The Role of Learning Organizations in Improving Human Resources Management

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Abstract

The rapid pace of changes in internal and external business environment affects the organizations to develop a new strategy such as learning ; in this change process, what is more important is that how organizations struggle to survive and succeed in business environment . The proposed strategy is that organizations develop into learning organizations , in other words , innovations in different dimensions make the organizations to learn as much as or faster than outside environment , in case the organizations do not embrace change and not learn as much as or even more than environmental changes , doubtlessly, they shall be destroyed. Organizational learning in terms of methods, structures within organization encourages the human resources in the organizations.

Keywords: Learning, learning Organizations, Human Resources

Introduction

The most important asset of any organizations is human resources, One of the factors to create motivation and dynamism for human force is learning. In fact, learning is a success key in the development and surviving learning organizations. Growth and prosperity of organizations has drawn the attention of businessman and this false belief the organizations consist of irrelevant forces- is a false idea. Cognition and significance of learning is very important. Those organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the 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 to see the whole together.

Organizational management theories dated to the early 20th century, when Weber proposed Bureaucratic Theory and Taylor and Fayol Presented principles of scientific and administrative management, afterward, human relations movement originated in the 1930s . And the last school found with system theories and contingency theory ,nowadays,the school is dominant thought in the management and organization.(Alvani,seyed mahdi1385).

In general ,learning organization is a response to insecure and variable environmental conditions, in the future, only those organizations that are able to adopt which enable to benefit from the capabilities, obligations and individuals learning in all levels of organizations in the best way and those that learn faster than their competitors shall survive, finally, reaching to a learning organization is possible because all of us are learner and eager to learn(Senge,2011), at the current time, the value and position of organizations is distinguished by the knowledge and learning capabilities(Redding,1383)

   The idea of a learning organization is a new management theory which has been presented by Senge, one of the professors of technical institute of Massachusetts, U.S.A., through publishing the book of "The Fifth Discipline" in 1990; this was also developed by publishing its complementary book in 1997.

1. Literature of the subject

1.1 Organizational learning

Organizational learning is a process by which inputs are acquired, preserved and used to conduct improvement in the organization, and it leads to the increase of continuous self-learning capacity and modernism in the organization (Mollica, K. 2004). Argyris also believes that organizational learning can be propagated in groups who have three conditions: 1. Having new ideas 2.   Having doubt about the existing knowledge and activities of the organization 3. Developing and transferring knowledge among organization staff (Argyris 2005). Organizational learning refers to capacity of the organization for the sake of gaining or creating necessary knowledge, in order to survive or compete in the environment (Armstrong and Foley 2003).

1.2 Learning organization

Dubees believes that learning organization is an organization which is logically resistant, flexible and adaptable against the changes, and uses all its members' potentialities for learning at all organization levels (Dubees et al., 2005). Estel and Gibons also believe that learning organization is an organization which constantly expands its potentialities to create the future. The changes and innovations can occur through constant learning and they can turn into an effective action (Estel, Gibons, p. 3).

Senge considers 5 disciplines for the idea of learning organization: 1. Personal mastery 2. Mental models 3. Building shared vision 4. Team learning 5. Systems thinking; he believes these 5 disciplines are five parts of technology which are converging to change learning organizations to an innovation (Senge 1996).

1.3 Disciplines of learning organization:

1. Personal mastery
2. Mental models
3. Shared vision
4. Team learning
5. Systems thinking(Yeo, R.K. 2005).

- Personal mastery: refers to a process in which the individual constantly improves his viewpoints and concentrates his energies and abilities, expands his patience and finally grasps the realities without any prejudice (Walczak, S. 2007).
- Mental models: represent attitudes and discover internal feelings of us from the external world to conduct influence to others. Mental models are in fact the active part of one's memory which can depict individual's insight and decisions.
- Shared vision: these are the aims that have always been inspiring for organizations in management; they refer to the capacity of creating a picture or a target of a future which we are longing for.
- team learning: Senge considers team as the key learning unit, and believes that team is the process of developing capacity of the group for creating desirable results that the team members yearn for (Rahnavard 1999) and they believe that this is the team not the individuals who create learning in modern organizations (Smith, P.A.C. 2007),.
- Systems thinking: Senge believes that "systems thinking" is the basis of 4 other learning disciplines. It can cause learning in individuals and make them understand the changes and cohesion, and causes them see phenomena in general, and learn that there is nothing out of the system which can cause problem, but all the problems are hidden within the system (Senge 2005).
- Learning levels: in each organization learning can occur in different levels, such as: individual level, team level and organizational level.

