

The Strategic Building Blocks of a Learning Organization

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Abstract

The current paper focuses on the importance of learning to the development of business enterprises and corporate organizations. It highlights the need for the training and re-skilling of organizations human resources in line with the developments of today's business demands. Hence, the purpose of the paper is to explore the impacts of continuous learning on skills development to increase the performance of people in the service of business organizations. Such training interventions are, without exception, crucial irrespective of position or rank in the organization. The paper draws on Peter Senge's five disciplines towards building strong learning organizations: building shared vision, personal mastery, mental models, team learning and systems thinking. The adoption and application of the five basic principles will aid business leaders, line managers, training consultants and employees to acquire competitive business skills and healthy intellectual minds, essential for the growth and development of business enterprises. Also, by implementing the five well-tested new component technologies, the paper advocates that corporate organizations grow more rapidly, thus facilitating management and the development of workplace skills. It will also allow the development of strong teamwork inside the organization and open up opportunities for creating a competitive advantage within the business field.

Keywords: The learning organization, basic disciplines, competitive advantage, Systems thinking strategies

1. Introduction

Academic research into learning as well as professional development has increased rapidly in recent times, and continues to grow (Dochy, Gijbels, Segers, & Van den Bossche, 2011). Nearly half of new business enterprises and corporations will fail within the first five years of their existence. According to Senge, "Only four [out of ten] of these companies will make it to ten years, and a mere three [out of ten] will make it to fifteen years in business" (Senge, 1990a, p.117). Senge posits that every time a company fails, publics are quick to assign blame to a specific problem and never even give consideration to the possibility that the failure could be due to a general system problem. The five principles as proposed by Senge (1990a) have improved understanding into the way learning organizations function. Senge is of the view that the core strategy is systems thinking, which can be explained as a unique way of thinking wherein all personnel of the organization put aside their customarily used ways of discerning and begin afresh using an open-minded way of reasoning. At the start, this organizational learning strategy will require extra efforts which ultimately will lead to a substantial pay-off. In the sections that follow, an elucidation will be given that supports this methodology. In addition, arguments will be offered to strengthen and reinforce this strategy as a beneficial endeavor.

2. Conceptualization of a learning organization

Several researchers have posited definitions of organizational learning. Below is a few sample:

- "Organizational learning is a process of detecting and correcting error."(Argyris, 1977)
- "Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding." (Fiol& Lyles, 1985)
- "An entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviors is changed."(Huber, 1991)
- "Organizations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior." (Levitt & March, 1988)
- A learning organization is any organization that is skilled at knowledge creation, knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer as well as engaging in behavior modification to reflect new knowledge creation and insight (Garvin, 1993).
- Learning organizations are places 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 (Senge, 1990, p.3).

On the basis of the above definitions, the core principle for learning organizations is that in cases of rapid change only organizations that are flexible, adaptive and productive are those that will perform well and emerge as high performance organizations. However, for this to occur, it is maintained that organizations need to discern on how to tap employees' commitment and the ability to learn at *all* levels (Senge, 1990a, 1990b).

While individual persons have the ability to learn, the structures within which they have to operate are usually not favourable for reflection and serious engagement. Besides, employees may not have the appropriate

tools and guiding knowledge to make sense of the circumstances they face. Organizations which are constantly expanding their ability to design their future have need of a fundamental shift of mind among organizational members.

When people are asked about what it is like, being part of a great team, the most striking reaction is often the meaningfulness of the experience. Individual persons speak of being part of something bigger than themselves, of authentically being connected and generative. It becomes obvious that, for a majority of people, their experiences as a small part of genuinely great teams stick out as special moments of life lived to the fullest. There are people who spend the rest of their lives in search of ways to recapture that spirit. (Senge, 1990a).

According to Senge, authentic learning gets to the core of what it means to be human. Individuals become capable of recreating themselves (Dochy et al., 2011). Clearly, this situation also applies business organizations as human institutions. Thus, undoubtedly for a learning organization, it is not sufficient to survive. Here, adaptive learning is crucial and certainly of the essence. Nevertheless, for a learning organization, adaptive learning must be intimately linked to “generative learning”, that is, learning that improves the individual person’s capacity to create (Pasquini, 2012; Senge, 1990a, Watkins & Marsick, 1996), and should connect existing body of knowledge with emerging ideas (Dochy et al., 2011) leading to a more personalized understanding as regards its systematic value.

