

Need to Shift from Linear to Web Style Transitions in Learning Organization

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Abstract

Learning is the prime characteristic for organizational development. If university is considered as hub of promoting and generating knowledge then focus on the supportive culture is imminent in order to analyze the related practices in the universities which shape them as learning organization. Most of the studies address business organizations; however, this study encompasses the universities. The study so designed was descriptive, quantitative in nature, non contrived and adopted a survey approach for collecting data. From the population of university teachers, sample was drawn from 17 departments of the university. Tool for the study was adapted from the work of Britton (1998) for data collection and both descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, chi square and Pearson correlation were applied to analyze the data. The perception of substantial proportion of university teachers reflected the weak supportive culture in the departments and teaching faculties. There is need to create web of sharing knowledge and information among university teachers for the building university as a learning organization.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Supportive Culture, University, Learning Organization

Introduction

The basic function of the universities is to create human capital for the accomplishment of the knowledge based society. Consequently to increase the product of any organization, the learning culture of the organization which is relative factor is very important. Organizational learning culture means an organization which has proficiency to create, attain and then extend knowledge and at shifting its attitude to exhibit recent knowledge and insights (Garvin 1993).

Cole (2002) highlighted that learning was a complex course of action of acquiring knowledge, understanding, skills and values in order to be able to adjust to the environment in which one existed. He further spelt out that, such adjustment normally, involved some identifiable change in our behavior. An organization was considered as a group of individuals

and group had an evolved culture. The force of that civilization depended on the degree of group's survival, the permanence of the memberships of individuals in the group, and the emotional intensity of the actual past experiences they had (Schein, 2004). It might take eras to promote an original culture, for instance a learning culture. Senge (1990) advocated that a learning organization had a culture that chained up learning and innovations both by individuals and by the organization itself.

The atmosphere that encouraged traditions of learning a group of people benefit from learning, and it also ensured on the other hand that individual learning promoted and enhanced the entire organization (Blodgood and Salisbury, 2001; Pedler, Boydell, & Burgoyne., 1989). The learning process was envisaged as part and parcel of the culture. The development

of learning must be made component of the culture, not only the solution to a particular problem (Schein, 2004).

Similarly universities enjoyed the status of an organization and obviously had same managerial feature of learning organization. Universities like many other organizations had inbuilt practices and techniques that were essential for learning organization. Such techniques could be team teaching and learning, shared vision, systematic thinking, etc. Question remained how are the universities dedicated to creating permanent learning opportunities, encouraging teamwork and team learning, establishing systems to share learning, and relating the university organization to its surroundings. It is essential to rethink about the major functions of the university (Nakpodia, 2009).

Learning had been defined as a relatively permanent change in behavior as a result of experiences (Wilson, 2005). Thus learning could only be believed to have taken place when one showed difference in behavior, for example when one could acquire knowledge of new possessions, or when one became capable to do somewhat the individual was not capable to do before. The origin of becoming a learning organization is learning (Goldstein & Ford, 2002).

Learning organization was a notion that was becoming a gradually more prevalent thinking in the current society. It had a well-built humanistic and social point of reference, being a place where people frequently develop their capability to generate consequences they supposed in, where innovative way of thinking was nurtured and where people were continually learning how to learn together. During the early 1980s, researchers in organizational learning are paying attention on the types of learning and the changes in behaviors resulting from the learning. In other expressions, they explained whether the result of learning was behavioral or cognitive (Meyer,

1982). In the mid-1980s, the concept of lower learning and higher learning emerge was parallel to the concept of single-loop and double-loop learning. According to this the cognitive association development has not plays an important role in behavior changes and without changes in behavior knowledge may be gained. Fiol and Lyles (1985) discussed that higher-level learning was intended at adjusting overall cultures and norms relatively than specific activities or behaviors within organizations. Only the results from higher-level or double-loop learning can have lasting effects on the organization as a whole.

During the late 1980s, many questions arose again and again such as, "How can we make organizations in which continuous learning occurs?" and "What kind of personality can most excellently direct the learning organization?" (Senge, 1990b). During 1990 a definition of learning organization generated and the core disciplines of building the learning organization formulated by Peter Senge. (Kuo & McLean, 2006). Senge (1990a) cited in Kuo & McLean, (2006) defined a learning organization as "An organization where people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p.3). By applying systems theory to the process of learning, Senge (1990a) sketched the processes of organizational learning. The study of learning organizations has since received increasing attention in both business and academic world.

