

## Examining School Administrators' Beliefs and Understandings about Strategic Planning: An Exploratory Typological Perspective

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### Abstract

The present study aimed at determining the planner profiles of school administrators through unearthing their beliefs and understandings towards strategic planning by adopting a typological perspective. The exploratory descriptive approach was employed in the research. The research was conducted with the participation of 21 school administrators in a large province in Southeastern Turkey. The data were collected via one-on-one interviews. Thematic and conceptual coding revealed that the profiles labeled as “right-handed planner, left-handed planner, analyst and catalyst” by Mintzberg (1994) in the strategic planning process could define school administrators' understandings and beliefs about planning in the current study. In the research, it was revealed that the planner profiles displayed by school administrators differed based on contingent and contextual specificities. However, it was understood that they decided on which planner profile to adopt based on their experiences rather than a technical perspective. The planner profiles of school administrators were discussed in terms of their potential contribution to the strategic planning processes.

**Keywords:** *Strategic planning, planner profiles, school administrators, qualitative research.*

**DOI:** 10.29329/epasr.2018.143.2

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## **Introduction**

Organizations can survive and flourish as far as they can cultivate the capacity and resilience to progress towards their goals by responding and adapting themselves to emerging developments, demands and standards. The struggle for survival and progress is inescapable for organizations as they have to propel in uncharted waters in the environment which is unexpected, ever-changing and full of difficult conundrums. Then one of the most crucial things that organizations need to do is to engage in an endeavor for building bricks for a sustainable future for themselves while making the most of the present moment, which requires planning. Planning as a fundamental managerial function can help organizations to painstakingly carry out their missions and also draw the path to be walked and the ultimate goal to be reached in the future brick by brick. However, as the challenges and developments faced are almost completely different from the ones faced in the past, formerly effective techniques, methods, and tools may not assist organizations in keeping up with novel ones under most circumstances both today and in the future. Traditional approaches to planning or outdated ways of tackling challenges may not result in desired consequences or, at least, aid organizations in building the capacity and resilience aforementioned. Strategic planning seems to be promising for organizations, if implemented properly, to cultivate the capacity and resilience to move in desired directions by thinking, learning and acting strategically (Bryson, 2011).

Public organizations are obliged to determine a mission and vision and make strategic planning in accordance with the regulation and adopted principles as a requirement of Public Finance Management and Control Law No. 5018 (2003) in Turkey. Therefore, school administrators' understandings and skills regarding planning may be analyzed systematically at every school through the scrutinization of strategic planning processes. Although making strategic plans is an obligation for educational organizations, some problems arising from various factors are faced with in this process. Among these problems are the ones which are resulted from school administrators' planning skills and understandings and their lack of information regarding planning. Memduhoğlu and Uçar (2012) found that even though school administrators had positive perceptions about strategic planning, they believed that studies pertaining to strategic planning are carried out in opposition to the purpose of strategic planning. In the study by Arslan and Küçüker (2016), it was unearthed that Turkish school administrators regarded themselves insufficient in strategic planning and that they are in need of relevant training. Consistently, Çetin (2013) revealed that both school administrators and teachers could not communicate soundly and that school administrators did not have an understanding regarding strategic management, which led to problems in the planning process. Not only the managerial role that school administrators have bureaucratically but also their power to influence school stakeholders are considered to be amongst the most significant driving forces facilitating the

effective implementation of strategic planning at schools. However, for effective strategic planning, school administrators must have planner characteristics so as to undertake their planner roles properly.

The following sections offer a review of the concept of strategic planning, the benefits of strategic planning for organizations and the factors that hinder the success of strategic planning process and implementation and the conceptual framework that this research was based on.

### **Literature review**

As a broader practice and part of strategic management (Altinkurt & Bali, 2009; Bryson, Edwards, & Van Slyke, 2017), strategic planning can be defined as an approach or process which incorporates concepts, procedures, tools, and practices that help envision the future positioning of an organization and move the organization towards the direction in which it can achieve its future state by coalescing people around a shared vision and balancing their expectations (Bell, 2002; Bryson, 2011; Bryson et al., 2017; Cheng, 2013; Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2008). Strategic planning requires future-focused thinking (Wilcoxson, 2012); and it is viewed as a process in which an organization defines its mission or goal and makes decisions regarding the allocation of resources to reach its mission or goal (Hu, Liu, Chen, & Qin, 2017). In the public sector, strategic planning is important for achieving goal alignment, continuity of effort, and performance-related effectiveness (Bryson et al., 2017), and it is like an organizing instrument which affects workplace interactions in the organization (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011) and the organization's relationships with the environment served in order for these relationships to remain relevant and productive in the long-term (Pashiardis, 1993).

In the field of education, it functions as a process of matching the activities of the school with the current and emerging environment (Davies & Ellison, 1998); and it sets the actions and directions that can lead to development and growth in schools (Wanjala & Rarieya, 2014). Strategic planning leads organizations to engage in self-analysis and develop procedures regarding ongoing evaluation and feedback about their policies and priorities (Fernandez, 2011). Through strategic planning, school administrators can recognize the importance of the future and notice critical trends and inclinations, and thereby, skillfully respond to them by adapting and/or modifying systems and structures in order to address new challenges and situations (Chukwumah, 2015). Schlebusch and Mokhatle (2016) consider that strategic planning is a critical tool for school improvement, and they claim it to be key to the proper functioning of the school. Consistently, Cheng (2011) believes that it functions as a catalyst for the sustainable development of the school. It can also be a valuable tool for the management of organizational change (Conley, 1993), and it is important for organizational success in education (Babaoğlan, 2015) and a crucial element of organizational improvement in all levels of education (Lindahl, 2016).