1.4 The purposes of learning organization are as the following:

1- Creating a better performance
2- Quality development
3- Creating competing commitment
4- Commitment giving and empowering the workforce
5- Creating a connection between work and creativity
6- Innovation and creativity in organization
7- Change management
8- Decision making improvement
9- Faster reaction against the dynamic environment
10- Modification and improvement of compatibility and efficiency potentiality against environmental changes
11- Recognizing internal dependencies(Moilanen, R. 2005).

The final purpose of a pervasive organization is to learn part by part in the organization.

1.5 The features of a learning organizations:

One of the features of the learning organizations is their smoothness in information flow. It has caused improving knowledge and growth in human resource management of the organization. Another feature is that, it is possible for opinions from the outside of organization to enter into the organization and there is enough freedom for the growth and development of valuable opinions from all the levels in different classes. And in performing the tasks it has group potentiality and it has the power to solve obvious conflicts between "organization programs as a

fixed and determined programs" and "environmental changes". These kinds of organizations have the potentiality to get use of processes and tools in order to achieve organizational learning(rtenblad, A. 2007). Another feature of the learning organization is that; it habituates with the unknown problems while sensitively and consciously seeks for the new solutions, and it does not attribute its problems and failures to external or uncontrollable factors. Yet it is seeking the defects and failures within itself, and in order to compensate the problems gets equipped. This "getting equipped" and preparation can be achieved through learning. In other words, it predicts future problems and issues, concentrates on external environment of the organization and looks for constant growth and development. It also gives value to innovations and creativities (Shelton, C.D. and Darling, J.R. 2003). The definition of the job in these organizations is based on risk-taking encouragement, discovery, innovation and knowledge sharing (Daket 2002). The main concentration of management in learning organizations is based on increasing customer satisfaction through constant improvement in efficiency, product quality and services. In other words, customer-centricity is one of the important features of learning organizations, either the customer is inter-organizational or extra-organizational. It is worth noting that inter-organizational customers are those who receive the results of the working of the others, which might be a production, report, order, or a service. Also extra-organizational customers are those who use from the products and services of the organization. Customer-centric organizations provide a way by which the customers can easily present their opinions and complaints to the officials; in fact the needs of the customers are placed in the center of organizational activities, and adjusting policies (Alvani 2004).

1.6 Subsystems of learning organization

Markowart (2009) has presented a systemic model for creating a learning organization. He believes that creating a learning organization without recognition and development of the related quintuple subsystems is neither feasible nor stable (if created). These subsystems include: learning, organization, individuals, knowledge, and technology. All these quintuple subsystems are necessary for a stable organizational learning and getting assured of organizational success.
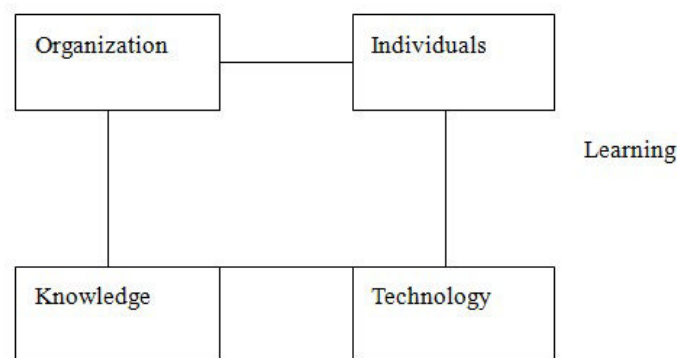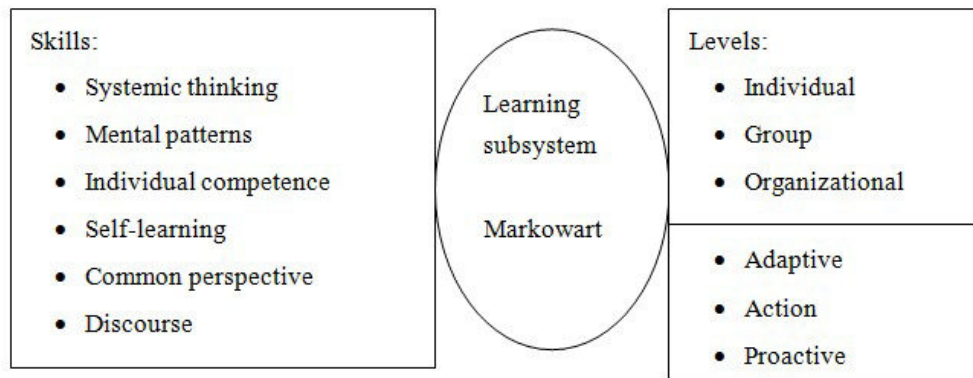