Braham, (1999) cited in Basim, (2007) a learning organization draws a lesson from every experiment and renewing itself continuously, it can adapt to changing environmental conditions. This age is organizational revolution era of fast technological advances, social and political changes and harsh international

competition. When the world environment is considered to be changing at large, so in the system, any kind of change happening in a sub-system will manipulate all of the other sub-systems in a very short time. Because of that reality we experience, political, economic, socio-cultural or managerial reconstructions every day. As of a much broader point of view, organizational learning deals with the process of change and renovation (Yeo, 2005). According to Senge,(1990b) and Yeo (2005), such processes often concerned not only searching for momentary solutions but also on the adjustment of the organization. Preferably, learning and growth in an organization must take a logical approach that facilitates all of the organizational members to take part in renovation process. Yeo and Rothwell (cited in Basim, 2007) argued that Change of an organization means the change of people's values and beliefs. If those changes occur in a collective order, change in materialization of organizational learning and transformation to a learning organization might be seen.

Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell (1991) define the learning organization (cited in, Watkins Marsick, (1994), as "an organization that facilitates the learning of all of its members and continuously transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals" (p. 1). They recognized eleven areas in which this happens: a learning approach to strategy, participative policymaking, information, formative accounting and control, inner exchange, reward flexibility, enabling structures, boundary workers as environmental scanners, intercompany learning, learning atmosphere, and self-development for every individual. Granberg & Ohlsson, (2000) described that "University organizations' activities are powerfully associated to learning, such as teaching, supervision and research. Though, that is not adequate to label university organizations as learning organizations from a theoretical perspective". A small

number of space thus necessitate to be specified to differentiate learning organizations from organizations in broad-spectrum, by applying theories developed from constructive management systems.

It is more general to use the thought of adjustment rather than learning in the research writing on university transformation and expansion. Occasionally, it looks that the ideas are used equally. As the short dialogue about the research field has exposed, the concept of adaptation may pass on to the process of change, which can be practical and active as well as reactive. The learning consequences in well-organized problem-solving and organizational development, which leads to reject the idea that policies and goal formulation, are permanent about learning organization (Mulford, 2000). Learning may be seen as a course of action that results in changes. Mulford (2000) defines "learning organizations as organizations that make up, reorganize and expand themselves in such a manner that the organization as well as its organizational members constantly learn from their experiences, from one another as well as from the environment". Granberg & Ohlsson (2000) defines the concept in a related manner; an organization that creates superior environment for organizational members' learning and uses their learning to manipulate and settle in to the environment is a learning one. Mulford and Granberg & Ohlsson (2000), both focus on the relationship between individual and organizational learning as the product of problem solving on the one hand, and on the relationship between the organization and the surroundings on the other hand. Argyris & Schön (1996) and Senge (1999) come into view that organizations with a tremendously developed potential to identify and resolution of problems with the objective of adjusting or to a varying environment are seen as learning organizations.

Research Methodology

In this research the status of supportive culture in university as learning organization is described and studied. This research is descriptive in nature and survey method was used.

The study is related to university as learning organization. For these reason teachers of all the departments of the University of Sargodha as sub organizations were included in the population of the study. The university teachers were the important part of the

learning organization. Conveniently a sample of 100 was drawn from teaching faculty of the departments of university.

For the study an instrument was adapted already used by Britton (1998). Pilot study was conducted to finalize the instrument and further assure the validity of the tool thorough Cronbach alpha, its value was 0.853. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied through SPSS to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire.

Data Analysis and Results

NT=Not true, RT= rarely true, ST=Sometimes true, OT=often true, VT= Very true

Table 1: Views of university teachers about supportive culture

NO.	Statements	NT	RT	ST	(NT+RT+ST)	OT	VT	(OT+VT)
1	Experimentation is encouraged in the department.	7%	20%	28%	55%	34%	11%	45%
2	Faculty members share their problems with head without any hesitation.	4%	15%	25%	44%	32%	24%	56%
3	Sharing of experience & knowledge has high priority among faculty members.	6%	9%	33%	48%	31%	21%	52%
4	Head openly discuss and encourages mutual learning.	7%	9%	24%	40%	34%	26%	60%
5	We are appreciated for the contribution which we make in the departmental learning.	7%	10%	23%	40%	39%	21%	60%
6	We have regular academic discussion with colleagues.	6%	17%	28%	51%	32%	17%	49%
7	All colleagues feel free to know from, and challenge each other.	7%	20%	22%	49%	32%	19%	51%
8	All colleagues perform academic activities independently.	4%	12%	31%	47%	34%	19%	53%
9	All colleagues often discuss with each other about new methods of teaching.	4%	12%	37%	53%	38%	9%	47%
10	Male and female members are given equal value and status in all academic activities.	4%	13%	22%	39%	36%	25%	61%
11	Senior faculty members always share their experience with junior colleagues.	10%	15%	21%	46%	38%	16%	54%

