



## **The Relationship between Learning Climate and Organizational Agility in Managers of Education Department**

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between learning climate and organizational agility in managers of Marivan Education Department. Regarding the classification of the research based on the method, this study was a descriptive correlational research. The population consisted of all managers (150 people) of Marivan Education Department in 2019-2020. The members of the statistical sample were 106 people. Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size. This study used a random sampling method. To collect data, Marsick and Watkins's (2003) questionnaire of learning climate quality and Sharifi and Zhang's (2004) organizational agility questionnaire. First, 20 questionnaires with confirmed validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the learning climate quality questionnaire was 0.73 and for the organizational agility questionnaire 0.86) were distributed, and then 86 questionnaires were distributed and the results were collected. To answer the main hypothesis of the research, the structural equation method and PLS software were used. The results showed that there was a significant and positive relationship between the learning climate and the variables of organizational agility. Also, it was found that the variable of learning climate could predict the changes in the variable of organizational agility and its components. Besides providing the appropriate learning climate for the staff of the organization through education, an increased sense of trust in all organizational levels will increase the organization and staff agility.

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### **Introduction**

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Agility refers to climatic challenges and using the constant and rapid changes in the climate to gain high quality, the best performance, services, or products desirable for customers. It is aimed at creating compatibility between information technology, staff, and working processes in a homogenous and flexible system (Worley and Lawler, 2010). The concept of agility for an organization refers to dealing with unexpected challenges, and flexibility and speed in response to the climate (Ja'farnejad & Shahaei, 2007). Agility has been defined as the potential to grow and develop in an climate with ongoing and unexpected changes. It reflects quick responses to events happening within and outside the organization. Achieving agility certainly relies on the responsibility to strategies, technologies, staff, stages, and work facilities (Sendgol, 2014).

The climate in which learning, knowledge, question, and acquiring experience are valuable and people trust each other to share their knowledge is the learning climate (Cox, 2017). In recent years, the learning climate had attracted great attention in developing and developed countries. Most researchers believe that a learning climate leads to beneficial competitive advantages for the staff when they have a precise understanding and view about the quality of services. Organizational learning can be defined as a dynamic process of creation, gaining, and collecting knowledge to develop resources and capacities leading to better performance of the organization. Some researchers have simply considered the organizational climate or culture as a valuable subject to improve organizational learning and changing the organization to a learner one (Rebelo et al, 2008). The organizational learning climate is one of the important elements in making dynamic and changing modern organizations efficient. It is also one of the effective factors in the development of all organizations in the present age. The concept of organizational learning climate has been just recently developed in the field of research and among employees. One of the main reasons for the development of this concept is the new characteristics of business and service climates. It

seems that organizational learning is particularly is of great importance and significance in modern work climates where the employees constantly change their occupation or keep what they know because they feel that sharing their knowledge may be detrimental to their success (Marsick and Watkins, 2003).

Due to the high speed of climateal changes and competition between organizations, the organizations seek to gain competitive values and more effectively provide the needs of applicants. Therefore, to overcome uncertain and complicated conditions and survive in the competitive market, the only way the managers can choose is to provide an empowered and efficient human force. Undoubtedly, human resources have been the most important factor to achieve development in all ages and have been always considered as the development engine. Despite the role of technology in development during the current century, not only has the importance of human resources not undermined, but attention to this issue as a creator and the use of technology has become increasingly important (Jesri, 2011). The most important element of each organization is the human force that can push the country toward development. Proper use of human resources as the most valuable and greatest property in each society is of special importance.

