Pedler *et al.* (1997) emphasise organisational change and transformation, while Moilanen (2005) highlights the growth of learning at individual, team, and organisational levels, grounded in shared values, vision, and goals. Similarly, scholars underscore improvement and adaptability (Rowden, 2001), continuous learning (Senge, 1990), and the creation, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge as defining features of Learning Organisations (Lewis, 2002).

When these characteristics are embedded within organisational structures, institutions gain a competitive advantage through enhanced creativity, responsiveness, and adaptability. Importantly, several researchers conceptualise learning organisations not as fixed end states but as evolving processes. Ortenblad (2004) describes LOs as a dynamic pursuit rather than a predetermined goal, while Burdett (1993) frames them as a continuous process rather than a final destination. Griego *et al.* (2000) further define effective learning organisations as those that engage in ongoing organisational renewal and progressively deepen their understanding of collective expertise.

The development of a learning organisation also requires the deliberate unlearning of entrenched, non-collaborative practices that hinder knowledge sharing and

professional growth (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). To support this transformation, organisations must adopt innovative strategies, such as fostering a strong learning culture, encouraging continuous experimentation, building close professional networks, developing effective information systems, aligning incentive structures, strengthening human resource management practices, and redefining leadership roles (Coppieters, 2005).

While these conceptualisations

provide a robust international framework, it is essential to contextualise them within the realities of the Indian education system, where schools often operate within rigid administrative structures and limited autonomy. Drawing upon established constructs of learning organisations, Table 1 outlines key characteristics and their implications for Indian schools, highlighting pathways for transforming schools into sustainable learning organisations.

While the universal principles

Table 1
Concept and Constructs of a Learning Organisation (LO)

Author(s)	Concept of LO	Constructs of LO	Indian Implications
Senge (1990)	Employees in such an organisation are constantly challenged to achieve what they desire; innovative and expanded ways of thinking are promoted; collective aspirations are supported; and staff members learn new skills in their areas of expertise.	• Personal mastery; • Shared vision; • Mental models; • Team learning; • Systems thinking.	A shared vision is needed to align the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, such as interdisciplinary and holistic education.
Garvin (1993)	As an organisation develops and gains information, it distributes that knowledge to other organisational units and modifies its behaviour.	• Logical problem-solving; • Experimentation; • Take into account prior mistakes; • Gaining knowledge from others; • Passing on knowledge.	Indian schools are embracing low-cost innovations and teacher-peer learning models, such as Kerala's ICT Initiative and Delhi's 'Happiness Curriculum.'
Moilanen (2005)	Learning is integrated into an organisation's values, goals, and daily operations that manage it intentionally.	• Transitioning factors; • Identifying the goal; • Interrogation; • Enfranchising; • Assessing.	Peer observations and cooperative lesson planning are examples of daily operations that can support the professional learning and development of teachers in schools with limited resources.

Watkins and Marsick (1996)	An organisation that is capable of continual development and transformation was once considered to be a learning organisation.	• Continuous learning; • Dialogical inquiry; • Collaborative learning; • Distributive leadership; • Knowledge application.	India's drive for community engagement by School Management Committees (SMCs/ SMDCs) is reflected in distributed leadership. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one way to institutionalise inquiry and collaboration.
Armstrong and Foley (2003)	A learning environment is supported by learning organisations' suitable cultural aspects (visions, beliefs, assumptions, and actions). Identifying and facilitating learning needs is essential to promoting people's learning and development. Structured considerations play a significant role in the support and execution of workplace learning activities.	• Creating the actual learning environment; • Addressing the actual learning needs for all; • Fulfilling the demands of learning overall; • Workplace application of learning and expanding.	In Indian schools, cultural vision combines contemporary teaching methods with regional customs and flexibilities to promote inclusivity and uphold a learning-oriented school culture.
Kools and Stoll (2016)	Schools are places where people learn and grow all the time, and they put a lot of emphasis on this.	The seven elements are: • Learning leadership • Collaboration Inquiry, innovation, teamwork, knowledge sharing, vision, and external partnerships	It helps establishing professional learning communities and teacher collaboration and aligns with the NEP-2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission.
Harris and Jones (2018)	Schools can become places where people learn by using leadership as a spark.	• Places a strong emphasis on inquiry-based methods, professional learning communities, and distributed leadership.	Beneficial for Indian schools pursuing shared leadership and collaborative cultures.
Field (2019)	Critical perspective: In the absence of structural support, schools as learning organisations often remain rhetorical.	• Draws attention to conceptual ambiguity and a lack of political and structural clarity.	In the Indian context, NEP-2020 and other policies require more than just rhetoric they require systemic support.