Another significant issue to be accentuated is strategic planning's role in driving decision-making (Mankins & Steele, 2006). Strategic planning lays the foundation for advanced decision-making: it concentrates the organization on significant issues and challenges and helps it to find what decision-makers should do and to develop their advanced decision-making skills. It, thus, helps achieve improved performance and organizational responses (Demirbolat, 2005).

### **Conceptual framework**

Although effective strategic planning requires the involvement all of the staff (Cheng, 2013) in all processes from the starting phase to the implementation phase, the role that school administrators can play in strategic planning and the effects of leadership-related skills, competencies, and characteristics are highlighted in the related literature. For example, Wanjala and Rarieya (2014) argue that leadership is essential to the successful implementation of strategic planning. Kocaoğlu and Balkar (2016) revealed that school administrators need to become strategic leaders in order for attaining desired results. According to Baloğlu, Karadağ, and Karaman (2008), there are different strategy areas in educational organizations. However, achieving its existential goal is a school's first strategy. In this process, the success of the school depends mostly upon the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of school administrators. In the Arabacı, Namlı, Zincirli, and Özer (2016) study, the lack of managerial support in the strategic planning process was found to be one of the factors hindering the success of strategic planning. Consistently, Chukwumah (2015) found that schools did not have the skills, leadership qualities and commitment to strategic planning practices that school administrators should possess. These studies imply that effective and proper implementation of strategic planning depends on administrators' management understanding and leadership style (Aslanargun, 2011).

Based on the research presented above, we attempted to frame our study around the critical role of school administrators' understandings and beliefs about strategic planning in particular. Revealing school administrators' understandings and beliefs, or mental models, regarding strategic planning can help us learn how they perceive strategic planning, its nature and processes and the factors affecting the success and failure of strategic planning, and the invisible variables regarding behaviors of school administrators in the strategic planning process. As understandings and beliefs are mostly embodied in form of attitudes and behaviors towards specific actions, we believe that understandings and beliefs of school administrators may exert influence on their strategic planning actions in detail. Their understandings and beliefs can unearth whether they could act as the sole authority in the process or engage in collaborative actions, ensuring all of the stakeholders' involvement, communication, and commitment. Through such a perspective, the leadership fallacy that is addressed by Bell (2004) in the strategic planning process can also be understood.

By examining Turkish school administrators' understandings and beliefs about strategic planning, their characteristics as planners were revealed. School administrators' planner profiles were unearthed through a typological perspective in the research. Thus, a picture of how school administrators exhibited their management roles as well as planner roles were attempted to be built up.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study attempted to determine school administrators' planner profiles through unearthing their beliefs and understandings towards strategic planning by adopting a typological perspective. With this purpose in mind, the following research questions were attempted to be answered in the study:

1. What are school administrators' beliefs about strategic planning?
2. What understandings do school administrators have towards a successful strategic planning preparation and implementation process?
3. What are the planner profiles that school administrators' planning understandings and beliefs are compatible with?

### **Method**

This study was conducted through a descriptive approach by using qualitative methods and techniques. The exploratory descriptive approach was employed in the research as it is one of the qualitative descriptive methods which focus on social contacts, life events and relationships between people. In this approach, the meanings that a group of people attaches to any events emergent in their lives are examined (Rizzo Parse, 2001). Qualitative descriptive inquiry helps researchers to understand the phenomenon in question, its nature, how and in what way it is perceived (Sandelowski, 2000).

This section presents information about the study group and its characteristics, collection of the data and data analysis. Furthermore, the studies conducted for validity and reliability are delineated in the parts specifying the collection of data and data analysis as the issues related to validity and reliability were dealt with in these parts.

### **The Study Group and Its Characteristics**

The study group of the research consisted of 21 school administrators working at schools in Gaziantep province, a large city in the South-east of Turkey. It was thought that private and public school administrators' understandings towards planning might be different due to socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of their schools. For this reason, maximum variation sampling technique was used to ensure the diversity in terms of points of view when selecting the participants. The

participating administrators were selected on a voluntary basis. Of the administrators, 11 administrators were working at public schools, while 10 of them were working at private schools. Their ages ranged between 36 and 49. Their seniority was between 4 and 10 years. 9 of the administrators had a graduate degree, and 12 of them had an undergraduate degree.

### **Collection of the Data**

The data were gathered via semi-structured interview technique. Previous research conducted on strategic planning studies at schools was examined while constructing the questions used in the interviews. Then an interview protocol including 10 main interview questions and 8 related probes was developed. Two pilot interviews were held by using this protocol. However, it was seen in the pilot interviews that school administrators knew strategic planning process very well and managed the process actively and therefore they gave comprehensive answers to the questions and while answering the questions, they answered other questions as well.

It was observed that asking detailed questions hampered school administrators from expressing their views clearly by making connections between situation, and it was decided that asking comprehensive (general) questions would be more effective. For this reason, the interview form was reduced to 5 main comprehensive interview questions by taking into consideration school administrators' answering styles and the flow of the pilot interviews. The length of the interviews conducted with school administrators ranged between 38 and 77 minutes. As for the credibility (internal validity) of the research, it was paid attention to keep the interviews long in duration and thereby gather deeper and more accurate information in this way. Furthermore, the researchers summarized what they understood from the participants' answers and took their consent on the accuracy of what they understood (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The interview questions developed in accordance with the first and second research problems are presented below:

1. Do you attach importance to the preparation of strategic plans at your school? For what purposes do you think planning should be done?
2. What issues should be considered in the planning process in order to ensure the success of strategic planning? Why?
3. Which characteristics of your school do you consider in preparing and implementing strategic plans? Why?
4. What are the issues that you take into consideration as you believe that they have critical value for the implementation of strategic plans? Why?