Systemic model of systemic learning organization (Markowart, 2009, p. 34)
Subsystems of organization, individuals, knowledge, and technology are necessary for enhancing learning, and each of them in turn affects other quadripartite subsystems.

1.6.1 Subsystem of learning

Learning is the main subsystem of a learning organization. Micro-system of learning refers to levels and types of learning which are critical for the related organizational learning:

Skills:
- Systemic thinking
- Mental patterns
- Individual competence
- Self-learning
- Common perspective
- Discourse

Learning subsystem

Markowart

Levels:
- Individual
- Group
- Organizational

- Adaptive
- Action
- Proactive

1.6.2 Subsystem of organization

The second subsystem of the learning organization is the organization itself, i.e. an environment and a framework in which learning occurs. Key quadripartite dimensions or components of this subsystem include: vision, culture, strategy, and structure(Ipe, M. 2003).

1.6.3 Subsystem of individuals

The subsystem of individuals in learning organization includes: staff, managers and directors, clients, business participants (suppliers, venders, sub-contractors), and the society itself (Markowart, 2006, p. 40).

1.6.4 Subsystem of knowledge

Knowledge subsystem in learning organization refers to the management of acquiring and creating knowledge in the organization. This subsystem includes: acquisition, creation, saving, analysis and data mining, transfer of publication and utilizing and validating knowledge (Markowart, 2006, p. 42).

1.6.5 Subsystem of technology

Technology subsystem includes supporting and integrating technological networks and information tools which allow access to and exchange of information and learning. This micro-system includes technical processes, collaboration systems and structures, supervision, coordination, and other knowledge skills. Technology subsystem comprises electronic tools and advanced methods of learning including simulation, computer conferences, and collaboration. The function of all these tools is to create knowledge freeways.

1.7 Types of Organizational Learning:

Adaptive Learning, Proactive learning & Action Learning
Markowart (2006) divides organizational learning into 3 categories: adaptive, proactive, and action learning. These learnings do not confine each other, i.e. it may be possible that more than one learning occur simultaneously at individual, group, and organizational levels.

1.7.1   Adaptive learning:

Adaptive learning occurs when individuals, groups, or organizations learn from their past experiences and evaluations of their performance. Adaptive learning is a process which proceeds from action to conclusion, and after that evaluating results, and then getting feedback. Adaptive learning may be single-loop or double-loop(Korth, K. 2007).

1.7.2   Proactive learning:

Proactive learning is the process of acquiring knowledge from different future visions (the process of proceeding from vision to action and then, evaluation). Adaptive learning is a kind of dynamic or creative organizational learning. This type of learning empowers the organization significantly, because the staff is very active, evaluative, and more creative in their learning(oilanen, R. 2005).

1.7.3   Action learning:

Action learning means to search for the existing reality and utilizing knowledge in order to develop individuals, groups, and organizations. Action learning includes working on real subjects, focusing on obtained knowledge, and implementing solutions. Utilizing this method as a systematic process will improve organizational learning

so that the organization can respond to changes more effectively. This kind of learning combines introduction and presentation of results of new problems of knowledge with evaluation of taken actions during and after problem-solving sessions.

