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Transition Approach in Analyzing Organizational Learning Capability: From Employer Perspective to Employee Concern

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Abstract:

Organizational Learning capability is a critical element in the organization that fosters an organizations' ability to adapt, to learn, to grow and strengthen its potential to face highly competitive challenges. Previous studies in this area have focussed on the perspectives of employers 'orientations'; specifically focusing on innovation, firm performance, business sustainability, competitive advantage, organizational effectiveness etc based on several measuring parameters. This paper attempts to highlight the importance of organizational learning capability from employees need and orientation leading for some behavioural and attitudinal outcomes (employee satisfaction, employee commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, intellectual capital) that supports their association and due concentration to achieve end results based on their efforts. The link between the HR based employee concern and organizational learning capabilities have not been well established in the literature. A conceptual model is presented that enumerate the shift of OLC from conventional to contemporary concern for employees as a consequence for organizational learning capability assessment.

Keywords: *Organizational learning capability, conventional outcomes, contemporary outcomes, employer perspective, employee concern*

1. Introduction

Considering employees' interest is paramount to the maintenance of business efficiency and effective results. The competitive edge of any organization rest upon the ability of their manpower to adapt, learns, and innovates. The knowledge residing in human resources constitutes a decisive factor to organizational success and the source of competitive advantage (Nonaka, 1994; Noon and Blyton, 2002; Pfeffer, 1994; Storey and Quintas, 2001). Employees make a critical difference when it comes to innovation, organizational performance, competitiveness, and thus ultimately business success (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). The effective accomplishments of an organization's results tremendously rely upon its employee's potential. Ulrich (1997, p.125), who writes in his seminal book "Human Resources Champions": "Employee contribution becomes a critical business issue because in trying to produce more output with less employee input, companies have no choice but to try to engage not only the body but the mind and soul of every employee." It is important to understand how organizational learning capability- as a key factor contributes, determine and support employees' contribution for organization's success. Although learning organizations are still concerned with tangible results, i.e., market share, productivity, profitability, and growth, they understand that learning is the key to acquiring greater results. However, the orientation of the learning organization on people's approach is simply lacking in past researches. Developing organizational learning capabilities and firms' output in competitive market is tightly connected with employees' performance levels and association with the organization. The issue of sensitivity and concern for employees and their potential provides due implications for identifying and strengthening organizational learning capability of the organization leading to employee benefits.

Many authors have argued that organizational learning can be the main antecedent for organizational well-being, the key enabler for achieving organizational change and securing competitive advantage (Krogh et al., 1998; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994). Pfeffer (1998) and Greer (2001) suggested the success of companies in the present competitive environment largely depends upon the calibre of their human resources and innovative employee management programmes and practices. Few authors in the past (Nonaka, 1994; Noon and Blyton, 2002; Pfeffer, 1994; Storey and Quintas, 2001) concede that the knowledge trait of organizational members represents a dominant feature for gaining organizational success and to achieve competitive advantage.

Past researches has posited that organizational learning lead to a change in systems and structures (Levitt and March, 1988), innovation and competitiveness (Nason, 1994), financial performance (Lei et al., 1999; Pérez et al., 2005), CRM and firm

performance (Akgun et al, 2014; Herhausen and Schögel, 2013). Thus, these studies been done with the view of strategic management domain area considering organizational success criteria but the forte of human resource perspective is overlooked in such studies.

2. Organizational Learning Capability

The concept of organizational learning capability is an expansion of the study of organizational learning concentrating primarily on the firms' assisting factors for organizational capacity to learn and grow. Due to ever changing dynamic and complex economic environment the area of organizational learning has gained a great deal of attention in recent years by academic and business practitioners (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004; Easterby-Smith et al., 2000).

Organizational Learning Capability is defined as the organizational and managerial characteristics or factors that facilitates the organizational learning process or allow an organization to learn (Goh and Richards, 1997). Ulrich et al. (1993, p. 60) on the other hand define organizational learning capability as "the capacity of managers within an organization to generate and generalize ideas with impact." Further few authors like (Goh and Richards, 1997; Pedler et al., 1997; Ulrich et al., 1993) expressed a set of actions that ensures learning capability: effective generation of ideas by implementing a set of practices such as experimentation, continuous improvement, teamwork and group problem-solving, observing what others do, or participative decision making. Further Chiva et al. (2007) considered OLC as a multidimensional concept, and suggested extended dimensions of OLC as: experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participative decision making.