3. Basic building blocks for authentic learning organizations

Learning is a fundamental, natural process which inevitably forms an essential part of human existence and growth. Therefore, to remain afloat, expand networks, maximize results and become a successful leader and not a perpetual follower, a person needs to learn constantly throughout life (Dochy et al., 2011; Garvin, 1993). It is through learning that a person’s general and business knowledge expands: business ideas grow and new ways of doing things emerge. Besides, learning offers great opportunities for employees, managers and executive leaders to grow at the same time, rather than depending on the ‘single-source wealth of knowledge emerging and dictated by such an organization’s Bill Gates, Ford, Sloan, or Watson’ (Senge, 1990a, pp.3-4). It was along this line of reasoning that Senge maintained that the corporate world in the 1990s had transformed into a learning organization.

It is Peter Senge’s (1990a) strong assertion, therefore, that to have a successful company in the future, corporate and economic activities have to be authentically business-like, through which continuous learning skills are promoted. Therefore, continuous learning becomes a strategic issue and a significant tool in the rapidly developing society. Business has to be conducted as a dynamic system that is in no way redundant but, to a certain extent, predictable and based on previous accomplishments. Senge (1990a) argues that continuous learning allows a person or an organization to learn faster, and in the process, performs better than other competing businesses. Through constant learning, effective and innovative planning and business predictions are planted. Primarily, learning provides the opportunity of keeping with prevailing business networks, at the same time, appreciating the complexity and vibrant nature of today’s business environment (Senge, 1990a). Through the above claim, it is the suggested model that the marketing of a successful economic activity requires a great deal of teamwork, whereby people work together in unexpected ways, trusting one another and making up for each other’s strengths and shortcomings. Applying the principles of teamwork, such as constructive conflict and co-construction (Decuyper, Dochy, & Van den Bossche, 2010) it could be feasible to harness together diverse potential and ultimately facilitate the building of a strong and business-focused organization. The basic idea now is to envision organizations as business communities, a place where people learn together and cultivate team learning behaviors (Peddler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 1991; Senge, 1990a; Smith, 2003; Watkins & Marsick, 2004). With such an attitude, both employees and managers would perceive one another as key stakeholders, co-owners and co-creators in business organizations, instead of seeing the company as belonging solely to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Thus, all stakeholders become, part and parcel, of the organization contributing towards its growth, through the variety of learning exercises organized by management.

In this manuscript, the objective is to discuss the five building blocks recommended by Senge (1990a) as contributing to the creation of a powerful and successful learning organization. At the core of the five building blocks is the need to provide strong business leadership, produce superior results and be capable of outperforming all other competing companies by a large margin.

The central questions which the current paper aims to address include the following: What are the critical competent tools which enable the creation of a healthy business learning organization? To what extent can these competent skills contribute towards the growth of today’s business environment?

To answer the above questions, a detailed discussion of the five disciplines will be offered. As Senge (1990a) posited, a framework is offered for effective business learning conditions based on his publications on the areas under discussion. These primary sources shall offer the key data required for an understanding of the discussion. In addition, the views of other authors and sources on this critical business topic will be considered. The current paper will also provide support to Senge’s mission statement, which states: “forget your old, tired

ideas about leadership. The most successful corporation of the 1990s will be something called a learning organization.” Considering the above declaration, it only needs to be highlighted that excellent performance relies on top-quality learning. To a greater extent, human beings are born, with dignity, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, interest to learn as well as the delight in learning (Dochy et al., 2011).

In today’s corporate world, companies that perform extremely well are those that take full advantage of the most productive and innovative resources of employees and collaborators, animated through constant learning, at all levels of the organizational structure (Dochy et al., 2011). Edmondson and Moingeon corroborated this observation in these words:

To remain viable in an environment characterized by uncertainty and change, organizations and individuals alike depend upon an ability to learn. Yesterday’s knowledge and skills are vulnerable to obsolescence, and future success requires flexibility, responsiveness and new capabilities. (Edmondson & Moingeon, 2004, p.21)

In the above assertion, the real meaning of learning is re-emphasized more radically, whereas the concept of lifelong learning is perceived as a natural drive in all human beings.

Figure 1 below, gives a pictorial representation of the five strategic building blocks that facilitate learning within business organizations. It offers a solid framework for both methodology and empirical evaluation (Goh, 1998; Pasquini, 2012; Senge 1990a; Watkins & Marsick, 1996; Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004). These conditions are critical factors needed to build a learning organization. They are strategic building blocks that can serve as valuable guiding principles in working towards learning organization status. Each principle logically opens to others, and the unity of the process emerges through the obvious interdependence of the disciplines. In the next section, these guiding principles are further explained and recommendations made as to how to operationalize them into actionable plans.