Table shows findings of the study about university as learning organization with regard to supportive culture showed that the negative opinion of university teachers about encouraging new experimentation (55%), discussion on teaching methods (53%), the positive opinion of faculty members about sharing of problems with head (56%), mutual learning (60%), appreciation for contribution of departmental learning (60%), to perform academic activities independently (53%), status of male and female in all academic activities (61%), sharing of experience with junior colleague (54%) and heads reflection on academic matters (56%). However the opinion remained equally divided about sharing of experience (48% & 52%), academic discussion with colleagues (51% & 49), feel free to know from (49% & 51%).

The cumulative data of university teachers (49% & 51%) reflected divided opinion about supportive culture in the university. As pointed earlier that if the department had weaker supportive culture then it was not easy for individuals to expand learning competencies and it is also not possible for a university to become higher seat of learning.

Result revealed that the probability of the chi square statistics ($\chi^2=2.388$) was $p=.496$, greater than the alpha level of significance (0.05). Hence there was no significant difference between the views of male and female teachers about supportive culture. It means there was no variation between the views of male and female faculty members about supportive culture. The correlations between the factors of learning organization was found, the first factor Supportive culture has significant correlation with the internal experience ($r=.355$), communication system ($r=.260$) and overall learning organization at significant level (0.01) and also have significant correlation ($r=.556$) With mechanism for drawing conclusion at significant levels (0.05) but have weak and

not significant correlation with external learning ($r=.128$), developing university memory ($r=.171$), integrating learning into strategy and policy ($r=.134$) and application of learning ($r=.122$).

Conclusion and Discussion

Following Britton (1998), the first dimension of learning organization was supportive culture. According to Britton supportive culture means the values, ideologies and norms to enhance the positive attitude to the learning. It had been specified into freedom of speech, encouragement, independent working, democratic leadership, gender equity, mutual sharing of experience and knowledge among members of the organization. An organization meeting the criteria as mentioned earlier, can be said to have supportive culture for learning organization.

Table 1 reflected the views of teachers about the status of supportive culture in the departments of the university. Experimentation and innovations were considered basic practice of a learning organization. However, more than half (52%) teachers were of the opinion that little attention was being paid to experimentation in the departments of the university. Teachers seemed to be following old or traditional practices where they themselves felt more secure and protective. Alive learning organization demanded accommodation of new practices and innovations but the situation under study appeared to be not so healthy in this regard. University is a higher seat of learning and product of experimentation and research for the benefit of society. However this weaker aspect could be hindrance to accomplish the vision.

If problems not timely addressed then it may be harmful for a learning organization. Sharing of problems with their head without any hesitation was considered necessary feature of supportive culture as well as learning organization. It

is essential for healthy supportive culture that the head is devoted to the importance of learning and learning can take place when head provides motive, means and opportunity for learning. As Serrat (2009), describes that leaders take an exemplary leading position in creating and sustaining a supportive learning culture. However, more than half (54%) teachers opined that there were the practices of sharing of problems with head in the department. On the other hand opinion of 46% teachers is the considerable proportion which could not be ignored having contradictory opinion. It is common observation that whenever there is authority; subordinates hesitate or withdraw the criticism; whatever context was considered the opinion of the teachers appeared to be equally divided. Hence this situation could be graded as weaker supportive culture, because there was occasional observation of practices of sharing of problems with their heads.