5. How do you ensure teachers' participation in the preparation and implementation process of strategic plans?

School administrators' answers were recorded via a tape recorder during the interviews and were then transcribed verbatim. Each participant was given a code specifying their school type as such S-SA1 (State School - School Administrator1), S-SA2, P-SA1 (Private School - School Administrator1), P-SA2, and their views were transcribed using these codes.

### **Data Analysis**

The research data were analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, thematic and conceptual coding was done for school administrators' understandings and beliefs about planning. The coding was done at theme and sub-theme levels. The themes were identified in line with the interview questions, but the sub-themes were determined based on school administrators' views. Therefore, the themes in the research were labeled as "purposes of strategic planning, success factors in strategic planning, school characteristics that affect strategic planning, success factors in the applicability of strategic plans and ensuring participation in the planning process". 39 sub-themes related to these five themes were specified. In order to ensure the reliability of the research, the codes were constantly compared with each other in the coding process and thus whether there was deviance in coding or not was detected (Gibbs, 2007). For internal validity (credibility), the results obtained during the content analysis were given to two school administrators, and their consent was taken on whether the codes reflected their views (Erlandson et al., 1993).

In the second phase, first of all, the concepts and characteristics which represent planner profiles regarding strategic planning were investigated in the light of the related literature. Specified concepts and characteristics were compared with the results of the content analysis conducted in the first phase. As a result of this, the profiles labeled as "right-handed planner, left-handed planner, analyst and catalyst" by Mintzberg (1994) in the strategic planning process could define school administrators' understandings and beliefs about planning in the study. For this reason, the characteristics identified as a result of the comprehensive conceptual coding regarding the profiles were incorporated into a larger characteristic in line with their joint aspects. After this incorporating coding process, right and left handed planners' characteristics were collected under six umbrella concepts, and the characteristics of the analysts and catalysts were combined into five umbrella concepts. Subsequently, the sub-themes which showed school administrators' understandings and beliefs about planning and were identified in the first phase of the content analysis were matched with the characteristics of the profiles. Thus, the characteristics that school administrators had as planner were listed as "right-handed planner, left-handed planner, analyst, and catalyst" depending on the profiles.

In some of the matches, it was observed that more than one feature and different profiles were matched with one sub-theme. The characteristics related to profiles featured as umbrella concepts and covered more than one characteristic; therefore, the sub-theme related to school administrators' beliefs and understandings about planning matched with more than one characteristic of the same profile. The fact that there were the points at which different profiles clashed caused multiple matching of the same sub-theme under different profiles. When examining school administrators' characteristics related to these profiles, authentic quotations were taken from school administrators' talk. The coding process pursued in the second phase which aimed at determining school administrators' planner profiles and related characteristics contributed to the internal reliability of the research as it was done in accordance with a certain conceptual framework (Mintzberg, 1994) in the study and the data were presented via a descriptive perspective without any interpretations (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). In order to ensure the validity of the research, the research as a whole was given to an external evaluator, and thus feedback was sought for the objectivity of the research processes and comprehensibility of the findings (Creswell, 2014). For the confirmability (external reliability), the raw data and results obtained were examined comparatively, using the confirmative strategy by a field specialist (Erlandson et al., 1993), and thus the specialist's approval was taken about the cohesion between the raw data and the results. Within the context of consistency (internal reliability) study, the methods used, the coding process and the codes emerged were presented to an expert, and feedback was taken from him about the consistency of the methods utilized (Morrow, 2005).

### **Findings**

In the findings section of the research, first of all, the findings related to the first (school administrators' beliefs about strategic planning) and second (school administrators' understandings about a successful strategic planning preparation and implementation process) research questions were provided. Then based on the answers to the first and second research questions, planner profiles regarding school administrators' understandings and beliefs about strategic planning (right-handed vs. left-handed & analyst vs. catalyst) were determined.

#### **The First Research Problem: School Administrators' Beliefs about Strategic Planning**

School administrators' beliefs about strategic planning were coded based on themes of purposes of strategic planning and success factors in strategic planning. Table 1 demonstrates the thematic coding regarding school administrators' beliefs about strategic planning.

**Table 1.** *The Thematic Coding Regarding School Administrators' Beliefs about Strategic Planning: Themes of Purposes of Strategic Planning and Success Factors in Strategic Planning*

Purposes of Strategic Planning	Success Factors in Strategic Planning	
Securing the order (st1)	Developing applicable strategies (st8)	An active research process (st15)
Managing change (st2)	Making average decisions that everyone can agree (st9)	Thinking the consequences of strategies (st16)
Being innovative and creative (st3)	Making situational analysis (st10)	Developing strategies appropriate for school characteristics (st17)
Creating a vision (st4)	Considering the changing needs (st11)	Being future-oriented (st18)
Obtaining the competitive advantage (st5)	A teaching staff inclined to and voluntary for teamwork (st12)	Generating realistic ideas (st19)
Changing the way of doing tasks (st6)	Developing creative ideas (st13)	Observing other schools (st20)
Changing attitudes (st7)	Strategic thinking (st14)	

\*St: Sub-theme

When the views of school administrators about strategic planning are examined, a dichotomy can be seen to have revealed. Apart from school administrators who evaluated the purpose of strategic planning from a developmental perspective by regarding it as managing change and being innovative, there were some school administrators who considered strategic planning in a more static perspective such as securing the order and just changing the way of doing tasks. S-SA2, looking at strategic planning from a static perspective, paid attention to the fact that planning is, in essence, a part of the bureaucratic structure by commenting: *“Planning is done in order for the tasks to be run properly. Under the existing circumstances, it is impossible to prepare strategic plans for improving schools. We do not have enough resources and authority to do this.”* Despite this, when the purposes attributed to strategic planning are examined, it may be suggested that evaluations made from a developmental perspective preponderated. P-SA6, who made an evaluation from a developmental perspective, the planning understanding supported both him and his school to renew: *“I, first of all, make efforts to be creative and innovative in strategic planning. If I do not have an innovative planning and management style, then I can only maintain the status quo. I continuously strive to develop myself in order to be innovative and form an atmosphere open to innovation at my school.”*

