Measuring the Learning Organization's Construct in Pakistan A Case of Public Sector Educational Institutes

Rana Zamin Abbas
Research Associate, School of Business & Economics, Department of Business Administration
University of Management and Technology

Hasan Sohaib Murad
Rector, University of Management and Technology

A G Ghaffari
University of Management and Technology

Ahmed F. Siddiqi
Associate Professor, Chairman, Department of Quantitative Methods SBE
University of Management and Technology

Zulfqar Ahmad
Corresponding Author, Assistant Professor, Hailey College of Commerce, University of Punjab Lahore
E-mail: zabowra_pu@hotmail.com

Zia ur Rehman
Lecturer, Hailey College of Commerce, University of Punjab Lahore

Muhammad Ashraf
Student M.Phil Business Administration, Department of Business Administration
Superior University Lahore, Pakistan
E-mail: Ashraf.scholar@gmail.com

Abstract

Purpose: This paper focuses upon assessing the learning levels of Pakistani organizations[1] particularly on those aspects which are prominent and verifiable in Pakistani context.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The paper in hand first reviews all the relevant literature for distilling the main features of learning organization's construct which are used in the questionnaire. The research used Marsick & Watkins, (2003) questionnaire as an instrument.

Research findings: Factor analysis after survey filters five dimensions of the construct learning organization. namely; learning climate, employees' participation, systematic employee development, leadership, and incentives of most positive kinds (rewards), for learning which are found in different proportions in public sector organizations.

Keywords: Learning Organizations, Dimensions, Cultures, Public Sector, Pakistan.

1 Names have been kept confidential.

Introduction

The term "learning organization" by Senge, (1990) is highly debated now a days in strategic as well as in management world. This concept is evolved from different thinking lines such as the theory of ", the idea of "action learning" floated by Revans and the idea of system thinking by Leitch, Harrison, Burgoyne, & Blantern, (1996).

This paper begins by addressing the following points:

1. Concept evolution and definition
2. Building blocks of learning organizations
3. Previous research into learning organizations
4. Hypothesis
5. Research methodology
6. Research findings
7. Commentary
8. Concluding remarks

Literature Review

Concept Evolution and Definition

After the candid study of literature, it becomes evident that Senge's Fifth Discipline (1990) was the most vital one. The ideology of learning organization shed light on personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision and systemic thinking. Following the steps of Senge, (1990) there starts an unending proliferation of classic writings on learning organization. Surprisingly the concept of learning organization is still ambiguous. It seems as if the concept of learning organization is an unending journey and not a destination and one starts feeling as if the roads are slippery means are uncertain with a tentative road map of learning organization.

Defining the Learning Organization

An organization where people are in empowered, where information is share, where culture is adaptive, and where structural is horizontal. Contrary to it is mechanical organization with vertical structure, routine tasks, rigid culture, formal systems, and competitive strategy. In learning organization, learning is an integral and vital component of its values, vision, behaviors, goals, policies, practices and systems. Learning for all is the logo of learning organization. It facilitates learning for all its members and learning organization is the consciously executed effort on the part of the management with its focus on learning.

Components/Building Blocks of Learning Organization

There is no consensus on what constitutes the learning organization. Some highlight qualities like leadership, strategy, information flow, and learning climate while others focus on team learning, empowerment, continuous learning and financial performance.

Armstrong & Foley, (2003) has stated four attributes of learning organization namely (i) learning environment, (ii) developmental needs for learning (iii) fulfilling learning as well as developmental needs and (iv) practical implementation of learning at the workplace.

Mayo & Lank, (1997), emphasized on the most significant factors in organization, individual and collaborative learning, with particular focus on management and leadership.

Tannenbaum, (1997) focused his study mainly on learning environment.

Lipshitz, Popper, & Oz, (1996), stated dissemination of information, learning culture of organization, and mechanics of learning fast in an organization.

An Overview of Country Wise Research into Learning Organization

In Pakistan: there is a little and insignificant research so far that addresses the notion of learning organizations in empirical fashion.

In Colombia, Hernandez, (2003), dealt with different patterns of a learning atmosphere which act like catalysts in transferring the tacit knowledge and resultantly multiplies performance thus establishing the link between the competence building environment and improved efficiency.

In Jordan research on learning organization will be materialized in near future.

In Europe, Kidd & Teramoto, (1995) tackled Japanese organizations stationed in European countries and found out no indication of learning organizations among firms of Japan working in Europe. The researchers finally reached this conclusion that Japanese organizations could be learning organizations with the worthwhile contribution of CEOS.

In Israel, Amitay, Popper, & Lipshitz, (2005) studied 44 healthcare entities and marked that transformational leadership and organizational learning are inseparable from each other.