Admiraal <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Schools serve as professional learning environments that aid in the professional growth of teachers.	• Constructs include things like teamwork, integrated professional development, learning leadership, organisational transformation, and a shared objective.	Supports Indian teacher training programmes by incorporating professional development into school culture (DIKSHA, NISHTHA).
Banoğlu <i>et al.</i> (2023)	The principals' technological leadership influences learning organisation culture.	• ICT integration with professional learning, team learning, a shared vision and mission, and systems thinking.	It demonstrates how digital leadership creates LO culture and is pertinent to India's Digital India and DIKSHA platforms.
Gouëdard, Kools and George (2023)	Schools positively impact teachers' job satisfaction and well-being as learning organisations.	• Constructs focus on things like well-being, leadership, teamwork, professional growth, and a culture of inquiry.	SLOs are a way to improve teacher job satisfaction and are directly related to the retention and morale of Indian teachers.

Source: Sharifirad, M. S. 2011. Kools and Stoll (2016), Harris and Jones (2018), Field (2019), Gouëdard, Kools, and George (2023).

of a learning organisation are widely acknowledged, their effective implementation must be contextually adapted to diverse socio-economic realities, cultural complexities, and evolving educational reforms such as India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission. Contextualisation demonstrates that learning organisations cannot be applied as uniform models but must respond to local conditions, systemic constraints, and policy priorities.

Building on Senge's (1990) foundational ideas, a learning organisation within a school context

reflects a sustained commitment towards continuous improvement through systematic thinking, shared vision, team learning, and reflective practice. Extending Garvin's (1993) perspective to educational settings, such organisations engage in systematic problem-solving, purposeful experimentation, and effective knowledge transfer across academic units. Moilanen (2005) conceptualisation further emphasises the deliberate integration of learning into core institutional values and everyday practices, attention to temporal dimensions of learning, and the empowerment of both teachers

and students as active agents of change.

Similarly, Watkins and Marsick (1996) define schools as learning organisations characterised by collaborative cultures, continuous learning processes, and the practical application of knowledge to real-world contexts. Armstrong and Foley (2003) underscore the centrality of organisational culture in nurturing positive learning environments and enabling the translation of learning into practice. Collectively, the perspectives of Senge (1990), Garvin (1993), and Moilanen (2005) conceptualise learning organisations in school education as institutions deeply committed to continuous learning, cultural integration, and evidence-informed practices that empower educators and learners alike.

In the Indian context, these principles require careful adaptation. NEP 2020 emphasises a shared vision of holistic development, community engagement, and learner-centric education, aligning closely with learning organisation ideals. National initiatives such as NISHTHA, which focuses on professional development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), promote collaborative learning and team-based reflection among teachers. School leaders, operating as systems thinkers, are required to balance the local linguistic and cultural diversity with national educational priorities. Furthermore, the principle of

continuous learning must explicitly include capacity building for teachers working in under-resourced and diverse school environments to ensure equity and sustainability.

AIM OF THE STUDY

To address issues related to improving school effectiveness, the present paper investigates the role of school leadership in conceptualising and nurturing schools as learning organisations. The study focuses on redefining schools through the lens of learning organisation theory and examining leadership approaches that facilitate organisational learning and adaptability. As highlighted by Marsick and Watkins (2003), a school's capacity to adapt is strongly influenced by leaders' openness to innovation and new ways of thinking. Accordingly, the overarching aim of this paper is to examine how school leadership is evolving to support the transformation of schools into learning organisations at both structural and organisational levels.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This paper adopts a conceptual review design, grounded in a comprehensive analysis of existing literature on learning organisations, school leadership, and schools as learning organisations. More than 50 research studies published in reputable national and international journals were reviewed to inform the analysis.

The study aims to contextualise the concept of learning organisations within school education, with a particular focus on the Indian schooling system.

To strengthen the conceptual foundation, literature was sourced from peer-reviewed journals indexed in ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, SpringerLink, Taylor and Francis Online, SAGE, and ResearchGate, along with policy reports from organisations such

as the OECD and the World Bank. The synthesis of empirical research, theoretical perspectives, and policy documents enabled the development of a robust conceptual framework to inform future research, leadership practices, and education policy formulation. The emphasis on contextualising learning organisations within Indian schools were supported by the existing research, thereby enhancing the methodological rigour and relevance of the study.