The only point that private and state school administrators dissented without regards to purposes of strategic planning was about the contribution of planning in gaining competitive advantage. This purpose was only accentuated by private school administrators. One school administrator (P-SA10) stated that their school can be a preferred one thanks to effective strategic

planning: *“As I work at a private school, I have to think about the issue of competition. Our school’s being a preferred one, in fact, depends upon having a good strategic plan. I try to follow what activities other schools carry out. Based on what I have learned, I attempt to detect our shortcomings or what we can do better.”* Thus, she paid attention to the function of planning in launching a competition through development in the private sector.

The sub-themes under the success factors in preparing strategic plans theme demonstrate the differences between school administrators’ planning understandings. One group of school administrators stressed development, competition and change realized through planning by suggesting some aspects such as considering the changing needs, developing creative ideas, being future-oriented and observing other schools.

S-SA7 believed that planning must contribute to innovativeness and creativity of the schools and expressed his views as follows: *“I do not want to make strategic plans just for the sake of doing. I want it to make a contribution or provide a benefit for the school. I always think what a new thing I myself can do at this school. I want teachers to produce new and creative ideas that can be used in strategic plans.”* The school administrators who focused on developing applicable strategies, making average decisions that everyone can agree and generating realistic ideas can be said to have displayed an understanding which supports the status quo and is more static. S-SA4 had such a view: *“What is important for me is the applicability of what is written in plans. You can write everything in plans, but you need to be realistic. I want what we plan to realize. For this very reason, I pay attention to the fact that the strategy developed is applicable.”* This administrator implied that what can be done with strategic planning is limited.

The school administrators who entirely mentioned the technical validity of strategic planning such as making situational analysis, strategic thinking and an active research process drew a different portrait of an understanding regarding the planning process. S-SA3 whose understanding of planning depends on a technical and scientific base argued that the success of strategic planning is linked to making situational analysis and conducting continuous research: *“We cannot start strategic planning before making a situational analysis. However, to criticize myself, I could not every time obtain rich data during situational analysis. When I face with such a situation, I make effort to gather more data. This is because if you could not get adequate data by making situational analysis, you cannot make a right and effective strategic plan.”* The important point to be mentioned here is that the school administrators who adopted a planning understanding depending on a technical and scientific base were holding master’s degree.

When the views of private and state school administrators regarding the success factors in strategic planning are examined, significant differences can be noticed. State school administrators

made more emphasis on determining applicable strategies and realistic ideas; while private school administrators underscored developing creative ideas and engaging in an active research process. The reason behind this difference is noted in S-SA1's statements as follows: "[...] *If the resources owned are inadequate, one cannot make too many innovations. In order for a plan to be successful, we focus on determining our goals, namely, what we can do.*" These explanations show that financial and physical deficiencies at S-SA1's school hampered creativity and forced him as an administrator to carry out more reasonable activities.

**The Second Research Problem: Understandings about a Successful Strategic Planning Preparation and Implementation Process**

School administrators' understandings about a successful strategic planning preparation and implementation process were coded based on the themes of school characteristics that affect strategic planning, success factors in the applicability of strategic plans and ensuring participation in the planning process. The thematic coding regarding the participating school administrators' understandings about a successful strategic planning preparation and implementation process are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *The Thematic Coding Regarding School Administrators' Understandings about a Successful Strategic Planning Preparation and Implementation Process: Themes of School Characteristics that Affect Strategic Planning, Success Factors in the Applicability of Strategic Plans and Ensuring Participation in the Planning Process*

School Characteristics That Affect Strategic Planning	Success Factors in the Applicability of Strategic Plans	Ensuring Participation in the Planning Process
Budget and equipment (st21)	Determining applicable strategies (st26)	Assignment/Behaving in accordance with the bureaucratic structure (st33)
The number of teachers/school size (st22)	Providing the required conditions for the implementation of the strategies (st27)	Voluntary participation (st34)
An innovative teaching staff inclined to teamwork (st23)	Respecting school administration (st28)	Encouraging to think about the future (st35)
Teachers' fields of specialization (st24)	Sharing strategies (st29)	Sharing goals and strategies (st36)
The way of doing tasks (st25)	Not being committed to strict rules (st30)	Team building/Not behaving hierarchical (st37)
	Teamwork (st31)	Holding meetings (st38)
	Ensuring the participation of school stakeholders at every stage of the planning (st32)	Making teachers a part of the problem (st39)

The sub-themes belonging to the school characteristics that affect strategic planning theme included school administrators' evaluations of teachers' characteristics to a large extent in terms of school characteristics. It is believed that teachers' fields of specialization and their inclination for teamwork are determinant factors in the strategic planning process. School administrators stressed that a planning process that does not involve teachers is actually not planning. P-SA8 who emphasized the significance of teachers' fields of specialization argued that: *"The tasks that teachers can carry out or contribute must be assigned to teachers in the planning process. At what aspect teachers can make contributions determines the scope of planning partially. I know for what issues I can want support from the teachers working at my school."* She stressed the significance of a specialized staff.

When private and state school administrators' views are compared, private school administrators can be seen to have emphasized teachers' fields of specialization and teamwork; however, state school administrators stressed the issues related to budget and equipment. S-SA11 believed that school budget and equipment restrict the goals of strategic plans and that inadequate budget impacts planning negatively: *"Actually, we make plans according to the school budget and the resources owned. I can say that the budget and physical facilities determine the goals of planning. Unfortunately, the budget of state schools is not adequate for this."* All of the state school administrators stated that the school budget and the facilities are the primary aspects which are looked at in preparing strategic plans.