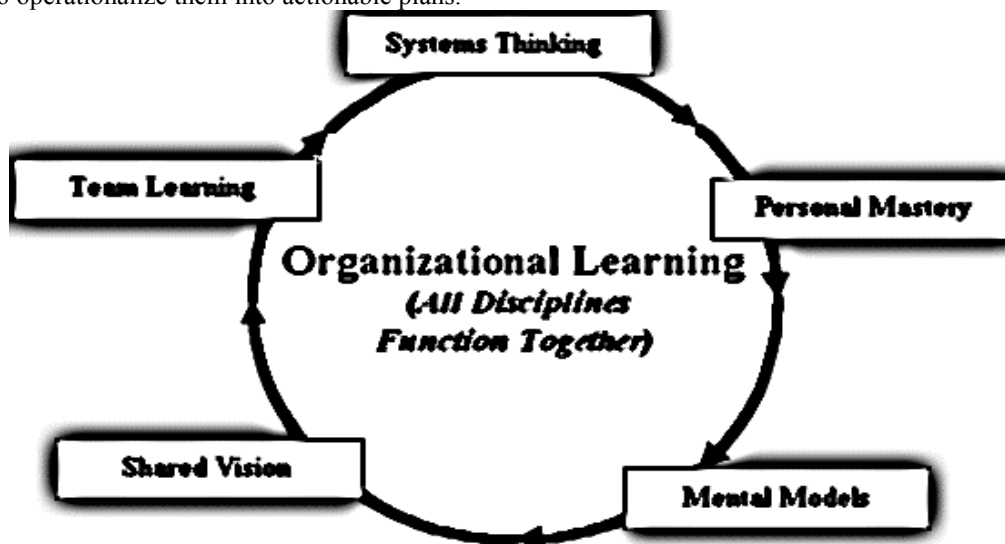


Figure 1. Building blocks of Learning Organization. Adapted from Pasquini, L. (2012)

3.1 Building solid learning organizations through Senge’s (1990) Five Disciplines

Engineers say that a new idea has been “invented” when it is proven to work in the laboratory. The idea becomes an “innovation” only when it can be replicated reliably on a meaning scale at practical costs. If the idea is sufficiently important... it is called a “basic innovation”, and it creates a new industry or transforms an existing industry. In these terms, learning organizations have been invented, but they have not yet been innovated. (Senge, 1990a, pp.5-6)

In the citation above, the writer’s stress on the need for continuing learning within the business organization is not in any doubt. The author’s assessment of learning, as a crucial and critical privilege to a successful business enterprise, essential to keep abreast with the developments of innovation connected with today’s business environment, is important.

To cultivate a business idea then, is one thing, but the capacity to nurture it further into an innovation, through a process of constant laboratory engineering and learning, becomes particularly imperative (Senge, 1990a). Accordingly, all such innovations, supported through learning, training and retraining programs, hold the key to defeating all business irregularities, and competitors. They also keep both employees and employers reliably informed about the dividends connected with teamwork in any particular organization. On the basis of the five component technologies, Senge (1990a) offered the steps reviewed below, which the paper list here as strategic building blocks, required for developing high performance learning organizations. They are the five

component technologies projected to innovate learning organizations: building shared vision, mental models, personal mastery, team learning and systems thinking.

3.1.1 Building Shared Vision

This is a key building block that Peter Senge believed to be a force in the hearts of people, a force of extraordinary ability (Senge, 1990a,) as well as a precondition for the formation of a functional and sound learning organization (Dochy et al., 2011). For Senge (1990a), a vision is shared when two or more persons have a similar mental image and are fully committed to one another having the vision, not just to each other, uniquely, having it. Within the principle of shared vision, all the stakeholders concerned are assisted to obtain some shared foresight, vitality for learning, as well as future representations. Senge upholds that such a future vision promotes the authentic commitment of employees on the team towards attaining the set goals of the business organization. By means of a shared vision, corporate leaders, business managers and employers develop comparable business views, and promote hard work and strategic planning. Inherently, corporate leaders are able to project the organization's vision, and work towards accomplishing the vision collectively, as a team of visionaries. To make it practicable and achievable, corporate leaders frequently engage the power of diplomacy, negotiation and personal charisma, as well as co-opt employees into developing shared vision (Senge, 1990a). Also, this principle promotes and supports the development of strong personal visions, which subsequently generates into shared vision. And so, personal visions mature as they are being shared, through interactions and dialogue, from which new ideas develop, while more authentic commitment becomes possible amongst the different members of a corporate organization (Dochy et al., 2011). Through this way, it becomes feasible for corporate organizations to mirror the future they desire to produce, which is usually constructive, and meant to inspire more positive visions.