Table 2
Analysis of Studies on School Leadership and Learning Organisation (LO)

Author(s)	Category	Focus	Findings
Senge, 1990; 1995	Conceptual/Theoretical	Systems thinking, five disciplines	The Learning Organisation (LO) model includes systems thinking, a shared vision, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery.
Garvin, 1993	Conceptual Framework	Organisational learning practices	Emphasised knowledge transfer, experimentation, and problem-solving as crucial techniques.
Leithwood <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006; Leithwood <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Empirical and Reviews	Transformational and distributed leadership	Student learning outcomes, teacher motivation, and teamwork are all significantly impacted by leadership.
Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Fullan, 2021	Conceptual and Case Studies	Coherence framework system change	Building capacity and maintaining leadership coherence are essential for long-term school reform.
Harris and Jones, 2018	Empirical Review	Distributed leadership, PLCs	Continuous improvement and collaborative professional cultures are fostered by leadership.
Papazoglou and Koutouzis, 2019	Empirical Study	Principals' leadership and teacher learning	Professional development for teachers is associated with collaborative leadership.
Karanikola <i>et al.</i> , 2019	Empirical Study	Leadership practices collaboration	Teacher learning and collaborative cultures are maintained by leadership.

Banoğlu <i>et al.</i> , 2023	Empirical Study	Technological leadership, Learning Organisation culture	Innovation, shared vision, and systems thinking are all enhanced by digital leadership.
Gouédard, Kools and George, 2023	Comparative Study	Leadership, teamwork, well-being	A learning organisation culture improves teacher retention and satisfaction.
Welsh <i>et al.</i> , 2021	Empirical Study	Team meetings and collaboration	Organisational learning is improved through regular teamwork.
Pedler <i>et al.</i> , 1997	Conceptual	Transformation processes	Learning organisation is not a fixed state; it is a continuous evolving processes.
Moilanen, 2005	Empirical/ Conceptual	Organisational learning integration	Learning is a part of how we do things, what we want to do, and what we believe.
Rowden, 2001	Conceptual	Continuous improvement	Stressed that the culture of learning needs to keep getting better.
Lewis, 2002	Conceptual	Knowledge acquisition and transfer	Emphasised the production and dissemination of knowledge in LOs.
Ortenblad, 2004	Conceptual	Learning organisation as process	Learning organisation was defined as dynamic and ever-changing rather than static.
Burdett, 1993	Conceptual	LO as continuous process	Emphasised that education is a process rather than a destination.
Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012	Conceptual	Professional capital	Promoted the unlearning of non-collaborative methods.
Coppieters, 2005	Conceptual	Leadership requirements	Emphasised the part that leadership plays in cultivating LO culture.
Watkins and Marsick, 1993; 1996; 2003	Empirical/ Questionnaire (DLOQ)	Organisational learning dimensions	Suggested seven LO dimensions: leadership, teamwork, inquiry, and ongoing learning.
Armstrong and Foley, 2003	Empirical	Workplace learning culture	Learning in the workplace requires organised cultural support.
Admiraal <i>et al.</i> , 2019	Empirical Study	Professional learning, and leadership	Schools as settings for professional development: cooperation and integrated professional development.

Field, 2019	Conceptual/ Critical	Critique of learning organisation rhetoric	Advised against using LO rhetorically in the absence of structural backing.
Brandt, 2003	Conceptual	Adaptive schools	Schools should encourage innovation and adjust to their surroundings.
Banerjee and Duflo, 2012	Empirical	Education and skill development	Emphasised the necessity for schools to adjust to the swift changes in society.
Schleicher, 2015; 2018	OECD Reports	Teacher skills and leadership	Identified world-wide issues that schools face; leadership is essential.
OECD, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2021; 2022; 2023	Policy Reports	SLO framework, leadership, equity, digital learning	Highlighted cooperation, creativity, and the welfare of teachers while defining the seven learning organisation dimensions.
Marsick and Watkins, 2003	Conceptual/ Framework	LO dimensions	Emphasised the importance of leadership, teamwork, and inquiry.
Silins <i>et al.</i> , 2004	Empirical	Systems thinking in schools	Systems-level understanding is supported by demonstrated leadership.
Fullan, 2012	Conceptual	Change leadership	Strengthened leadership as a catalyst for systemic change.
Sindhi, 2016	Policy/ Conceptual	School leadership gaps	Schools are not learning organisations; they are administrative organisations.
Muralidharan, 2018	Empirical	Community participation	Highlighted school revitalisation driven by the community.
Mukherji and Grewal, 2016	Policy	Leadership and learning orgs	The key to transformation is leadership.
ASER Reports 2018, 2022	Survey Data	Student learning outcomes	Brought attention to the ongoing learning gaps in Indian schools.
World Bank, 2018; 2022	Policy Reports	Education system performance	Highlighted the necessity of systemic changes for education.
Marsick, 1999	Conceptual	Learning culture	Demonstrated the connection between performance and organisational learning culture.
Sammons <i>et al.</i> , 1995	Empirical	School effectiveness factors	11 essential components for successful leadership have been identified.

Schechter, 2012	Empirical	School culture and leadership	A positive culture improves organisational learning.
Pont, 2020	Policy Review	Leadership in schools	Emphasised the importance of leadership in achieving success.
Senge <i>et al.</i> , 2000; 2008	Conceptual	Organisational learning evolution	An expanded learning organisation model that emphasises shared learning and vision.
Ainscow <i>et al.</i> , 2016	Empirical	Inclusion and leadership	Leadership practices foster inclusive school systems.