1.8 The difference between learning organization and organizational learning

Many authors have differentiated between learning organization and organizational learning. Organizational learning is something that happens in an organization, while learning organization is a certain form of organization. But Jones and Hendi believe that this difference is more complicated, and in fact learning organization is essentially the direction or target, while organizational learning can explain and measure the activities and events that occur in such an organization (Lee and Bent 2000).

1.9 Comparing learning organization and learning with traditional organizations

The nature of a learning organization becomes clear when it is compared with other non-learning organizations. The difference between learning organizations and traditional ones is presented in the following table.

No.	Dimensions	Traditional organizations	Learning organizations
1	General orientation	Insight is presented by the higher management of the organization.	There is a common insight which is manifested in all organizational levels, and the top management is responsible for making sure of its existence and development.
2	Formulating and implementing ideas	The top management decides about what should be done in the organization and others have to implement it.	Formulation and implementation of ideas and thoughts are conducted in all organizational levels.
3	The nature of thinking	Atomism; everyone is responsible for his own work.	Systematic thinking of staff who not only understand their own work, but also comprehend its relation and cohesion with other jobs in the organization.
4	Resolving conflicts	Conflicts are resolved by applying hierarchical leverage.	Conflicts are resolved by collective applying and integrating different ideas across the organization.
5	Leading and motivation	The role of the director is to present insight, reward, punishment, and have supervision.	The role of the director is to create common insight, empower the staff, and in general, to play three roles of designing, instructing, and serving.

Source: Zali, Mohammad Reza (1999), papers collection of the conference of the Development and Administrative Office

Table (2-4): the difference between traditional and learning organizations

1.10 Discussion and conclusion

Knowledge and learning are among the important factors in organizations and are inevitable for their survival. Organizations are the result of the way of thinking and acting of their members. Therefore, if we want an organization to change, we should give enough time to individuals to change their way of thinking and acting. It is obvious that we cannot achieve such changes by intensifying training courses and/or the method of order and control management. Organizational learning requires introducing new management ideas, methods and tools. By providing opportunities for doing new works, members of the organization will achieve a stable capacity for change.

Organizational learning has been paid increasing attention by the organizations which are interested in competitive advantage, innovation, and efficiency. Traditionally, learning has been defined as a process by which individuals will acquire new knowledge and insight as a result of changing their behaviors and actions.

Learning organization is an organization which is managed consciously towards learning, and learning is an important component in its values, visions, objectives, evaluations, and daily operations. Learning is a process which includes quadripartite mechanisms which themselves include learning environment, recognition of developmental and learning needs, realization of developmental and learning needs, and utilizing learning in work environment. To focus on learning means to concentrate on making changes in an extensive level of individuals, groups, and organizations. Since environmental change is a constant and continuous action and an

open and unpredictable process in nature, learning plays a critical and sensitive role in aligning organizational forces in this unreliable environment and moving towards a glorious, pervasive, and learning organization.

1.11 Suggestions

The authors' suggestion for developing human resource management in organizations, based on the pattern of learning organizations and organizational learning (as mentioned before), is as follows:

1. Enhancing the quantitative and qualitative level of in-service trainings, corresponding to technology growth and new methods
2. Making the staff participate in organization information, and enhancing their commitment to the organization
3. Encouraging the staff to search for new methods
4. Creating and inducing a committed attitude towards the organizations' objectives, and believing the training and learning of all the staff as an inevitable matter
5. Training and justifying the managers regarding the advantages of learning organization in the form of in-service trainings
6. Encouraging and supporting new ideas in the organization by all members
7. Following the strong presented ideas in the form of spontaneous teams and supporting them
8. Providing necessary conditions for continuing education, and passing required courses
9. Utilizing individual capabilities of the staff in the organization and transferring them to others (if necessary)
10. Gaining benefit from experiences of expert staff and transferring them to others through holding training courses

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