Dymock, (2003) showed in one of his case study conducted in Australia that the prerequisite process of becoming a learning organization is very slow and is painful too. Transformation is not a child's play but is an uphill task. It requires an environment of unconditional love, complete trust, candidness, unlearning of old concepts and relearning of new concepts.

In Malaysia, Maria, (2003) demonstrated the link between the learning culture of organization and the use of innovation.

Kumar's, (2005) study in Malaysia's private colleges noted a relationship between organizational stages/levels of learning and economic growth.

In Turkey, Aksu & Ozdemir, (2005) investigated nine elements that shape up hotel establishment into learning organization.

In Tiwan, Lien, Hung, Yang and Li, (2006) examined beautifully the notion of learning organization using Marsick & Watkins' dimensions about learning organization.

In Lebanon, no evidence of study on learning organization has been found. So this line of research is the demand and dire need of time in the knowledge economy.

Hypothesis

- In Pakistan, Public Sector organizations are at different levels of learning.

Research Methodology

DLOQ by Marsik & Watkins, (1998) was used for data collection. There were 53 questions in the questionnaire out of which 43 were used covering three levels: individual, group and organizational level for the study. The questionnaires were filled by 44 respondents from public sector organizations. After survey, factor analysis with SPSS filter five dimensions of the construct of learning organization.

Research Findings

This Section presents five dimensions that is, five prominent dimensions of learning organization come to the forefront through factor analysis, namely; learning climate, employees' participation, systematic employee development, leadership, and reward for learning which are found in different proportions. It also brings to limelight cross cultural differences on the way to learning organization.

Table 1: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.804	28.735	28.735	15.804	28.735	28.735
2	7.236	13.157	41.892	7.236	13.157	41.892
3	5.669	10.307	52.199	5.669	10.307	52.199
4	3.540	6.437	58.636	3.540	6.437	58.636
5	3.111	5.657	64.293	3.111	5.657	64.293
6	2.742	4.985	69.278	2.742	4.985	69.278

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 2: Component Matrix[a]

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
People openly Discuss mistakes in order to learn from them	.426	.123	-.383	.496	-.172	.053
People identify skills they need for future work tasks	.548	-.189	-.259	.400	-.222	.275
People help each other learn	.569	-.076	-.324	.498	-.065	.154
People can get money and other resources to support their learning	.534	.031	.053	.457	-.179	.073
People are given time to support learning	.712	.175	.016	.251	-.340	-.075
People view problems in their work as an opportunity to learn	.641	.046	.211	.167	-.332	-.197
People are rewarded for learning	.680	-.013	.027	.257	-.239	.026
People give open and honest feedback to each other	.737	.166	.029	.005	.089	.098
People listen to others' views before speaking	.498	.043	.191	.029	-.235	.316
People are encouraged to ask "why" regardless of rank	.568	.169	.204	.130	.053	.206
Whenever people state their view, they also ask what others think	.477	.229	-.274	.157	-.025	.344
People treat each other with respect	.278	.305	-.125	.594	.182	-.205
People spend time building trust with each other	.680	.196	-.137	.254	.113	.094
Teams/groups have the freedom to adapt their goals as needed	.447	.110	.149	.276	.461	-.178
Teams/groups treat members as equals, regardless of rank, culture, or other differences	.451	-.026	-.039	.380	.579	-.067
Teams/groups focus both on the group's task and on how well the group is working	.703	-.078	.261	-.197	.249	-.024
Teams/groups revise their thinking as a result of group discussions or information collected	.664	.133	.105	-.265	.122	.075
Teams/groups are rewarded for their achievements as a team/group	.598	.034	-.006	-.282	.090	-.151
Teams/groups are confident that the organization will act on their recommendations	.578	.091	.357	.206	.091	.097
Uses two-way communication on a regular basis, such as suggestion systems, electronic bulletin boards, or town hall/open meetings	.515	-.116	.000	-.225	-.116	.399
Enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily	.500	-.067	-.241	-.314	.029	.310
Maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills	.532	-.209	-.037	.006	.264	.276
Creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance	.397	-.121	-.105	.144	.066	-.008
Makes its lessons learned available to all employees	.518	-.018	.145	-.287	-.227	.380
Measures the results of the time and resources spent on training	.574	-.081	.127	-.385	-.062	.268
Recognizes people for taking initiative	.650	-.014	.078	-.406	.085	.216
Gives people choices in their work assignments.	.449	-.020	.344	-.153	.282	.225
Invites people to contribute to the organization's vision.	.466	.003	.162	.017	.404	.113

Table 2: Component Matrix[a]- (Continued)

Gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work.	.483	-.167	-.192	.155	.218	-.070
Supports employees who take calculated risks.	.508	-.117	-.262	.019	-.086	-.166
Builds alignment of visions across different levels and work groups.	.463	.151	-.114	-.199	-.313	-.385
Helps employees balance work and family.	.597	-.010	.115	-.232	-.103	-.501
Encourages people to think from a global perspective.	.586	.035	.233	-.245	-.260	.026
Encourages everyone to bring the customers' views into the decision making process.	.451	-.161	.413	-.140	-.015	-.298
Considers the impact of decisions on employee morale.	.408	.205	.502	-.076	.171	.072
Works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs.	.621	.300	.275	-.027	.069	-.004
Encourages people to get answers from across the organization when solving problems.	.652	-.264	-.200	-.112	.317	.134
Leaders generally support requests for learning opportunities and training.	.649	-.222	-.146	-.200	-.130	-.078
Leaders share up to date information with employees about competitors, industry trends, and organizational directions.	.609	.027	-.194	-.282	-.323	-.278
Leaders empower others to help carry out the organization's vision.	.586	-.067	-.175	-.209	.027	-.294
Leaders mentor and coach those they lead.	.638	-.139	-.306	-.045	.194	-.275
Leaders continually look for opportunities to learn.	.690	-.231	-.155	-.078	-.117	-.286
Leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with its values.	.643	-.207	-.358	-.029	-.055	-.339
Return on investment is greater than last year.	.082	.832	-.448	-.133	.110	.022
Average productivity per employee is greater than last year.	-.030	.667	-.247	-.057	-.258	.283
Time to market for products and services is less than last year.	.070	.709	-.078	-.115	.352	-.258
Response time for customer complaints is better than last year.	-.093	.485	.749	.122	-.025	-.040
Market share is greater than last year.	-.141	.731	-.412	-.158	.117	-.008
The cost per business transaction is less than last year.	-.122	.656	.382	.036	-.231	.237
Customer satisfaction is greater than last year.	.043	.728	-.549	-.162	.044	.094
The number of suggestions implemented is greater than last year.	.116	.400	.749	.174	.112	-.133
The number of new products or services is greater than last year.	-.034	.758	-.093	-.193	.227	-.196
The percentage of skilled workers compared to the total workforce is greater than last year.	.161	.679	.472	.122	-.196	-.183
The percentage of total spending devoted to technology and information processing is greater than last year.	.010	.772	-.430	-.136	.064	.121
The number of individuals learning new skills is greater than last year.	.211	.408	.070	.121	-.508	-.145

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 6 components extracted.

Reference Table for Factors

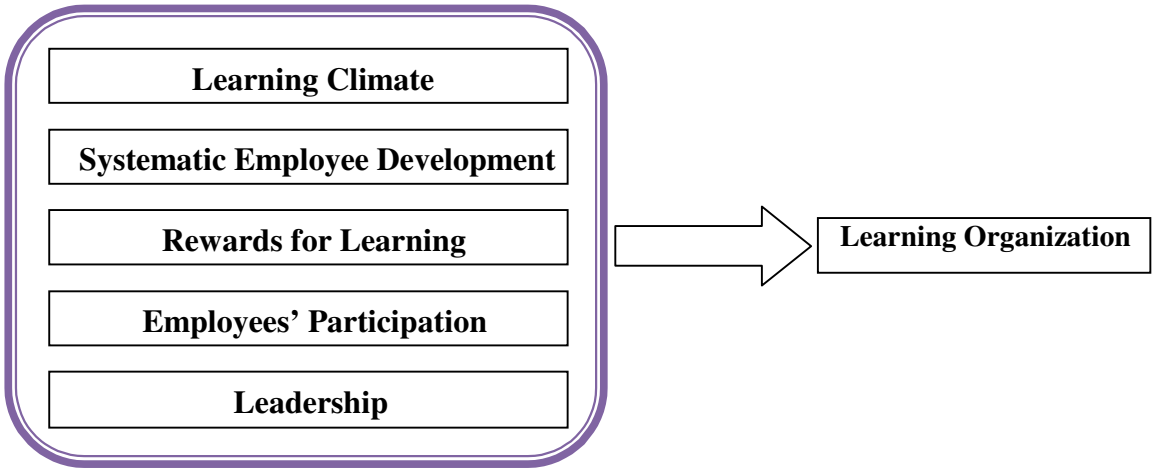
Factor	Sample Item
Learning Climate	People give open and honest feedback to each other. People are given time to support learning. People treat each other with respect. Teams/groups have the freedom to adapt their goals as needed. Gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work. Makes its lessons learned available to all employees. Considers the impact of decisions on employee morale.