Source: Compiled by the author based on in-text citations and references used in this study

SCHOOL AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

Conceptualising schools as learning organisations requires an integrated framework that actively combines systemic innovation, teamwork, and shared vision. Within this framework, school leaders play a pivotal role in fostering a culture of inquiry, interprofessional collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and accountable administrative practices. When these elements are embedded effectively, Indian schools have the potential to transform into learning organisations that are responsive to both local contexts and global educational developments. This study foregrounds the significance of schools as learning organisations (SLOs) as a means of enhancing school effectiveness and adaptability.

Drawing on Silins *et al.* (2002), the SLO framework emphasises environmental scanning, shared goal-setting, and a school culture that encourages risk-taking. Such conditions prioritise experimentation and exploration, thereby promoting innovation at all levels of schooling. This approach

highlights the interconnectedness between schools and their external environments. Further, Kools and Stoll (2016) underscore the importance of organisational processes and structures that support knowledge creation and innovation, while Paletta (2011) advocates for a shared, system-wide vision complemented by continuous professional development. The OECD (2016) expands this framework by incorporating the principles of transparency, quality, participation, and collaboration as core dimensions of learning organisations.

The value of individual mastery, shared vision, and team learning in fostering lifelong learning, flexibility, and creativity in educational settings is well articulated in Senge's (1995) *The Fifth Discipline*. Synthesising these perspectives, schools as learning organisations can be understood through three interconnected dimensions—processes that support change over time, practices that guide everyday professional activity, and pathways that demonstrate leadership and strategic direction.

In essence, transforming a school into a learning organisation requires a hands-on, collective approach grounded in open communication, shared responsibility, and a sustained commitment towards a continuous improvement. Such an approach enhances a school’s capacity to respond effectively to the evolving needs of students and the broader educational environment.

In the present study, the term pathways refers to the strategic direction established by school leadership, including alignment with national education reforms, the articulation of a shared vision, and the maintenance of high expectations for teaching and learning. In the Indian context, school leaders are increasingly integrating the goals of NEP 2020 into institutional visions, particularly those related to competency-based learning, inclusive education, and holistic student development.

Leadership behaviours enacted through routine institutional functioning are conceptualised as practices. These

include collaborative curriculum planning, reflective teaching, peer observation, and participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). National initiatives such as NISHTHA, along with state-level teacher mentoring programmes, have contributed significantly to the systematic implementation of these practices across Indian schools.

The processes that ensure long-term organisational learning and sustainability include structured feedback mechanisms, community engagement, data-informed decision-making, and continuous professional development. In India, these processes are exemplified through School Management Committees (SMCs), Community-led Monitoring (CLM), and ICT-enabled platforms for resource sharing. Together, these mechanisms actively support the leadership pathways sustained by teachers, teacher educators, principals, researchers, policymakers, and other educational stakeholders, thereby strengthening the school’s identity as a learning organisation.

Table 3
Components and Characteristics of School as Learning Organisation (LO)

Component	Characteristics
Personal mastery	Personal vision, purpose, alignment, values, perception, transformation, and awareness (Senge, 1990; Gouëdard, Kools and George, 2023).
Shared vision	Dialogue, enthusiasm and commitment, common intentions and goals (Kools and Stoll, 2016; OECD, 2023).
Team learning	Open communication and evaluation, discussion and dialogue, collaboration, mutual creativity, and engaged employees (Harris and Jones, 2018; Admiraal <i>et al.</i> , 2019).

Mental model	Anchoring, backwards chaining, classical conditioning, commitment and consistency bias, shared knowledge, comparative advantage, the illusion of control, inversion principle, loss aversion/risk-taking, status quo bias, and the map is not the territory, circle of competence (Senge, 1990; Banoğlu <i>et al.</i> , 2023).
Systems thinking	Teachers are better equipped to assist pupils with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate education system (Silins and Mulford, 2004; Fullan, 2021).
Knowledge sharing and innovation	Embedding systems for capturing and sharing learning (e.g., DIKSHA, NISHTHA); fostering inquiry, experimentation, and innovative teaching practices. (OECD, 2017; Fullan, 2021).
Learning leadership	Distributed and technology-enabled leadership that nurtures professional growth, builds capacity, and sustains school improvement. (Leithwood <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Papazoglou and Koutouzis, 2019).