The education system, based on the requirement of social changes, is one of the largest and most complex social organizations in each country, with an integrated bond with social, cultural, and economic development. It has gradually turned from a simple form to a more complex form. The efficiency of this system is manifested, on the one hand, in making healthy, talented, developed, balanced, and empowered people and, on the other hand, it provides the needs of human force in different cultural, social, and economic sections. Regarding such importance, the governments all over the world, from small to large ones, powerful and weak, developed and developing, consider education as one of their fundamental tasks. In this regard, they have incorporated heavy commitments for public education in their constitutions and even they

have made it compulsory. They have also allocated a large percentage of the national gross production and current budget to this important issue (Rostami, 2016). Education is an institution that determines development in the country. This organization is involved with educating children who can play an important and key role in making a healthy society if they are appropriately nurtured and trained. The experts and specialists are educated and trained in such a system. Allocation of huge budgets in developed and developing countries for education and, more importantly, allocation of huge budgets in developed countries to identify as many factors as possible to increase efficiency and proper performance of this organization reveal the importance of the organization and the need for performing research about it (Sanjari, 2016).

The present study investigated the relationship between learning climate and organizational agility in managers and experts of Marivan Education Department. The next part presents the research background. Then, the methodology is presented. And then the data are analyzed. The final part presents the discussion and conclusion of the study.

## **Research Background**

### **National Studies**

Bagheri et al (2020) in research entitled "Evaluating the Organizational Agility in Higher Education Institutions and its Effect on Organizational Flexibility (case study: Bandar Abbas Islamic Azad University)". The study was conducted on 159 staff using the PLS structural equations model. They concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between organizational agility and the variable of staff flexibility.

Safdarian et al (2019) in research, "Identifying the Variables of Individual Empowerment and Organizational Agility in Isfahan University of Medical Sciences and Studying their Relationship", studied 265 staff. They found that empowerment has a positive effect on agility.

Ismaelinasab (2018) in research entitled "The Relationship between Knowledge Management and Organizational Agility in Health Network Staff in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad" concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between knowledge management and organizational agility.

In research entitled "The Relationship between Organizational Learning and Organizational Agility in Staff working in Shahrud Social Security Organization", Taghiei (2017) found that there is a significant relationship between organizational learning and the components of agility.

Iranzade et al (2016) conducted research entitled "Investigating the Relationship between the Dimensions of Organizational Agility and Productivity of Dana Insurance Company Employees in the Province of East Azerbaijan" and showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between organizational agility and its dimensions (flexibility, responsiveness, culture change, work speed, integration, and low complexity, high quality, custom orders, and core competencies) and labor productivity.

Javadi, Kalani, and Sa'atchian (2015) found in research, "The role of Organizational Learning Dimensions in Facilitating the Organizational Agility in the staff of Tehran Physical Education Research Center", that the subscale of management commitment for organizational learning and human resources management for organizational agility had the highest means rather than other components of the variable under investigation. They also found that there is a significant relationship between organizational learning and organizational agility.

Heidari, Siyadat, and Hoveyda (2014) in research entitled "Investigating the Multiple Relationship between Organizational Learning, organizational Empowerment, and Organizational Agility Capabilities in Isfahan State Universities" examined 291 faculty members of state universities in Isfahan and concluded that organizational learning has a significant ability to predict organizational agility.

Farsijani (2013) studied the components affecting the organizational agility system in research, "Explaining and Identifying the Components affecting Organizational Agility in Universities". He formulated the ways to gain the pattern in different areas and finally provided the related general strategies.

Yousefi and Gheysvandi (2012) investigated the learning organization on organizational agility in 129 bank employees using questionnaires and random sampling method. They concluded that there is a significant relationship between learning organization and organizational agility.

### **International Studies**

Arefnejad, Mohsen et al (2020) concluded, in research entitled "The Model of Promoting Organizational Agility in Human Resources Flexibility in Banking Industry", that the flexibility variables of responsibility, skill, and behavior had the key role in organizational agility.

Fink, Yogov, and Ivan (2017) investigated the relationship between business intelligence and organizational learning. The results showed that organizational learning is one of the most effective predictors of business intelligence and there is a positive relationship between these two.