In general, visions are shared through the process of learning. Throughout the process, accommodated within the terrains of a corporate organization, such shared visions are better channeled, reviewed and explored, and even become more clearly defined and distilled, facilitating the achievement of particular set-goals. Based on this understanding, it has been strongly recommended that business managers should envision this concept as one which outlines 'where we want to be' in the future (Senge, 1990b, p.4).

3.1.2 Mental Models

Mental models as personal images of reality based on life experiences affect the behaviors, perceptions, actions and attitudes of people (Senge, 1990a). Mental model as a learning strategy demands that individuals shape the way they act. Thus, Senge suggests that people need to position themselves, their job careers and professions to the standards and control of their mental metaphors. It is the above perspective that individuals should think about or look deeper into themselves, so as to develop clear mental picture regarding their inner dispositions which possibly could facilitate their systems thinking abilities. Such inner images of the self could then become the basis for self-knowledge and understanding of the world, much better and more objectively.

By following the above process, Senge (1990a) suggests that employees learn more effectively, practically and objectively. For example, the Royal Dutch Shell oil company adopted and applied the principle of 'mental models' which enabled the company to gain competitive advantage in the oil industry at some point in the 1970s. Most importantly, such a perspective predisposes people knowledge, viewpoints, and inspiration of others. Within this perspective, useful ideas could be shared thus enabling the process of co-creation and constructive conflict to take place. Furthermore, as knowledge could be exchanged throughout the entire process, creative business innovations could be achieved and provide policy guidance for business leaders and entrepreneurs in the direction of openness and excellence (Dochy et al., 2011; Senge, 1990a). This could further persuade business leaders to take decisions that promote the interests of the company, rather than basing policy issues on excessive bureaucratic politics.

Following the principle of mental model, Dochy et al (2011) contend that better ideas develop when they are shared between people. Thus the sharing of honest and open ideas lays the foundation for more critical and objective reflection, which leads to clearer understanding and better performance (Senge, 1990a). Indeed, the old adage, "two heads are better than one" becomes a reality.

On the basis of the above analysis, there is need to investigate and tap into the non-canonical knowledge, capabilities and natural endowments which every single person possesses within the self, with the purpose of enhancing personal skills, particularly in today's technological age. Alone, each and every one is rich in individual knowledge (Dochy et al., 2011), but when people are put into working teams, surprises emerge. Thus, through continuous sharing and learning, knowledge becomes more meaningful and becomes shared in mental representations. Consequently, creativity grows more rapidly, while objective and reflective thinking become means of entrepreneurial resourcefulness and professional expertise in the business world of today.

3.1.3 Personal Mastery

Personal Mastery is the art of constantly clarifying and deepening of personal vision, of concentrating energies, of learning to be patient and of perceiving reality in an objective manner. Thus, Senge (1990a) referred to this learning strategy as the spiritual foundation of a learning organization. Senge's perception of this learning

strategy has to do with an individual's business capacity to maximize results and still create room for other business firms to grow well in the context of fair competition. It is the position of Dochy et al. (2011) that a resolute commitment to constant learning provides the key with which this target is achieved, while appreciating the fact that this learning strategy is a discipline of constantly clarifying and developing some deeper insight, through continuous learning, co-creation and constructive conflict, objectivity and patience.

Following the above analysis, it is therefore not surprising to discern the factors that account for the consistent and enviable leading role of Microsoft products within the computer market nowadays. In spite of the rigid opposition and lawsuit its competitors set up against the persistent dominance of its computer software business, Microsoft alongside its allied products continue to provide market leadership (Dochy et al., 2011). Microsoft continues to excel where other competitors fail.

Owing to Microsoft mastery of its product spaces, the company has developed into a leading computer software enterprise within the computer market today. Microsoft passion for continuous learning and engaging in market surveys and research, has given it an edge over its competitors, in doing so making all Microsoft products popular in the computer business. Microsoft passion for continual learning is further enhanced by its investments in human capital, thus making it possible for Microsoft to tap into the energy, resources, intelligence as well as the engagement of all its diverse workforce (Dochy et al., 2011). Consequently, Senge (2006) strongly proposes that corporate leaders urgently need to redefine their current roles, and eschew the traditional view of planning, organizing and controlling the whole business empire single-handedly, while acknowledging the fact that personal mastery transcends individual knowledge, competence, skills and capabilities alone.