In the success factors in the applicability of strategic plans theme, school administrators opined that some of the success factors stemmed from themselves, and others believed that it is liked by teachers. They viewed their roles to be more dominant in the success factors such as determining applicable strategies and sharing strategies. The success factors like teamwork and respecting school administration were regarded to be related to teachers' attitudes. Among the administrators who assigned more roles to school administrators in the success of the planning process, S-SA9 argued that recognition of the strategies triggers teamwork, and thereby she considered sharing strategies as a task: *In order for strategic plans to be successful, they must be known by all school staff. Teachers who do not know what and why we are to do are not volunteer to participate in this process. In fact, parents also must be knowledgeable about this issue because we need their support too."* The explanations of S-SA9 implied that she adopted a participatory management approach for the success of strategic planning and undertook her responsibility in realizing this approach. P-SA1, who is one of the school administrators thinking that teachers' attitudes and participation are more critical in the success of strategic planning, commented that: *"Everyone must respect each other in the planning process. Planning is the task of all of us. If it is thought that it is only my job, then we will be unsuccessful. I do not want to be in a position of someone who forces teachers to do something."* With these statements,

he paid attention to that he perceived teachers' displaying a participative and supportive attitude in the planning process within the context of respecting school administration.

In the success factors in the applicability of strategic plans theme, a comparison of state and private school administrators' views revealed that the success factor of not being committed to strict rules was mostly accentuated by private school administrators. This difference demonstrates that private school administrators adopted a more flexible management understanding in the strategic planning process. P-SA9 held such a view and stated that: *"I do not think that there may be a plan which can be valid under every condition. Because the needs of the schools change continuously. My management style is not always the same. I act according to contingencies. I can say that I take into consideration the changing needs of the school."* School administrators who had similar views perceived strategic planning as managing change, and they, therefore, believed that planning must not be restricted by rules.

In the ensuring participation in the planning process theme, school administrators were observed to have mostly preferred non-traditional methods in ensuring participation in planning. However, in accordance with traditional management understanding, they preferred some practices such as assignments and holding meetings. The ones preferring these practices were those who argued that there was an unwillingness in participation in strategic planning in general. Consistent with these administrators, S-SA8 opined that: *"The only way of ensuring participation is making assignments. If it is left to voluntariness, no one wants to work extra."* By these statements, he noted that assignment is one of the methods which he had to prefer due to obligation. Encouraging to think about the future and making teachers a part of the problem stood out as striking and distinctive practices in ensuring teachers' participation. P-SA4 thought that strategic planning studies attract more attention in the case of experiencing common problems or everyone's being bothered even in indirect ways from the problems. He noted: *"It is of utmost importance to involve teachers in the strategic planning process. They must be encouraged to generate new ideas. But, when I say 'Come on, we are preparing new ideas now', no one will come up with new ideas. For this, I sometimes make teachers a part of the problems. In other words, no one makes effort to try something new before their comfort is disrupted."* General views of school administrators regarding this issue suggest that making problems common requires too much effort in terms of social relations and communication; therefore, they did not use this method despite being an effective one.

The views of state and private school administrators held similarities in the ensuring participation in strategic planning theme. The point that both state and private school administrators jointly underscored was that encouraging to think about the future is a necessary pathway to ensuring participation in strategic planning. S-SA5 commented: *"Strategic planning is about the future. It is*

*about working in the direction of a vision. If the ones working at a school are not interested in its future, there will be nothing as strategic planning.” P-SA2 had similar views: “I encourage everyone to think about the future at my school. What do we want to do? What kind of a school do we want to be? These questions are very significant. While seeking answers to these questions, you have almost developed a strategic plan.”*

**The Third Research Problem: Profiles Regarding School Administrators’ Understandings and Beliefs about Planning: Right-handed Planner vs. Left-handed Planner and Analyst vs. Catalyst**

Table 3 shows the characteristics of right-handed planner and left-handed planner profiles which matched the sub-themes determined in the coding regarding school administrators’ understandings and beliefs about planning.

**Table 3.** *The Profiles Regarding School Administrators’ Understandings and Beliefs about Planning (Right-handed vs. Left-handed Planner)*

Profile 1: Right-handed Planner	Matched Sub-themes	Profile 2: Left-handed planner	Matched Sub-themes
Striving for securing the order	st1, st9, st33, st38	Flexible management	st11, st24, st30, st31, st32, st34, st37
Making strategies ready for use	st10, st21, st26, st27	Adhocracy	st11, st24, st30, st37
School size	st17, st22	Valuing creative ideas	st2, st3, st13, st30
Bureaucratic structure	st1, st9, st25, st28, st33, st38	Strategic thinking	st5, st14, st16
Collecting the existing data	st8, st10, st15, st19, st25	Conducting in-depth research	st10, st15, st20
Developing and communicating strategies	st29, st36, st38	Developing/finding strategies	st8, st14, st20

When Table 3 is examined, it can be seen that there were 24 matched sub-themes constructed by 18 sub-themes in the right-handed planner profile; and there were 24 matched sub-themes formed by 17 sub-themes in the left-handed planner profile. This finding may suggest that school administrators used their left and right hands, from a metaphoric perspective, in balance. The fact that planning understandings of school administrators both complied with right-handed planning profile representing the traditional management understanding and left-handed planning profile denoting a more modern and technical understanding may indicate that school administrators displayed different approaches at different times by taking into consideration contingencies in planning. The explanations of

school administrators also support this inference. S-SA3's views: "[...] *There are some times when I assign teachers, and there are some times that I allow their voluntary participation*" and P-SA1's views: "[...] *Actually, I cannot say that there is only one solution for success. Behaving in a way that circumstances permit brings success*" revealed that right-handed and left-handed planner profiles emerge in school administrators' planning understandings according to contingencies.