Bahrami et al (2016) in research entitled "The Mediating Role of Organizational Learning in the Relationship between Organizational Intelligence and Organizational Agility" found that there is a positive and significant relationship between organizational intelligence and organizational agility, and organizational learning has a significant mediating role in the relationship between organizational intelligence and organizational agility.

Phillip, Rolden, and Leal (2016) conducted research entitled "The Predictors of Organizational Agility" and investigated the factors affecting and related to organizational

agility, such as work conscience, organizational learning, and personality features of the staff.

In research entitled "The Role of Organizational Agility in Management and Customer-centeredness", Mehdibeigi, Dehghani, and Ya'ghubi (2016) reported that organizations with high agility are more likely to show customer-centered behaviors.

Hossein, Dayan, and Bandeto (2016) conducted research, "The Effect of Competitiveness on Organizational Learning". They concluded that competitiveness has a positive relationship with organizational learning and the staff and managers in organizations with an organizational learning atmosphere compete with each other.

### **Methodology**

Selecting the methodology, the researcher collects data through appropriate tools to test the hypotheses and analyzes the data by using appropriate statistical methods compatible with the research method, variables, etc. (Khaki, 2003). In this study, the data were analyzed using a questionnaire and SPSS, and PLS. Structural Equations model was used, which is an inter-set causal structure of invisible constructs (Azar et al, 2012).

The statistical population consists of all elements and people within a certain geographical scale, with one or more common features or traits (Sarmad et al, 2010). The population of the present study consisted of a total number of 150 school managers of Marivan Education Department in 2019-2020. The sample size was calculated by Cochran's formula as 106 people, using the random sampling method.

### **Data analysis**

The following table presents the descriptive information of the research variables:

**Table 1. Descriptive information of the research variables**

Variable	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Skewness	Stretching
Learning climate	3.52	1.49	1.22	6.50	1.00	-0.74	0.32
Flexibility	2.22	0.45	0.67	4.00	1.00	-0.37	0.25
Speed	2.36	0.44	0.66	4.00	1.00	-0.51	0.18
Competency	2.50	0.37	0.61	4.00	1.00	-0.37	0.09
Responsiveness	2.41	0.41	0.64	4.00	1.00	0.05	-0.68

One of the main hypotheses of the structural equations model is to study the normality of the variables. To this end, special statistical tests in

SPSS can be used, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

**Table 2. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test**

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Sig.	Status	Test type
Flexibility	0.68	0.145	Normal	Parametric
Learning climate	0.73	0.152	Normal	Parametric
Speed	0.92	0.139	Normal	Parametric
Competency	0.65	0.148	Normal	Parametric
Responsiveness	0.84	0.168	Normal	Parametric

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test can be seen in Table 2. Since the significance level is more than 0.05 for all variables, the hypothesis that the variables are not normal ( $H_1$ ) is rejected. Therefore, parametric tests were used. when the distribution of data is normal, the Pearson correlation coefficient test is used to investigate

the relationship and the degree of relationship between two variables. The magnitude ranges between -1 and 1. Determination of the correlation magnitude represents the significance of the test. That is, two hypotheses of  $H_0$  (no correlation in the society) versus  $H_1$  (non-zero correlation coefficient) is at the error level of the test ( $\alpha$ ).

**Table 3. Pearson correlation test results**

No.	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Error level	Sig.	Pearson coefficient
1	Learning climate	Flexibility	0.05	0.00	0.512
2	Learning climate	Speed	0.05	0.00	0.601
3	Learning climate	Competency	0.05	0.00	0.551
4	Learning climate	Responsiveness	0.05	0.00	0.488

As seen in this table, the significance magnitude at the error level of 0.05 is lower than 0.05 for all relationships between the variables. Therefore, it can be said that all variables are interrelated, and the relationship between them is positive. The first validity to confirm the validity

of the measurement model is convergence validity. Fornell and Larker (1981) provided Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as an index to evaluate the extracted variance mean. The convergence validity of the measurement model is confirmed for  $AVE > 0.5$  (Azar et al, 2012).