Source: Senge, P. (1995); Kools and Stoll (2016); Harris and Jones (2018); Papazoglou and Koutouzis (2019); Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020); Fullan (2021); OECD (2017, 2023)

Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) conceptualise learning organisations as comprising multiple, distinct yet interrelated dimensions that collectively support continuous learning and organisational development. The first dimension emphasises the provision of ongoing learning opportunities, whereby organisations create structures and conditions that enable individuals to learn continuously as part of their everyday work. The second dimension, inquiry and dialogue, involves cultivating a culture in which questioning, reflective feedback, and experimentation are encouraged. The third dimension, team learning, reflects a collaborative mindset and the skills required to work effectively in teams, enabling shared problem-solving and collective

knowledge construction (Watkins and Marsick, 1996).

The fourth dimension focuses on empowerment through a shared vision, wherein members collaboratively build a common purpose and engage in dialogue about the gaps between current practices and aspirational goals. The fifth dimension, embedded systems, refers to the establishment of mechanisms and protocols for capturing, storing, and disseminating organisational learning. The sixth dimension highlights systems connection, recognising the influence of both internal dynamics and external environmental factors on organisational thinking and action. The seventh dimension, strategic leadership, underscores the role of leaders in deliberately leveraging knowledge to drive change,

enhance innovation, and respond effectively to emerging challenges. requires the integration of structural arrangements with human capacity, thereby fostering a culture of continuous learning and transformation.

Supporting this perspective, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) argue that sustainable organisational learning

Table 4
Dimensions of a Learning Organisation (LO)

Component	Description	Implication
Make opportunities for continuous learning.	• People should have the chance to acquire the skills necessary for success through their work. There are opportunities for continual learning and development.	Teachers and staff participate in continuous professional development, which is facilitated by digital platforms (e.g., DIKSHA, NISHTHA) and integrated into daily practice. (Admiraal <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Kools and Stoll, 2016).
Encourage inquiry and discussion in the process of learning.	• People acquire this skill as they improve their productive reasoning abilities. It involves learning to both listen to and articulate one’s viewpoints.	Fullan (2021), and Harris and Jones (2018) contend that staff can challenge presumptions, exchange viewpoints, and develop innovative pedagogy when there is a culture of reflection, experimentation, and communication.
Encourage collaboration and team learning.	• Questions, feedback, and experimentation are encouraged in the culture.	Cross-school networks and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) encourage cooperation, peer mentoring, and group problem-solving. (Gouëdard, Kools, and George, 2023; OECD, 2017).
Set up systems to record and distribute learning.	• One advantage of working in a group is the freedom to think differently. • The purpose of groups is to work together and share knowledge. • The organisation’s culture is what encourages and promotes teamwork.	Knowledge is captured, stored, and shared by mechanisms and digital tools; data-driven decision-making improves organisational learning. (OECD, 2021; Banoğlu <i>et al.</i> , 2023).
Motivate others to work for a common goal.	• People develop, own, and carry out shared visions. • In an ownership environment, people are motivated to decide what they are accountable for.	A shared vision of holistic student learning stimulates ownership, accountability, and group responsibility. (OECD, 2023; Kools and Stoll, 2016).

Link the organisation to its surroundings.	• It aids the individual in comprehending how their effort impacts the entire organisation. - To adjust work practices, people scan the environment.	Schools establish connections with parents, communities, non-governmental organisations, and broader networks to enhance student learning and adjust to environmental change. (OECD, 2022; Silins and Mulford, 2004).
Leadership model and support learning.	• Communities are integral to the organisation. • Take the role of a leader, promote learning, and support it. • The strategic use of learning by leadership drives organisational outcomes.	Leaders encourage digital innovation, distributed leadership, and well-being; their strategic role propels sustainability and change. (Papazoglou and Koutouzis, 2019; Leithwood <i>et al.</i> , 2020).

Source: Marsick, V.J. and Watkins, K.E. (2003); Kools and Stoll (2016); Fullan (2021); Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020); Banoğlu *et al.* (2023); Gouédard, Kools, and George (2023)

Applying the Marsick and Watkins (2003) model to schools requires contextualising its seven dimensions to address the specific demands of school education. This adaptation involves designing curricula that emphasise lifelong learning skills and vocational competencies; fostering critical thinking through open dialogue and reflective practices in classrooms; and promoting collaborative cultures through group-based learning and professional learning communities. It also includes the establishment of knowledge-sharing platforms, the development of shared educational visions, the integration of local and cultural contexts into the curriculum, and the modelling of lifelong learning by educational leaders (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006).

By aligning these dimensions with the unique challenges and opportunities within school systems, the model aims to strengthen holistic development, cultural relevance, and community engagement. The seven dimensions proposed by Marsick and Watkins (2003), as outlined in the Table 5, align closely with the pathways, practices, and processes described in this study, and are further reinforced by the framework proposed by Kools and Stoll (2016). However, effective implementation within Indian educational settings necessitates careful contextual adaptation, particularly through strategies such as resource sharing, collaborative leadership, and sustained community participation.