When the profiles of private and state school administrators are compared, a similar portrait appears. State school administrators had right-handed planners' characteristics of striving for securing the bureaucratic structure and order more, whereas private school administrators owned the characteristics of left-handed planners such as flexible management, adhocracy and caring for creative ideas. Private school administrators did not almost mention bureaucracy in their explanations, while adhocracy did not find a place in state school administrators' explanations. For this reason, it may be argued that private school administrators had a more compatible stance with the left-handed planner profile despite not being a dominant one.

Acting according to the bureaucratic structure and aligning planning studies by collecting existing data are the characteristics of the right-handed planners who have a more traditional disposition, and these characteristics are the most compatible ones that the participating school administrators had. It was understood from their explanations that school administrators acted according to the bureaucratic structure due to their responsibilities rather than their planning understandings. S-SA11 stated that: "[...] *Indeed, I would to do very different things. Behaving more innovatively and taking risks can improve the school more. But I, first of all, think about my responsibilities and what I have to do. I need to behave bureaucratically for this. Carrying out my duties during the planning phase already takes too much of my time.*" Thus, this participant emphasized that his paying attention to bureaucracy is dependent on his desire to carry out his fundamental duties in the planning phase.

When the characteristics of private and state school administrators as right-handed planners are compared, it can be seen that the characteristic of paying attention to the bureaucratic structure is not compatible with private school administrators' planning understandings. The characteristic of securing the order also takes less place in private school administrators' planning understandings compared to that of state school administrators. Differently, private school administrators regarded the notion of order as a prerequisite for

school improvement. P-SA7 explained her views as follows: *“Strategic plans are made in order to improve schools. However, in order for schools to improve, firstly the tasks at schools must be carried out properly. Everyone must do what they are supposed to, there must be order and discipline at schools.”* State school administrators considered securing the order as carrying out routine tasks at schools properly.

The planning understandings of the participating school administrators matched most with flexible management among the characteristics representing the left-handed planner profile. Their planning understandings were compatible with adhocracy and caring for creative ideas, following flexible management. The school administrators in whose explanations were some aspects related to flexible management noted that adopting a strict attitude in management hampers the planning process. P-SA5, who stated that he gained flexibility in the planning phase over time, argued that: *“[...] prepared plans must be renewed according to needs. I did not use to change the decisions and the plans I made at the beginning. Yet a static point of view does not work in planning.”* The administrators who made similar explanations stressed that a dynamic standpoint is a key to successful planning.

When the left-handed planner characteristics of private and state school administrators are compared, it can be seen flexible management and adhocracy were more dominant in private school administrators’ planning understandings. Especially, the emphasis on adhocracy came to the forefront in private school administrators’ explanations. The administrators considered adhocracy within the context of building temporary workgroups, caring for voluntariness and not behaving with a hierarchical understanding. P-SA3 stated he acted in parallel to this in the planning process by commenting: *“Teachers’ work styles and voluntariness are really crucial. [...] We try to perform teamwork in the strategic planning process. A certain hierarchy does not exist among us. What is important is to come up with new and useful ideas.”* The views of P-SA3 indicate that including adhocracy in the planning processes is closely related with teachers’ voluntariness and support.

Table 4 demonstrates the characteristics related to analyst and catalyst planner profiles matched with the sub-themes identified in the coding regarding school administrators’ understandings and beliefs about planning.

**Table 4.** *The Profiles Regarding School Administrators’ Understandings and Beliefs about Planning (Analyst vs. Catalyst)*

Profile 3: Analyst	Matched Sub-themes	Profile 4: Catalyst	Matched Sub-themes
Thinking about the results of the strategies	st8, st14, st16, st19, st21, st26, st27	Using provoking and shocking tactics	st7, st14, st32, st34, st39
Analysis for competition	st5, st20	Compelling to think about the future	st4, st11, st18, st32, st35
Developing alternative conceptual interpretations	st6, st7, st30	Generating creative/innovative pathways	st2, st3, st13, st30
Working with data	st8, st10, st15	Questioning the assumptions	st6, st7, st30
Intra-organization work	st9, st12, st17, st23, st24, st27, st29, st31, st32, st38	Involving in developing ideas rather than practices	st3, st4, st8, st13, st16, st17, st18, st19, st26

Table 4 demonstrates that the analyst profile included 25 matched sub-themes constructed by 23 sub-themes, and there were 26 matched sub-themes formed by 19 sub-themes in the catalyst profile. Based on this finding, it may be suggested that the participating school administrators had a balance in terms of adopting analyst and catalyst standpoints in the planning process. A comparison of both private and state school administrators’ profiles indicated that state school administrators had an understanding of planning compatible with the analyst profile; while private school administrators’ understandings of planning was compatible with the catalyst profile. All of the characteristics related to the analyst profile except for analysis for competition and developing alternative conceptual interpretations were found in state school administrators’ understandings regarding planning. State school administrators also had some characteristics like compelling to think about the future and involving in developing ideas rather than practices which belonged to the catalyst profile. All of the characteristics related to the catalyst profile could be traced in the planning understandings of the private school administrators.