**Table 4. Evaluating convergence validity of the measurement**

	Flexibility	Learning climate	Speed	Competency	Responsiveness
AVE	0.57	0.54	0.58	0.52	0.55

As indicated, the convergence validity is at a desirable level for all the variables. The second validity used to confirm the validity of the measurement model is discriminant or diagnostic

validity that is a complementary standard. In this study, the Fornell-Larker test was used. The following table presents the results of Fornell-Larker's factor loads.

**Table 5. Studying the discriminant validity of the measurement model**

	Flexibility	Learning climate	Speed	Competency	Responsiveness
Flexibility	0.81				
Learning climate	0.52	0.71			
Speed	0.62	0.35	0.69		
Competency	0.33	0.65	0.51	0.81	
Responsiveness	0.42	0.60	0.40	0.36	0.75

As seen, the load of each item for each variable is more than the load of the item for other variables (the factors loads on the main diameter are more). Therefore, the discriminant validity of the model is desirable. That is, the items for each variable assess that variable at higher levels than other variables.

composite constructs. In the present study, the measurement models are reflective. Besides Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability was also used in PLS models to investigate the internal consistency and one-dimensionality of the blocks. The composite reliability of the model is confirmed if this indicator is more than 0.7. The results of PLS are presented for the two indicators.

In PLS models, the measurement model or constructs is divided into two reflective and

**Table 6. Reliability of the measurement model**

	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
Flexibility	0.86	0.81
Learning climate	0.92	0.90
Speed	0.87	0.82
Competency	0.89	0.87
Responsiveness	0.86	0.82

Regarding the reliability, the reliability of the items needs to be investigated as well. However, since the reliability of the reagents is different, the reliability of each reagent should be evaluated separately. Researchers believe that a latent variable should explain a considerable part of the dispersion of the reagent (at least 50%). Bido believed that if AVE is greater than 0.5 and the

number of reagents is small (three or four), the reagents with factor loads lower than 0.7 can be used. Some believe that the weak reagents can be removed if the number of reagents is more than 5 (Bontis et al, 2002). The following table shows the reliability of the reagents. According to what was explained, the variables with factor loads lower than 0.6 are better to be removed from the model.

**Table 7. Reliability of reagents**

Learning climate		Speed		Competency	
A1	0.66	A11	0.77	A16	0.66
A2	0.78	A12	0.81	A17	0.73
A3	0.76	A13	0.71	A18	0.72
A4	0.78	A14	0.75	A19	0.72
A5	0.73	A15	0.75	A20	0.75
A6	0.65			A21	0.73
A7	0.80			A22	0.71
A8	0.67			A23	0.53
A9	0.73			A24	0.75
A10	0.78				
Responsiveness		Flexibility			
A25	0.11	A34	0.75		
A26	0.34	A35	0.81		
A27	0.70	A36	0.53		
A28	0.77	A37	0.76		
A29	0.60	A38	0.51		
A30	0.79	A39	0.73		
A31	0.77	A40	0.66		
A32	0.75				
A33	0.78				

As seen in the table, the items with the factor load lower than 0.60 were removed from the measurement model and the other items with a factor load higher than 0.6 were used in the significant and standard model.

Investigating the reliability and validity (the exogenous model or the research measurement model), the internal model or the research structural model was evaluated, by which the research hypotheses could be tested. In the exogenous model, the numbers in each circle indicate the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of the main construct, ranging from 0 to 1. The larger coefficient of determination indicates that the

regression line could completely explain the changes of the dependent variable. The magnitudes of 0.18, 0.23, and 0.67 in PLS models can be interpreted as weak, medium, and considerable. If the constructs of a path model describe a dependent variable with a limited number of independent latent variables (one or two), medium  $R^2$  is accepted. If the dependent variable depends on few independent latent variables,  $R^2$  should be at least at a considerable level (i.e. higher than 0.67); otherwise, the model is interpreted as weak in interpreting the dependent latent variables (Azar et al, 2013). Table 4-11 shows the magnitude of  $R^2$ .