Table 5
Integrated Model for the School as Learning Organisation (LO)

Component	Description
Creating a common vision focused on the learning of all pupils	An impactful educational vision, developed collaboratively by staff, promotes a comprehensive and exciting learning environment, while driving instructional techniques and unifying decision-making. This inclusive method, which includes students, parents, and the community, ensures a common commitment to comprehensive student development and excellence.
Developing and promoting continuous professional learning for all employees	In dynamic learning community, employees actively pursue ongoing professional development that is aligned with student-centred goals. Induction and mentoring effortlessly integrate new members, creating a culture of relevance and dedication. Schools functioning as learning organisation promote collaborative professional learning environment in which teachers collectively reflect on and improve their instructional practices.
Fostering team learning and teamwork among all employees	The school fosters a collaborative learning atmosphere where teachers communicate face-to-face and use Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to share knowledge and resources. This approach, rooted in trust, mutual respect, and reflection, strengthens teamwork and consultation among staff, and enhances student learning experiences and outcomes.
Establishing a culture of inquiry, exploration, and innovation	In this educational context, staff integrate purposeful face-to-face interactions and ICTs to enhance collective learning experiences. Fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect, staff actively engage in reflective practices, supported by the school's commitment to allocate dedicated time and resources for practical collaborative work.
Integrating the systems for accumulating, transmitting, and learning	The school employs a rigorous approach, systematically assessing progress, and disseminates exemplary and deficient practices among staff. This evidence-informed culture, complemented by robust dialogue structures and adept data analysis, guides resource allocation, instructional strategies, and the iterative refinement of the school development plan, and theories of action.
Learning inside and from the outside world, as well as a larger system	The organisation, functioning within a dynamic and adaptive flexible system, actively engages in egalitarian collaborations with external entities and fosters collaborative learning among staff. This inclusive approach extends to parents, teachers, administrators and the local community, while strategic relationships with higher education and non-governmental organisations enhance the overall educational environment.

The modelling and development of a learning leadership approach	Successful school leaders provide a good example by stressing continuous learning and delegating leadership responsibilities to encourage staff and student collaboration and growth. They ensure organisational activities are consistent with the school's vision, fostering a dynamic learning environment through proactive change, stakeholder collaboration, and a comprehensive approach to students' diverse needs.
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Source: Kools, M. and Stoll L. (2016).

The transformation of schools into learning organisations necessitates the collaborative articulation of an educational vision that is responsive to contextual diversity and oriented towards holistic student development. Central to this transformation is the deliberate cultivation of a culture that emphasises continuous professional learning, systematic induction of new faculty, and the creation of a dynamic and relevant educational environment (OECD, 2016). Establishing a collaborative learning culture grounded in trust and reflective practice strengthens teamwork and enhances professional dialogue among teachers, thereby improving the quality of students' learning experiences (OECD, 2017).

Purposeful professional interactions supported by the strategic use of technology, alongside dedicated time for reflection, foster a culture of inquiry and innovation within schools. Simultaneously, an institutional commitment to ongoing evaluation, dissemination of effective practices, and strategic collaboration with external stakeholders strengthens an evidence-informed culture within the

Indian educational context (OECD, 2014). At the core of this process is learning-centred leadership that models continuous growth and ensures organisational practices remain aligned with the shared vision. Such leadership enables proactive adaptation and collaborative responses to the diverse learning needs of students (Mukherji and Grewal, 2016).

TRANSFORMING INDIAN SCHOOLS INTO LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

Student learning outcomes are widely regarded as a key indicator of an education system's effectiveness. ASER reports from 2018 to 2022 indicate a decline in overall learning levels across India, with government schools experiencing a sharper decline in productivity, while private schools have largely maintained their performance levels. For instance, ASER data show that in 2008, 68 per cent of Grade 5 students in private schools could read a Grade 2 level text; this figure declined to 61 per cent in 2012 and stood at 65 per cent in 2018. Such trends highlight the urgent need to address

learning deficits at the school level through responsible and collaborative engagement of all stakeholders.

The World Development Report (2018) emphasises that the learning crisis can be mitigated only when learning difficulties are recognised as a priority and addressed systematically. However, many Indian schools struggle to function as learning environments due to the absence of a collaborative culture that values professional interaction and shared learning among teachers (Sindhi, 2016). Teaching practices, often remain isolated, limiting opportunities for peer observation, collective reflection, and professional growth.

Collaboration within and across schools and communities is a defining feature of learning organisations. In the Indian context, community engagement is often limited to system-driven mechanisms such as School Management Committees (SMCs) or School Management and Development Committees (SMDCs), which primarily focus on financial or infrastructural matters rather

than active involvement in students' learning processes. Emerging evidence suggests that schools can be revitalised and sustainably renewed not through hierarchical control, but by fostering collective ownership and shared responsibility for learning among all stakeholders (Muralidharan, 2018).