School administrators’ understandings and beliefs about planning matched most with the characteristics intra-organization work and thinking about the results of the strategies belonging to the analyst profile. The reason why the most dominant analyst characteristic was intra-organization work was that school administrators regarded strategic planning as a process which mostly takes place at schools and environmental factors and actors are not involved. Consistent with this argument, S-SA4 noted that environmental factors are ignored because no support is provided by saying: “[...] *We attempt to make plans appropriate for the characteristics of the school through engaging in small-scale brainstorming meetings with teachers. The facilities we own and the school characteristics lead*

*planning. [...] Unfortunately, we could not receive any support from outside the school. Therefore, we do what we can with the opportunities we have.*” School administrators’ thinking about strategies as analysts implies that they make effort to make strategic plans via a realistic approach in line with the existing opportunities. S-SA4 believed that: *“[...] I think whether there is a possibility of being successful at the end of the planning. I am not apt to make plans without thinking. To me, there may be a successful plan if one knows the school conditions and accordingly determines attainable goals.”* When private and state school administrators’ planning understandings as analysts are compared, it is seen that only private school administrators had the characteristic of analysis for competition. P-SA10 argued that competition is unavoidable at private schools due to the private sector and marketing understanding: *“[...] Strategic planning helps to provide services to students more by enhancing the quality at private schools. The competition between schools makes it compulsory to make the planning properly.”*

The participating school administrators’ understandings regarding planning was most compatible with the characteristic of involving in developing ideas rather than practices from among the characteristics of the catalyst profile. The fact that school administrators considered themselves at the outset of the planning process and adopted the directing role more in this process caused it to become the most dominant catalyst characteristic. P-SA6 attributed the leadership and directing roles to himself in the strategic planning process, and he proposed that: *“The administrator cannot do every task in planning. I must be a person who acts as a leader pointing out what needs to be done.”*

When private and state school administrators’ characteristics compatible with the catalyst profile are investigated, it can be understood that unlike state school administrators, private school administrators had the characteristics of generating creative/innovative pathways and questioning the assumptions more. P-SA3 suggested with regard to questioning that: *“[...] We share our thoughts and suggestions with all of the administrators and teachers. I try to find the wrongs known as right. I attach value to generating solutions apart from our routine ways.”*

P-SA3’s explanations showed that questioning the assumptions, in fact, contributes to being innovative. Private school administrators noted that being innovative provided them with an enormous power in strategic planning and that the opportunities required for being innovative are mostly found at private schools. State school administrators’ answers to different questions in the research indicated that they are also open to innovation, but they could not become innovative due to the deficiencies in terms of the budget and equipment. With regard to the significance of developing creative and innovative pathways, P-SA8 stated that: *“If the strategic plan does not bring an innovation in the school, then it may not be very beneficent. I constantly think about what new and useful things we can do for our school. [...] Private schools are more advantageous in this sense, namely resources. It is*

*really difficult to try something new if there are no adequate resources.*” The school administrators who viewed strategic planning from an innovative perspective considered planning as a tool for school improvement.

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions**

Attaining desired outcomes from the planning processes at schools and improving school performance through planning indisputably require school administrators’ commitment to the planning processes. Schaefer and Guenther (2016) revealed that school administrators’ playing a dominant role in strategic planning increases organizational performance and helps implement the strategies successfully. Graczewski, Ruffin, Shambaugh, and Bowles Therriault (2007) stated that school administrators;’ continuous support is needed for the effective implementation of school improvement plans. For this reason, examining school administrators’ planning understanding and skills is critical for school improvement to be ensured with planning. It is possible that the characteristics that school administrators must have may vary based on their countries’ socio-cultural and socio-economic features and contextual characteristics of schools. In this research, how school administrators adopt an understanding in the planning processes was attempted to be revealed within the framework of the contextual characteristics of Turkish schools by investigating school administrators’ planner profiles. The planner characteristics matching with Turkish school administrators’ planner understandings were investigated, and thus the planner profiles congruent with these characteristics were unearthed. It was understood in the study that Turkish school administrators had characteristics which were consistent with four planner profiles. In other words, a school administrator who had the characteristics specified in one planner profile might have the characteristics of another profile. Although the current study did not aim at making clear distinctions between private and public school administrators’ planning understandings, involving both public and private school administrators in the same study to reflect the general structure of Turkish education system may have been effective in obtaining such a result. Public school administrators had a planning understanding congruent with right-handed planner and analyst profiles, while private school administrators had a planning understanding consistent with left-handed planner and catalyst profiles. Nevertheless, it was concluded that both public and private school administrators had a planning understanding congruent with the four planning profiles.

The researchers in the field of strategic planning have dealt with strategic planning from functional perspectives rather than procedural ones and thereby they do not want to be inundated with empirical questions (Bryson et al., 2017). Turkish school administrators also adopted a similar attitude to that of strategic planning researchers. It was understood that school administrators did not consider planning as a technical process thoroughly. Instead, they mostly evaluated planning activities based on their experiences. School administrators opined that planning activities must be carried out cautiously and that the reflections of these activities may provide positive outcomes for schools if conducted in a

right way. In a similar vein, Korosec (2006) detected that strategic planning is required for determining strategic priorities and implementing change. School administrators' holding a common view about the benefits of strategic planning may lie behind the fact that they had proper characteristics matching with the four planner profiles. This is because successful strategic planning requires the common use of the four planner profiles by taking the contingencies into consideration. For this reason, it may be wrong to assert that one planner profile is more important or beneficent than another one.

In order for strategic plans bring about hoped-for results, it is required that planning processes are examined through a data-based approach, namely by adopting a research-based planning philosophy. Tyre, Feuerborn, and Woods (2017) argued that a data-based approach must be adopted in the planning process not only for evaluating the implementation outcomes but also determining the needs. In this research, it was revealed that school administrators attached importance to working through data in the planning process as analysts and right-handed planners. Similarly, Yıkıcı and Altınay (2017) found out that school administrators made planning by analyzing the existing conditions in the strategic planning process. Graczewski et al. (2007) uncovered that school administrators wanted to have a clear conceptual framework regarding the steps to be taken in the planning processes. These characteristics of school administrators are really critical for analysts and right-handed planners who pay utmost importance to working with data. The fact that school administrators had a clear conceptual framework as planners is a situation emerged as a result of the research processes (working with data) and does not mean that a certain strategy is adhered to. At this point, the administrators owning the analyst profile attempted to change the way of doing things by stressing the generation of alternative conceptual interpretations.