**Table 8. Coefficients of determination of the research variables**

	Speed	Competency	Responsiveness	Flexibility
$R^2$	0.41	0.35	0.29	0.34

$R^2$  was not presented for the exogenous latent variables or independent variables. As seen, the

calculated  $R^2$  is at a desirable level for dependent variables.



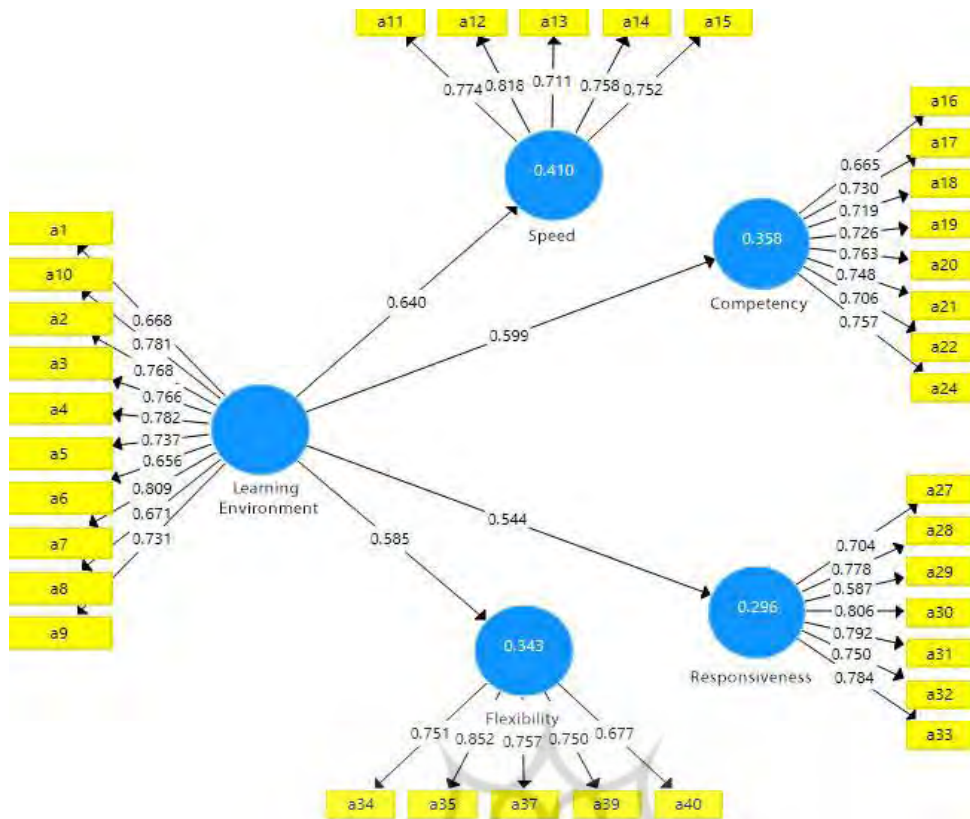


Fig 1. The research measurement model in the standard mode

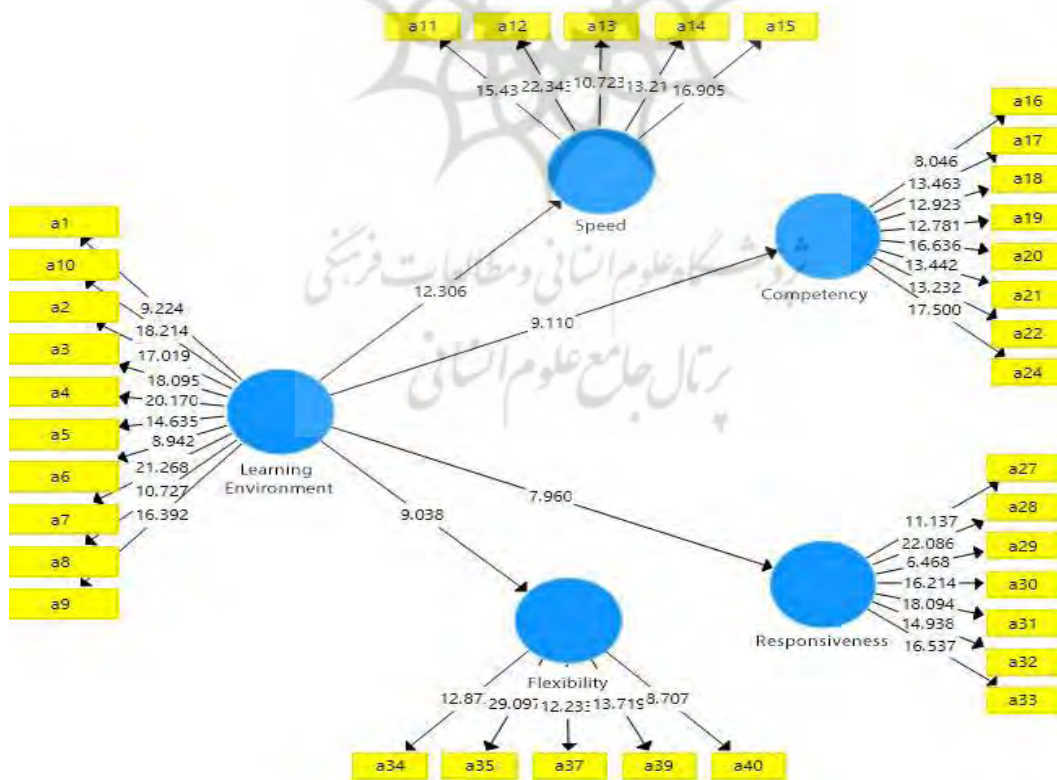


Fig 2. The research measurement model in the significant mode



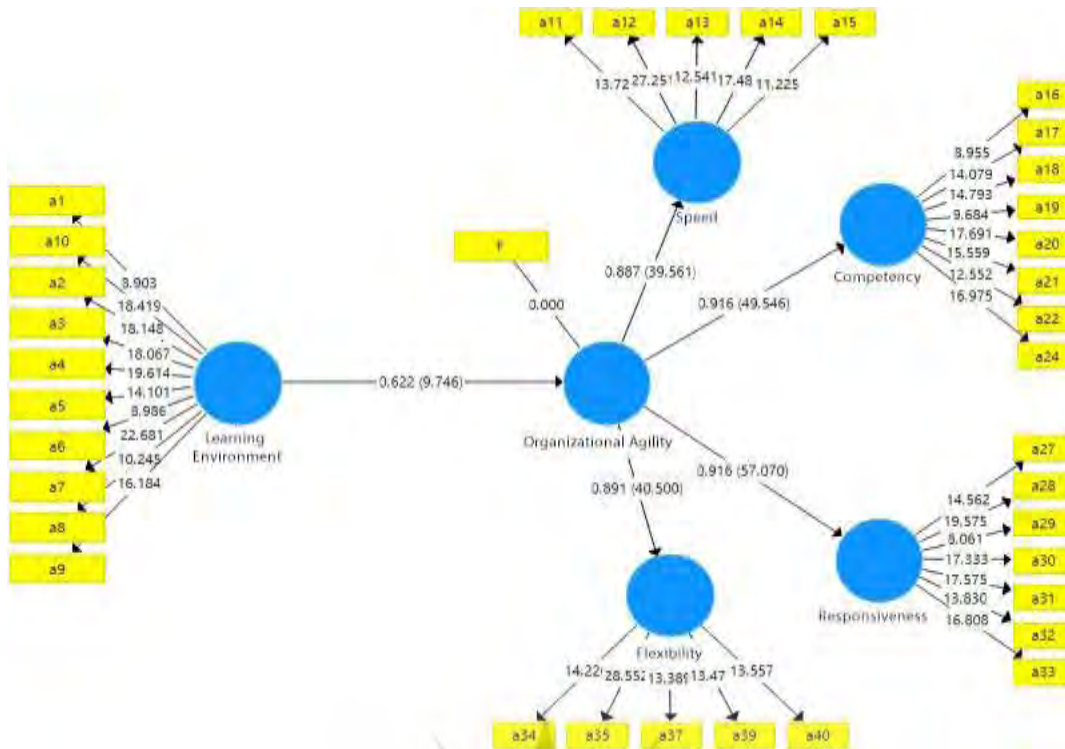


Fig 3. The research measurement model in the significant mode (the research hypothesis)

To evaluate the fit of the measurement model in PLS analyses, the  $Q^2$  indicator was used. The model is appropriately selected when the index of fit is good. To evaluate and assess the fit of the model, two indices of commonality and redundancy have to be studied. The positive values of these indices indicate the desirable qualities of the measurement model and the structural equations model. Positive the goodness

of fit (GOF) index indicates the total fit of the model. Table 4.13 shows the fit indices of the model. Considering the positive values of commonality and redundancy indices, three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as weak, medium, and strong values for GOF, respectively (Davari & Rezazade, 2013), as well as the value of 0.61 for GOF, the fit of the model, was confirmed to be good.

Table 9. The fit indices of the model

	CV-Red	CV-Com	GOF
Flexibility	0.42	0.38	0.61
Learning climate	--	0.51	
Speed	0.35	0.32	
Competency	0.36	0.42	
Responsiveness	0.45	0.28	