Through mastery of skill, complete specialization is encouraged. At the same time, it also promotes a mastery of other specialist skills and development of a strong sense of vision (Dochy et al., 2011). With a strong sense of vision, human resources are greatly coordinated, professionalism is unhindered, and business goals are achievable, whereas competence and efficiency are promoted (Senge, 1990a). Besides, such a training opens up employees to be good-natured, accommodating and dedicated in work attitudes. Hence, the advantages likely to be achieved from exposing employees to possibilities of training and retraining exercises are limitless and immeasurable for the business enterprise as well as the people involved (Dochy et al., 2011). Based on the above understandings, Kessels (1993) recommended that learning within organizations contributes to the mastery of jobs, and empowers employees to develop new skills and competences for the performance of the assigned responsibilities, skills which in later years contribute to employees' personal enrichment of task-related-knowledge. Organizational learning can be achieved through training programs, workshops, induction exercises, seminars, conferences and other related on-the-job practices which facilitates employees' continuous learning and knowledge of specialist skills (Elkjaer, 2004). Through organizational learning processes, workers' responsiveness and understanding grow more professionally, thus empowering workers to be more commitment to the assigned tasks as well as their professional careers (Senge, 1990a).

3.1.4 Team Learning

The fourth critical step towards building a sustainable learning organization is when employees see the need to work as a team, such that overall output is based on both the quality of individual effort and teamwork. Employees engaged in such a learning agenda are trained and educated to complement one another in providing services to the organization and society (Goh, 1998; Senge, 1990a). By and large, all employees work as a team, as well as a single learning workforce. The intelligence of an individual can never be the same with that of a team, in such a manner that workers' energy is fully maximized, resulting in unity of purpose, right understanding and shared vision. Therefore, through close partnership with one another in team-activity, perspectives are shared and criticisms are offered constructively. Most of all, teamwork facilitates the development of extraordinary abilities, shared visions as well as highly co-harmonized engagements (Senge, 1990a). Team learning also aids the building of sufficient foundation of mutual understanding, trust in one another, and creating opportunities for openness to objective experiences (Decuyper et al., 2010; Schein, 1993). By means of team learning, people grow more rapidly intellectually, as a result of the convergence of diverse and opposing minds and intellects. People learn to deal creatively with the dominant forces opposing constructive dialogue and conversations within working teams (Dochy et al., 2011). Team learning enriches intellectual discourses, brings about better understanding regarding crisis management and facilitates the growth of knowledge and innovation among members of the team. It creates ample opportunities for practice within management teams, and facilitates in-depth knowledge gathering as well as a free flow of meaning (Senge, 1990a). Argyris (1997) agreed that such intellectual events could be organized through seminars, workshops and conferences which allow constructive conflicts. Thus, team learning constitutes the fundamental learning block in modern-day corporations.

3.1.5 Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is the fifth and last element of the learning organization concept. It is this component that Senge (1990a, 1990b) thinks is the lever that holds the five disciplines together as a logical whole. It is a conceptual framework for exploring interrelationships that lie beneath interactions and complex situations,

instead of one-dimensional, fixed cause-effect structure (Dochy et al., 2011). It allows working teams to dissect the often invisible intricacies, leverage points, influences, as well as the planned (and unplanned) effects of change initiatives. It also brings about deeper and full awareness of the inter-relatedness following transforming any organization. Corporate leaders learn to apply archetypes (or what is referred to as *Systems Thinking Maps*) to chart and investigate events, business situations, ill-defined problems and their possible root causes, as well as the appropriate courses of action that will lead to better change possibilities and solutions.