Consequently, the transformation of schools into learning organisations requires the collective articulation of aspirations, the development of shared understanding, and the strengthening of capacities across the system. In challenging contexts, Senge (1995) metaphorically described this shared vision as the rudder that keeps an organisation on course. Today, many schools report high levels of stress among teachers and leaders, stemming not only from workload pressures but also from fragmented, silo-based working structures (OECD, 2018). Addressing these challenges necessitates a shift towards collaborative, learning-oriented school cultures that support both professional well-being and sustained educational improvement.

Table 6
Paths, Practices, and Processes for Transforming Indian Schools
into Learning Organisation (LO)

Dimension	Global insights	Indian Application
Paths—vision and direction	Leadership aligns school goals with continuous improvement, creates a shared vision, and sets high standards (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006; OECD, 2016).	As guiding principles for Indian schools, NEP 2020 supports competency-based learning, holistic education, and foundational literacy (NIPUN Bharat).

Practices— leadership and collaboration	Learning is integrated into everyday activities through reflective teaching, collaborative curriculum design, peer coaching, and professional learning communities (Senge, 1990; Fullan and Quinn, 2015).	Through initiatives like Happiness Curriculum (Delhi), NISHTHA teacher training, and Kerala’s ICT-enabled pedagogy, Indian schools embrace practices that promote creativity and teamwork.
Processes— sustaining transformation	Marsick and Watkins (2003) state that professional development programmes, data-driven decision-making, feedback loops, and community involvement all support a learning organisation.	The sustainability of change is reinforced by state-level performance tracking, community-led monitoring, School Management Committees (SMCs), and ICT platforms such as DIKSHA.

Source: Adapted from Marsick and Watkins (2003); Leithwood and Jantzi (2006); Senge (1990); Fullan and Quinn (2015); and updated with insights from Leithwood, Kools and Stoll (2016); Harris and Jones (2018); Harris, and Hopkins (2020); Fullan (2021); Gouédard, Kools, and George (2023); OECD (2023)

This framework demonstrates that while international perspectives highlight the core characteristics of learning organisations, their effective implementation in India requires state-specific research, meaningful community participation, and alignment with national educational reforms.

**EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR
TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO
LEARNING ORGANISATIONS**

Developing a culture of lifelong learning within Indian educational contexts necessitates strategic and sustained attention towards the teacher training and professional development. This study underscores the importance of experiential learning, mentoring, collaborative teamwork, and reflective practice as critical components for enhancing leadership competence and confidence

(Kumar, 2025). These elements should not be confined to higher education alone but must be systematically integrated into school and vocational education systems as well.

The study suggests that the structured professional development initiatives—encompassing mentoring, shared leadership, and continuous opportunities for reflective dialogue—are essential for fostering autonomy, innovation, and professional growth among both teachers and students. In the Indian context, school leaders are increasingly responsible for designing not only physical learning spaces but also digital, social, and cultural learning environments. This includes leveraging national platforms such as DIKSHA, nurturing collaborative teacher networks, promoting inclusive classroom practices, and engaging local communities as active educational partners.

To ensure coherence with national reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, school leaders must move beyond administrative compliance and actively curate and expand learning spaces that support pedagogical innovation. The transformation of schools into learning organisations depends significantly on the strategic coordination and leadership capacity of school heads. Their roles must therefore be examined within the distinctive socio-economic, cultural, and institutional realities of the Indian education system.

Effective school leaders must articulate a compelling vision and mission rooted in the Indian ethos, emphasising continuous learning, adaptability, and collaboration. This shared vision serves as a foundational step in the transformation process, supported by teacher leadership and community engagement. Cultivating a culture of continuous learning, requires the strategic integration of professional learning opportunities that empower teachers with autonomy and institutional support to experiment with innovative pedagogical practices. Such empowerment enables teachers to play a pivotal role in navigating the complexities of Indian classrooms and diverse learner needs.

Professional learning frameworks must be tailored to the specific challenges and contexts of Indian schools (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999).

Facilitating platforms for teachers to exchange best practices, share ideas, and collaboration enhances leadership efficacy and collective capacity (Kumar, 2025; Pont, 2020). Adapting to change in the Indian context further demands a nuanced understanding of socio-economic diversity and cultural variability. School leaders must therefore actively endorse change, providing adequate resources and support to help staff adapt to evolving technologies, curricular reforms, and instructional innovations.

Strategic resource allocation is particularly critical in a system marked by disparities in infrastructure and funding. School leaders must make informed decisions that prioritise learning goals while accounting for regional and socio-economic differences. Community engagement assumes heightened importance in India, where parental involvement and local partnerships significantly influence educational outcomes. Accordingly, school principals must be viewed as custodians of school culture, modelling learning-oriented behaviours that shape broader educational narratives.