In PLS models, the bootstrap (BS) method is used to test the significance of the hypotheses. The partial index of the statistic (T) indicates acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses. The values of t for this study are presented in Fig 2.4.

According to the figure and the coefficients of significance and since T should be higher than 1.96 or lower than -1.96 to accept or reject hypotheses, the value of the parameter between these two values in the model is not important.

Moreover, the values between these two indicate an insignificant difference calculated for the regression weights at 95% level.

Testing the main hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between learning climate and organizational agility in managers of the Education Department.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between learning climate and organizational agility in managers of the Education Department.

**Table 10. The research hypothesis**

Effects	Hypotheses	Direct coefficient	T statistic	Error level	Status
Direct	Learning climate→ organizational agility	0.622	9.746	0.06	Accepted

Since the significance value (T-value) is greater than 1.96 at the significance level of 95%, the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>), i.e. rejection of the significance of the hypothesis, was rejected and the hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> is accepted; there is a relationship between learning climate and organizational agility in managers and experts of the Education Department.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Agile organizations can feel the need for internal and external resources, apply continuously these changes, and keep the organization's performance at a higher level than average. Despite the possibility to reach a high level of performance, organizational agility seems necessary to keep such a high performance. Therefore, the organizations need to give up the old approaches to adapt to the upcoming changes and keep their performance. They also should apply the principles that emphasize flexibility, the use of information technology, knowledge management, and continuous adaptation to new climateal changes to improve their performance at high levels. It should be also noted that organizations are formed of a group of people, and the active workforce directs the organization toward the goals. In modern changing working conditions, the agile workforce feels uncertain and is expected to provide a prompt response to unexpected events. According to the review of literature on agile organizations, Boro et al (2002) determined the initial indicators of the agile workforce as follows: responsiveness to external

climate changes, modeling other's skills, speed of skill improvement, speed of adaptation to new working place, speed of evaluating the information, speed of technology change, applying mobile technologies, independent workplace, access to mobile technologies, participatory technologies and sharing the information. Swanson, R. (2007) argued that the employees who passed several training courses can guarantee the organization's agility because they have the potential for flexibility and can be transferred to anywhere at any time. The workforce with multiple skills can act more effectively at a wider range of tasks and has less work error percentage.