Sharing increases the knowledge and understanding and it can play key function in supportive culture of learning organization. Mulford (2000) defines learning organizations as organizations that make up, reorganize and expand themselves in such a manner that the organization as well as its organizational members constantly learn from their experiences, from one another as well as from the environment. Blodgood & Salisbury (2001) describes in a related manner that the environment promotes the learning culture, a community of learners, and it ensures that individual learning enriches and enhances the organization. Brahm defines (as cited Basim, 2007) the learning as an organization which gives learning priority; on as whole. For the reason that through sharing of experience and knowledge one can promote learning environment. However only more than half (52%) teachers showed their satisfaction towards the sharing of experience and knowledge has high priority among faculty members in the

departments. On the other hand opinion of 48% teachers is the significant proportion which is towards the disagreement with this practice. However there was need to raise the practices of sharing knowledge and experience to take university/department as learning organization. It seemed that the sharing is the central part of learning organization.

Mutual learning could be taken place when there is sharing as it was pointed above that the sharing is the pillar of learning and without pillar building could not stand. So without the pillar of sharing of knowledge and experience the building of learning would be castle in the air. Senge (1990) advocated that learning organization demands a new view of leadership, leader as designer. It means in the organization the head or leader is a designer which can build this building of learning through promoting mutual learning among individuals. Hence the opinion of 60% teachers was that their heads openly encourage mutual learning. Those these subjects were ensured that this information was only for the research purpose but there is some authority the subordinates withdraw or hesitate to the criticism. The researcher experiences in the organization were quite different. In the university the departments are sub organizations and it is the purpose of the head of the department to promote mutual learning in the whole university not only departments individually, then the head of each department is responsible for leadership and promoting learning environment. So it's the obligation of each head that support the academic activities of other departments also. But researcher experienced during data collection the heads of different departments not seemed cooperative in the academic activities. Appreciation is the major source for motivation and learning which encourage individuals for further improvement in the process of learning. The views of majority (60%) of the teachers showed contentment that they are appreciated for the

contribution which they make for departmental learning.

Kuo & McLean, (2006) described that the learning organization makes a conscious attempt to learn; not only from every experience, but also from the way the group collects, processes, and uses information. Evidently each department is required to promote the supportive culture to facilitate learning organization through discussions, academic meetings and seminars. The data reflected that the 51% subjects were dissatisfied with the practices of regular academic discussion with colleagues. The opinion of the subjects revealed that this situation can be upgraded because these practices were inadequate to promote supportive culture. The freedom to know and challenges are essential part for developing a supportive culture of learning organization. The opinion of 51% teachers showed the divided situation about the practices of colleagues to enjoy freedom, and challenge experiences and knowledge of others. There was also need to raise these practices. Divided situation reflected that there were weaker practices of freedom to know from each others.

It is pointed above that mutual learning and sharing is the essential component for supportive culture of learning organization. If all colleagues perform their academic activities independently then the purpose of sharing would be obviously spoiled. The view of 53% teachers showed that colleagues perform their academic activities independently, which negates the spirit of supportive culture of learning organization. It was pointed out earlier that the discussions were important component of supportive culture among colleagues on different academic activities. The university is a higher institution of learning which focus on teaching. Therefore it was assumed that teaching must be an important area on which colleagues make discussions to introduce innovations in methods of teaching. The

opinion of 53% teachers showed the weak practices of discussion among faculty members about new methods of teaching.

In our culture there is distinction among male and female status, so it was considered important element to take opinion of subjects that what are the practices in the university in different departments about status of male and female. Majority (61%) of teachers showed existence of practices of equal status of male and female in all academic activities. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that there was no gender discrimination in the departments of the university.

Sharing among colleagues has two directions. One is the sharing among the senior faculty members and the other is sharing with junior colleagues. For effective learning organization it was important that sharing takes place not only among senior faculty members but also with junior colleagues. The majority of the teachers supported the existence of practices of sharing of experience with junior colleagues but opinion of 46% teachers which was a considerable part of group hold that juniors are left out. Hence there was need to focus on sharing with junior colleagues to promote supportive culture as well as to make university as learning organization.

Senge (1990) indicated that the first step in building a learning organization requires a leader who inspires the vision of the learning organization. The head in the each department of the university is that leader who appreciates the opinion of others on academic practices in vogue. Majority of the teachers also supported that head always appreciate reflection on academic matters. This divided situation cannot be graded as predominant supportive culture of learning organization.

The situation analysis of the universities as learning organization presented discouraging picture where supportive culture is lacking in many

respects. Hence a substantial majority was working in the non conducive environment which contradicts the basic philosophy of learning organization. To achieve academic excellence in universities culture of sharing knowledge is eminent. Universities being seats of higher learning and hub of generating knowledge have to strive for a standard learning organization, having in built supportive culture to discharge their functions properly.

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