Thus to be able to succeed and survive in today's business world, organizations need some level of systematic and open-minded forecasting. Thus, both business owner (employer) as well as employees must think fast and plan ahead of time. Business leaders and managers need to become skillful at projecting, so as to be able to see far beyond the immediate business situations (Dochy et al., 2011). A successful business enterprise in today's modern world demands that both managers undergo thorough training, so as to be able to read and comprehend the signs of future business situations. Thus, five basic methodologies, within the systems thinking discipline, can be adopted and implemented so that an effective business thinking approach is achieved. The five proposed methodologies are as follows:

Focusing on interrelationships, rather than seeing things, processes and glimpses. It is proposed that business leaders and line managers need to look at the world of business as a phenomenon that is never fixed, but as dynamic at any given time. Senge (1990a, 1990b) recommends that with forward-looking attitude, business managers and entrepreneurs would be able to pool together knowledge from several related activities that go on outside their specific business environments. Such knowledge acquired from boundary spanning would aid managers and entrepreneurs develop various interrelationship between the particular business domains and other aspects of life (Dochy et al., 2011).

Moving beyond the blame game: Business managers and entrepreneurs must learn to hold themselves and their ill-designed systems answerable for any problems and failures encountered in the day-to-day business operations, rather than looking in another place for causes and explanations (Senge, 1990a, 1990b).

Distinguishing between detail complexity and dynamic complexity: In this respect, there is need for business leaders to understand in detail the dynamic complexity surrounding business. The practical implications include in-depth understanding of some causes and effects in corporate business, and how they impact on the future of business organizations (Senge, 1990a, 1990b).

Concentrating on matters of high leverage: Here, business leaders need to give sufficient attention to some critical strategic decisions and actions, which could bring about major and long-term improvements. The crucial factor remains that they be well-managed and aimed at achieving continuous progress.

Avoiding symptomatic solutions: Senge (1990a, 1990b) asserts that corporate leaders should refrain from applying quick fixes and short-term solutions to business problems. As an alternative, energies should be concentrated on developing lasting solutions to ill-defined problems, rather than searching for "shortcut solutions" as this could have lasting negative consequences.

Thus, effective systems thinking requires farsightedness, developed through continuous learning and training, to act as a source of enlightenment and to provide a sense of direction, strongly required to sustain the business and keep it afloat (Senge, 1990b). Such entrepreneurial skills would offer sufficient capabilities needed to survive difficult times, thus enabling the organization to occupy the top niche, while all other competitors follow. Equipped with a body of up-to-date business knowledge, it becomes feasible to work out and design effective strategies that could be adopted and put into practice in the future subsistence of the organization.

Following the above analysis, there is need for the application of new and modern technology as part of an essential strategy for resisting future problems and complications that could affect the growth of the business. Consequently, corporate leaders are duty-bound to set up a learning laboratory (Senge, 1990a), wherein the process of team learning could be developed. The learning laboratory concept is meant to increase shared intelligence and professional creativity, as well as construct and model effective practice for members of the management team. The concept of team learning certainly is a powerful predictor of team efficiency (Dochy et al., 2010). To a greater extent, this process provides the opportunity for unifying meaningful interpersonal dynamics with significant business matters. The process fosters the acquisition of new learning skills, whereby entrepreneurs who could grow their own businesses are given some basic training. In this way, the skills, competences, roles and tools that are essential for corporate leadership could be learned and internalized.

4. Creating a culture that supports a learning organization

To compete in today's information-flooded business environment, it is essential to remain focus, dynamic, competitive, and to continue to search for ways to enhance business organizations. Garvin (1993) asserted that continuous improvement entails a commitment to learning. The only constant that is expected in the workplace is change, and as a result, people need to do away with the traditional, hierarchal organizational structures that are frequently opposed to change, or experience change merely as a reaction to external events (Goh, 1998; Johnson, 1993). A learning organization adopts change and continuously initiate reference points to create a more and

more evolving structure that incorporates a vision. Karash (1995) maintains that learning organizations are healthier and better places to work because they promote independent thought; increase people ability to manage change initiatives; improve quality; produce a more dedicated employees; promise people hope that challenges can be resolved; stretch perceived limits; are well-informed on important aspects of humanity; such as, the need to learn, to improve upon the conditions within the environment, and finally to be active participants rather than passive receivers.

Thus, the primary ingredient required to create a learning organization is effective leadership: a leadership that is not founded on a traditional hierarchy, but somewhat, a mix of diverse employees from all levels of the organization, who lead in diverse ways (Goh, 1998; Senge, 1996). Also, there should be an awareness and understanding that all human beings have intrinsic motivation to search for solutions to the problems which confront them, and that people are capable of envisioning a future and taking the lead to create it. According to Gephart and colleagues, "the culture is the glue that holds an organization together" (Gephart, Marsick, Van Buren, & Spiro, 1996, p.39). The culture of a learning organization is built on openness and trust, whereby employees are encouraged towards learning and innovating, as well as, a culture that encourages experimentation, risk-taking, and attaches importance to the welfare of all employees.