(Continued)

	People openly Discuss mistakes in order to learn from them. People spend time building trust with each other. People listen to others' views before speaking. Enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily.
Systematic Employee Development	Creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance.
Reward for Learning	Encourages people to get answers from across the organization when solving problems. Maintains an up-to-date data base of employee skills. Teams/groups focus both on the group's task and on how well the group is working. People can get money and other resources to support their learning. Measures the results of the time and resources spent on training. People are rewarded for learning.
Leadership	Supports employees who take calculated risks. Teams/groups are rewarded for their achievements as a team/group. Leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with its values.
Employee Participation	Leaders mentor and coach those they lead. Builds alignment of visions across different levels and work groups. Leaders empower others to help carry out the organization's vision. When people state their view, they also ask what others think..
	Encourages people to get answers from across the organization. People are encouraged to ask "why" regardless of rank. Encourages everyone to bring the customers' views into the decision making process. Invites people to contribute to the organization's vision. Uses two-way communication on a regular basis, such as suggestion systems electronic bulletin boards, or town hall/open meetings.

Factor Analysis Report of Public Sector Educational Organizations

Factor	Sample Item	Level
Learning Climate	People are given time to support learning. Teams/groups have the freedom to adapt their goals as needed. Gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work.	Individual Teams/Groups Organizational
Systematic Employee Development	Creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance.	Organizational
Leadership	Leaders mentor and coach those they lead.	Organizational
Employee Participation	People are encouraged to ask "why" regardless of rank.	Individual



Commentary

Learning Climate seems highly valued in public sector educational organizations on all three levels; Individual level, team/group level, as well as organizational level.

Seeing form learning climate perspective, learning climate is just like a bridge between employee development and application. Firms focusing on learning climate, in fact, establish a strong connection between learning and application and think and plan in long terms. In this way, they maximize their long term benefits from their positive strategic investment in employee development. They do not treat employees as a liability but as human assets and so give them freedom, resources, positive atmosphere as well as tolerate their mistakes. Gladly mentioning this point that this is reminiscent and comply with the research conducted by Dymock, (2003) in the context of Australia.

Regarding proper and considerate employee development, it sounds extremely important in public sector educational institutes in Pakistan. It is evident from widespread education all over the country. Policies of HEC for faculty development program and a large number of scholarships offered in foreign universities by the government are really a breakthrough in the history of Pakistan. In this way, the government is not only supplementing knowledge acquisition but also developing the human capital and inimitable competencies for the national development. This finding is consistent and reminiscent of Jordanian research where learning and development juxtapose each other. Moreover, according to Khadra & Rawabdeh, (2006) consistent learning and development is a very major component of learning organization that an organization must keep in view ab initiao.

Leadership on organizational level and employee participation on individual level seem highly valued in public sector educational institutes, especially decision are made and when actions turn into mature forms. It also suggests the pivotal role of leadership for providing the healthy and participatory learning conditions in the organization. And this is again noticed in Turkish and Japanese organizational context (Aksu & Ozdemir, (2005); Kidd & Teramoto, (1995).

Rewards for learning seem highly valuable on individual and organizational levels in the context of Pakistani learning organizations. Reward schemes and incentives of positive kind directly motivate and shapeup employees' "learning orientation". In fact, it acts like a catalyst and a driving force in effective learning. When individual needs are met properly with mix of monetary and non-monetary rewards, this will act like intrinsic and extrinsic motivational force for creative learning and organizational performance. It is an acknowledge fact that even love without money is but an impossible dream in the commercial and cut throat competitive environment. This type of research has been nicely captured in Jordan where Khadra highlights the importance of rewards and reorganization for developing employees' adaptability and their keen interest in learning.

Employee participation is found in public sector educational organizations due to their permanent grades and role of authority.

Concluding Remarks

Un-deniably in recent years the world has experienced the dominance of learning organization paradigm, which is offering rays of hope with an in-depth analysis especially for those organizations competing in turbulent environment particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. It is more than accurate to speak of that the learning; the learning organization is not a wishful thinking but a very prospective path leading to Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA). Other sources of value creation can be copied but learning is something that cannot be copied and so it is imperative – urgent. One needs to be considered before anything else because it is time of seeking modern knowledge and new horizons with clear inferences.

Seeing Literature on learning organization it becomes evident that there are many researches focusing the question of why learning matters, and there is a dearth of empirical researches as to how CEO's are able to establish their learning potentials. Personally speaking, it is a measurement that

provides guidance to managers/CEO's when they try to diagnose their organizations and attempt to provide concrete and viable framework for action.

Insights from different countries are drawn along five prominent dimensions of learning organizations at different levels in the context of Pakistan. This research suggests that learning organization paradigm is not an overnight metamorphosis which can be materialized with revolutionary steps rather it is long term progress and should be dealt with incremental or evolutionary perspective. It is a constant odyssey of an unending passion for ever-growing development towards perfection. So learning should not be overlooked or neglected.

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