Therefore, multiple training and a variety of tasks can improve performance and reduce stress and fatigue. Yousef et al (1999) defined the basics of competition in an agile organization as speed, flexibility, innovation, creation or control of a situation for the response, quality, and profitability. More attention to the mentioned claims reveals that the features of an agile organization are the same from most scholars' perspectives. On the other hand, the learning organization is formed of an intrinsic philosophy for prediction, reaction, and response to change, complexity, and uncertainty.

This part provides the results of data analysis about each of the basic components of the research, and then the results and findings were compared with those of the previous studies.

To investigate the relationship between learning climate and organizational agility, the structural equations model through the PLS

method was used. Given the obtained value for GOF (0.61), good fit, and the value obtained for T (9.746), it can be said that the effect of learning climate on organizational agility was significant and the general model was approved. To explain the results, it can be said that an appropriate learning climate provides the required ground for the organization's agility and, based on the findings of the present study, it is one of the key factors creating agility for the organization in a competitive and changing climate. Increased agility has advantages such as fast movement toward goals, performance improvement, service quality improvement, more attention to the customers' demands, and organization's potentials in facing with changes, staff's increased satisfaction, staff's better views toward the organization, applying changes, prompt and appropriate response to changes and staff's increased skill level (Nikpour and Berkam, 2012).

As an agile organization is organized toward the way that it can cope with unexpected changes, the learning climate in such an organization is organized in a way that can respond and adapt to climateal changes and the available opportunities. Therefore, the more effective planning has the experts and the Education Organization for establishing the learning climate, the Education Organization can use the changes as opportunities and new workspace in the modern competitive market and speed its responses. This hypothesis is in line with the studies by Farahani et al (2016), Javadi, Kalani & Sa'atchian (2015), Fink, Yogov Ivan (2017), Bahrami et al (2016), and Philip, Rolden & leal (2016).

Since learning is one of the important factors affecting organizational agility, the effect of an appropriate learning climate is an important factor in increasing organizations' agility levels, especially the Education Organization. Organizations should establish appropriate conditions for establishing the learning climate. Therefore, the Education Organization can apply the following measures to improve agility: applied and in-service training, making appropriate communication within the organization, increasing staff's cognitive skills, delegating

powers to make decisions, sharing information, valuing staff's applied ideas, and creating an atmosphere of trust and responsibility.

Organizations should provide conditions to perform individual and organizational training in the form of work teams, through which the organizational activities speed up and the staff is motivated to solve their work problems in teams, and time is not wasted to solve the problems.

It is suggested to organizations hold conferences to introduce aspects of agility to the managers.

It is suggested to school managers to create an appropriate work climate, including trust and intimacy among the members, and encouraging them to be flexible to face changes in the organizations, to provide the ground for comprehensive development.

It is suggested that the Education hold courses for staff to increase up-to-date hardware and software capabilities of the electronic world.

It is suggested the Education Organization reduce administrative bureaucracies and create comfortable working conditions to help increasing creativity in staff.

It is suggested that top managers show more speed in making decisions and responding to changes.

Increasing teamwork in the Education Organization through establishing workgroups in offices.

The annual ranking of provinces is based on moving towards agility to encourage and praise provincial departments.

The basics of staff's agility can be strengthened and help them in this way by job rotation, increasing staff's specialized empowerment, and job enrichment. Multi-specialized training to staff can provide the ground for job rotation, develop problem-solving power, and finally lead to staff's agility.

### **Ethical considerations**

During the implementation of this research and the preparation of the article, all national laws and principles of professional ethics related to the subject of research, including the rights of statistical community, organizations and institutions, as well as authors and writers have been observed. Adherence to the principles of research ethics in the present study was observed and consent forms were consciously completed by all statistical community.

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The present study was funded by the authors of the article.

### **Conflict of interest**

According to the authors of the present article, there was no conflict of interest.

This article has not been previously published in any journal, whether domestic or foreign, and has been sent to the School Administration Quarterly for review and publication only.

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