To create a culture and workplace that will function as the basis for a learning organization starts with a fundamental shift of mind - from seeing people as not disconnected from the world, but connected to the world (Goh, 1998; Senge 1996); perceiving individuals as integral part in the work environment, rather than as detached and insignificant cogs in a wheel. Lastly, one of the biggest challenges that needs to be conquered in any corporate organization is to discover and overcome the defensive reasoning of people. If the above proposed ways are not achieved, then change can never be authentic but a transient stage (Argyris, 1991). Every person within an organization must become aware of the fact that traditional strategies which were used to define and solve problems can be a source of further problems for the organization (Argyris, 1991).

5. How to accomplish the principles of a learning organization

It is important to make a timeline to set off the types of changes required to accomplish the principles of a learning organization.

Step 1: Design a communications system to ease the exchange of relevant information, the foundation on which any learning organization is build up (Gephart et al., 1996). The applications of technology have and will continue to modify the work environment when information is allowed to circulate without any restraint, and to provide global access to vital business and strategic information (Gephart et al., 1996). What is also of great importance in to clarify the more intricate concepts into more unambiguous language that is comprehensible across units and departments within an organization (Kaplan & Norton, 1996).

Step 2: Develop a readiness questionnaire, an instrument that measures or calculates the distance between where the company is and where the company intends to be in the future, based on the following seven aspects. "Providing continuous learning, providing strategic leadership, promoting inquiry and dialogue, encouraging collaboration and team learning, creating embedded structures for capturing and sharing learning, empowering people toward a shared vision, and making systems connections" (Gephart et al., 1996, p. 43). The readiness questionnaire is given out to all personnel or a sample of employees within an organization, and is used to design an assessment profile to model the learning organization project (Gephart et al., 1996).

Step 3: Commit to cultivating, sustaining, and facilitating a work environment that promotes continuous learning.

Step 4: Create a corporate vision for the organization and compose a mission statement with input from all staff and personnel (Gephart et al., 1996).

Step 5: Make use of awareness and training programs to grow skills, understanding mind-sets that are required to attain the goals and objectives of the mission statement, the aptitude to work well with others as well as networking with employees across the various units and departments in the organization (Navran Associates Newsletter, 1993).

Step 6: Communicate a change in the organization's culture by incorporating both human and technical systems (Gephart, 1996, Serrat, 2009).

Step 7: Launch the new practices by putting emphasis on team learning and sharing. Consequently, members of the organization will become keener on management and self-regulation, and be more equipped to meet the challenges of today's ever-changing work environment (Gephart et al., 1996).

Step 8: Create opportunities for employees to question major business assumptions and practices.

Step 9: Develop practicable expectations for future actions (Navran Associates Newsletter, 1993).

Step 10: Keep in mind that developing into a learning organization is a time-consuming process and thus minor constraints and obstacles should be expected. The most important issue is the journey because the entire process brings all employees and stakeholders together to work as a single large team. Additionally, it

has innate financial advantages by transforming the business environment into a well-managed and motivating place to work; a workplace that greatly values its workers.

6. Leadership role in creating a learning organization

The leadership of any learning organization is dedicated to the meaning of learning and openly communicates that learning is crucial to the success and survival of the organization. Organizational learning is powerfully influenced by the behavior, attitude and actions of the leader (Garvin et al., 2008). When leaders at the top demonstrate through behaviors and actions a readiness to welcome alternative points of view, employees feel reassured to propose new ideas and options. Thus, leadership acknowledges and appreciates the significance of providing the purpose, processes, resources as well as the opportunity for learning (Goh, 1998; Serrat, 2009). Leaders take on an exemplary leading role in designing, sustaining and nurturing a supportive learning culture within the organization. Watkins and Marsick (1992) clarified that “Learning organizations are characterized by total employee involvement in a process of collaboratively conducted, collectively accountable change directed towards shared values or principles” (p.118). Executive leaders and line managers need to be particularly sensitive to local cultures of learning, which may differ widely across departmental units. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for building a learning organization since business organizations are not monolithic (Garvin et al., 2008). Learning organizations take a lot of time to be created, they are built gradually and not overnight. Concrete actions which the leader can use to create and foster a culture of lifelong learning for individual persons, teams as well as the entire organization are:

- a) Encouraging employees to learn by doing. Experience has shown that people learn a lot when they are given the opportunity to put into action their knowledge, so as to produce meaningful business results.
- b) Realizing that offering training programs to workers is only a tool for imparting knowledge. Leadership is to allow people to learn through sharing of lessons and experiences, telling of life stories, assigning employees with responsibilities and allowing them to make mistakes without being victimized. Since learning is multi-dimensional (Garvin et al., 2008), there is the need to create variety of learning opportunities and options for organizational members.
- c) Aligning and providing support to middle and line managers to foster a learning culture, since line managers are the ones who drive learning and not only the human resource team.
- d) Integrating learning in all organization processes. Specific rituals should be carefully put in place, such as periodic review meetings, time for reflection and analysis to evaluate what went well and invent new products. Thus, providing training in brainstorming, problem solving, reviewing and evaluating experiments is critical.
- e) Leadership needs to open up organizational teams to varied learning resources such as social media, books, conferences, workshops, symposiums, working with cross-cultural teams, project teams and so on. For example, a leader can bring customers, outside experts, internal groups, and other stakeholders together, to share ideas and to learn from one another. This will ensure a fresh movement of ideas and the opportunity to consider divergent perspectives.
- f) Organizational leaders can also make use of modern technology as a means of accelerating learning and make sure there is knowledge accessibility through various useful tools such as blogs, learning forums, wikis and so on.
- g) Engaging employees and staff in critical change initiatives, so that employees learn about change management processes and working with different categories of people.
- h) Promoting the capabilities of staff, who can come out with alternative ideas and be exposed to diverse viewpoints (Goh, 1998).
- i) Going beyond mere metrics to understand that learning is a lifelong and continuous thing which cannot be measured using numbers. Learning is implicit and visible only through results produced by team.
- j) Employees should be allowed to experiment and make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes (Goh, 1998). Employees never want to experiment if they have to pay a high price for testing things out.

To summarize, sustaining the effectiveness of a learning organization necessitates the full commitment of leadership and all employees of the organization. The effective business leader is able to lead the company towards becoming an authentic learning organization by developing a shared organizational identity and visibly communicating this identity to every member of the organization.

7. Implications for research and practice

To be able to determine the applicability of the proposed five principles model to the field of business management and organizational development, it is vital that the five component technologies are taken on board by business practitioners, particularly line managers to reinforce future real-life organizational change initiatives, and its continuing outcomes on organizational effectiveness. The implementation of the five principles model by business practitioners is also needed to ascertain and update organizational researchers concerning the critical set

of managerial and customer factors that come together to facilitate successful execution of action plans. Moreover, both academics and practitioners need to identify the scope at which the proposed five component technologies can provide guidance for successful change initiative and development of learning organizations in an ever-evolving virtual business world. Finally, given the unquantifiable, interdisciplinary and multifaceted nature of learning organizations, there is an urgent need to further explore specific examples of effective practice.

8. Conclusion

In summary, citation is given to the introductory note of the Journal of Educational Research (1987), which is stated as follows:

Education, as a central institution in modern societies, has contributed much to human welfare, including intellectual, social, and economic development, as well as to the enlargement of knowledge and culture. Greater effectiveness and productivity of education can contribute still more to the advancement of nations throughout the world.

The above citation is a strong reminder of the criticality of education and its wealth of knowledge to the growth and development of the human society. Education is critical to human beings in everyday activities. It is inevitable and mandatory in professional careers. Education continues to be fundamental in human subsistence. For both employees and employers, the benefits of educational knowledge are colossal.

It is not surprising then, that modern employers of human capital, company owners and business proprietors hold learning as a fundamental factor for the survival and growth of businesses. Through learning, employees' talents and ingenuity are maximally harnessed and effectively channeled towards the growth of the business. In addition, training and development gives people the opportunity to combine intellectual strength and physical potential towards achieving the objectives and visions of business organizations.

Such objectives, according to Smith (2003) would be fully attained if the training and education offered within the work environment were more clearly defined, more collaborative and more innovative. Smith (2003) asserts that through the five principles, employees' skillfulness and adaptability to modern business techniques and technology, particularly in today's highly technological climate will increase.

However, attention needs to be paid to the creation of a favorable learning environment, which would greatly accelerate the process of learning, education and training offered to the employees. Necessary tools essential for such a program must be provided too, while capable hands, which have been adequately trained for this purpose should be deployed to handle the trainees. Above all, necessary incentives and motivations should be provided to the people, both during and after the learning program, in order to encourage trainees in applying the knowledge to their professional tasks and responsibilities.

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