It was concluded in the research that being future-oriented is among success factors in strategic planning. Specifically, being prepared for every condition to be faced in the future by thinking in a multidimensional perspective is considered to be among the most significant benefits a planning process can provide. In this sense, left-handed planners and catalysts have profiles which highlight being future-oriented. It was also found that school administrators as left-handed planners paid more attention to innovative thoughts and strategy development, and they as catalysts used provoking and shocking tactics so as to have teachers to think the future. Various techniques could be used for encouraging future-oriented thinking in planning processes. Mather (1998) detected that scenario construction is a significant technique in differentiating potential futures in school planning processes. Likewise, Berry (2007) argued that developing alternative scenarios can help manage change better in strategic planning process. However, in this research, although the concept of thinking about future was highly emphasized by school administrators, none of the administrators did offer a concrete way of how such kind of thinking can be realized except for the administrators in the

catalyst profile. The school administrators in the catalyst profile prepared an environment of constructive conflict in the school by utilizing provoking and shocking tactics and compelled teachers to think about the future. Neuman (1998) noted that the elements of conflict should exist in the planning process in order for plans to be effective, otherwise, plans may lose their meaning.

School administrators, as a requirement of their planner roles, must have strong communication skills so as to build connections between school activities and stakeholders. No matter which planner profile they have, it is impossible for school administrators to make plans without nourishing communication and collaboration (Eryaman, 2006; Eryaman & Bruce, 2015). The importance that school administrators attach to communication and collaboration helps them for ensuring participation in the planning process. Involving the stakeholders of the school at every phase of the planning process was regarded as a success factor in the applicability of the plans by the participating school administrators. Tyre et al. (2017) argued that managers should encourage the staff having similar fields of interest to collaborate. Schäffer and Willauer (2003) revealed that the learning that achieved during strategic planning increases the effectiveness in the applicability of the plans. For that reason, informing teachers in this process and viewing planning activities as an opportunity for organizational learning may help gain the desired results in planning. Catalyst school administrators, in particular, mostly deal with coming up with ideas rather than implementation; it is, therefore, significant for this profile to place more importance on this kind of learning process. This is usually sufficed by involving the stakeholders in every phase of planning. Soini, Pietarinen, and Pyhältö (2016) argued that the strategies developed by school administrators should be comprehensive in terms of professional learning communities in particular and that more attention must be paid to sharing ideas with teachers. In this research too, sharing goals and strategies and holding meetings were accentuated among the methods aiming at enhancing participation in the planning process. However, making use of meetings only in ensuring teacher participation represents a very bureaucratic standpoint. The present research showed that developing and communicating strategies and bureaucracy were mostly preferred by the administrators in the right-handed planner profile. The administrators fitting into the right-handed planner profile may face with the risk of failure in terms of ensuring participation as they develop strategies on their own and communicate them as a consequence of their adhesion to bureaucracy.

Although the participating school administrators had awareness about the significance of the participation of the stakeholders, they mostly considered only teachers as stakeholders in the planning processes. Davies (1998) stated that the school must be focused on as a whole in the strategic planning processes at schools. Annandale, Heath, Dean, Kemple, and Takino (2011) noted that plans must be evaluated with the participation of all of the educational stakeholders, namely via using a multi-dimensional standpoint. According to Berry (2007), administrators deal with every economic,

political, cultural and social issue that may affect the organization and other issues regarding the environment of the organization in the strategic planning process. Therefore, not only the participation of teachers but also of every stakeholder who has influence on school processes either directly or indirectly is critical. Gutierrez, Field, Simmons, and Basile (2007) underscored that a pluralist stand of point and collaboration may form a more holistic approach to school achievement. They asserted that working with partner schools may be more useful in this regard. In this research, observing other schools was detected to be one of the success factors in strategic planning. However, in order for integrating such a practice into the planning processes, having a left-handed planner profile is needed as it places more importance on finding as well as developing strategies. Adams (2000) noted that new generation planners must focus on educational change and sustainability and give importance to building communication networks and advancing dialogue. However, it was seen that even the school administrators who had the characteristics of left-handed planner and catalyst profiles had limited communication networks. Slenning (2000) asserted that school administrators as catalysts ensured the transition of goals into school practices and that they provided agreement between the goals of national organizations and institutions and the ones of parents and unions. In this research, however, the catalyst profile emerged in the research did not have a large-scale area of action. Therefore, although the participating Turkish school administrators had some characteristics which fitted into the catalyst and left-handed profiles prioritizing innovation and creativity, they did not reflect these characteristics thoroughly.

Taken together, the results of the study indicated that the activities of school administrators in the strategic planning process are shaped based on their innovative standpoints and understandings regarding human relations. School administrators did not adhere to only a single planner profile, and they displayed the four planner profiles alternately when needed. However, the characteristics of the school administrators in the left-handed planner and catalyst profiles which are more innovative, creative and open to communication remained limited when compared to the ones specified in the relevant literature. This result revealed that the standpoints of school administrators regarding planning were mostly structured and bureaucratic. Therefore, prior to offering suggestions about what schools must do in the planning processes, it is required that school administrators' perspectives must be either changed or developed. School administrators receive training which is organized in the form of legal and structural seminar about strategic planning in Turkey. In order for school administrators to adopt more flexible and innovative perspectives in the planning processes, training organized as applied workshops must be provided for developing the understandings regarding strategic thinking.

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