A strong commitment to continuous professional development, sensitivity to cultural nuances, and a growth mindset that values learning from challenges are essential leadership attributes, especially within a cultural context that emphasises resilience and perseverance. In sum, school principals play a central and

multifaceted role in transforming Indian schools into learning organisations. Successfully fulfilling this role requires a deep understanding of India’s socio-economic, cultural, and educational complexities, as well as the capacity to cultivate dynamic learning environments that meet diverse student needs and prepare learners for future challenges.

DISCUSSION

Global perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of how educational institutions can function as learning organisations; however, their application within the Indian education system—characterised

by significant diversity, equity challenges, and quality disparities—requires careful contextualisation. In its simplest form, a learning organisation may be understood as one in which members continuously adapt their behaviours and mindsets based on learning, derived from experience. Within the school context, learning organisations are institutions where teachers, leaders, and stakeholders actively engage in ongoing processes of improvement through collaboration, reflective practice, innovation, and adaptive strategies (Senge *et al.*, 2008). These collective efforts aim to enhance organisational learning capacity and foster sustainable development.

Table 7
Dimensions and Indicators of Learning Outcomes

Dimensions	Key Indicators	Outcomes
Setting a direction	• Creating a shared vision. • Establishing agreement on objectives. • Setting high standards for performance.	Inspiring school leaders are well-linked, strongly united, trusted, and motivated through success.
Development of individual people	• Providing individualised mentoring, reflection, modelling good practice. Simulating the mind. • Setting an example of good behaviour and morals is crucial.	An organisation’s most important resource is its workforce which requires strengthening of teacher skills, autonomy, and innovation. Tasks and structures can only be understood with the involvement of individuals.
Redesigning of the organisation	• Developing a culture. • Establishing and maintaining procedures and mechanisms for collective decision-making. • Establishing connections with the neighbourhood.	The key to successful outcomes is to built adaptability, shared responsibility, and lasting partnerships

Source: Kumar, A. K., 2025; Jantzi, D. and R. Steinbach, 1999

An institution qualifies as a learning organisation when its goals, strategies, policies, and daily practices consistently support both individual and collective learning (Senge, 2001). A compelling and shared vision of what the school seeks to become, is relative to its current state, serves as a key motivating force for sustained improvement. Continuous learning enables educators and staff to achieve organisational objectives more effectively while also strengthening the institution's capacity to respond to internal and external challenges (Senge *et al.*, 2000). In this sense, learning organisations gain a strategic advantage by fostering adaptability, innovation, and resilience.

Sammons *et al.* (1995) identified 11 critical factors that contribute to the effectiveness of educational institutions, offering a holistic framework for the development of high-performing pedagogical ecosystems. Central to this framework is continuous professional learning supported by collaborative practices, along with the development of shared visions and common goals that

promote coherence and teamwork among staff (Schleicher, 2018). Equally important is the creation of a learning-conducive environment that prioritises academic focus and employs purposeful instructional strategies. High expectations and clear standards challenge all stakeholders and promote a culture of aspiration and accountability (Schechter, 2012).

Furthermore, effective schools encourage students through fair disciplinary practices, constructive feedback, and systematic monitoring of progress, thereby reinforcing positive learning behaviours. Strong partnerships between home and school, facilitated through active parental engagement, further strengthen the learning ecosystem. Finally, a sustained commitment to professional development for all staff members reinforces an organisation-wide culture of learning and continuous improvement (Sammons *et al.*, 1995). Collectively, these factors provide a comprehensive blueprint for transforming schools into effective learning organisations, with particular relevance for addressing

the contextual challenges faced by Indian educational institutions.

Table 8
11 Factors for Effective School Leadership

Factors	Features
Continuous 'professional' learning	• Robust and focused • Collaborative strategy • Learning by expert leaders
A shared vision and aims	• A shared goal • Continuity of application • Teamwork and collegiality

A setting for learning	• A calm environment • Aesthetically pleasing workplace
Focus on learning and teaching	• Maximising the time spent learning • Concentration on academics • Efforts to achieve learning goals
Teaching with a purpose	• Effective planning • A clear purpose • Structured instruction • Adaptive technique
Elevated standards	• Everyone has high aspirations • The exchange of expectations • Presenting a cognitive difficulty
Boosting encouragement	• Feedback on discipline that is open and fair
Evaluating development	• Observing student achievement • Assessing school performance
Rights and duties of students	• Boosting student self-esteem • Roles requiring accountability • Command over the work
Collaboration between home and school	• Participation of parents in the schooling and development process of their children
School as a 'learning organisation'	• All school staff participate in continuous professional learning and development

Source: Sammons, P., Hillman, J., and Mortimore, P. (1995). Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and updated with evidence from day et al. (2016); Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020); Harris and Jones (2018); OECD (2023); and Banoğlu et al. (2023).

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