The abstraction of OLC has considered organizational learning to be either internal or external. Bierly and Chakrabarti (1996), suggested firms' to sustain adequate balance between internal and external learning that creates adequate balance in resource configuration and strategic objectives. Internal learning occurs when members of the organization generate and distribute new knowledge inside the firm; as well external learning occurs when new knowledge comes from outside the firm and is then transferred throughout the organization. Hence, Organizational learning is the triumph key of organizations that facilitate the organizations to enable and improve their sustainability; anyhow if the organizations hold deprived learning capabilities, they could not gain advantage from all their capabilities in the competitive field of today's aggressive business threats. (Bahadori et al 2012).

3. Who Learns in Organizational Learning?

Argyris (1992) considers that organizations take action to ensure the learning, but the members are the ones who facilitate learning. Many authors (Chiva, 2004; Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Cook and Yanow, 1996; Easterby-Smith, Snell and Gherardi, 1998) put forth distinguished views on organizational learning as individual and the social views. According to Chiva (2004), the individual view considers learning as an individual phenomenon and consequently comprehend that organizations learn through individuals (e.g. Huber, 1991); the social view considers learning as a social phenomenon and accordingly understands that organizations learn through communities and groups (e.g. Brown and Duguid, 1991). (Argyris & Schon, 1978) highlighted that focus of organizational learning considers individuals as 'agents' for organizations to learn. Also (Örtenblad, 2001) expressed his views by stating that organization learns like an individual or in a collective way. Hence, organizational learning advances on learning and behaviour of its people (Burgoyne & Pedler, 1994; Honey & Mumford, 1992; Marquardt & Reynolds, 1994; Senge, 1990).

4. Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework for organizational learning capability outcomes is generalized and developed from previous studies. The concept of organizational learning capability has gained considerable importance among practitioners and researchers and concentration was drawn on the employees' perspectives based on their perceived end results. However, the expectations of human capital related with their behavioural reflections was mainly missed in previous studies. The proposed conceptual model considered firm performance, innovation, and knowledge performance as conventional outcomes of organizational learning capability (OLC), whereas the consequences of organizational learning capability (OLC) for perceived employee benefits was reflected with employee satisfaction, employee commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, and intellectual capital are postulated as contemporary outcomes of organizational learning capability (OLC), as in Figure 1.

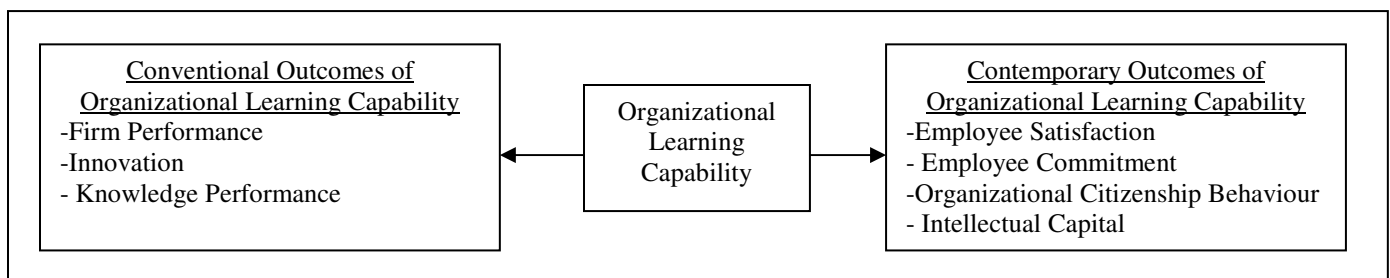


Figure 1: Outcomes of Organizational learning Capability

5. Conventional Outcomes of Organizational learning Capability

Although learning organizations in the past and even till date are still concerned with tangible results, i.e., market share, productivity, profitability, and growth, and understand that learning is the key to acquiring greater results. Earlier studies of OLC seem to be context

specific, i.e. individual, group, or organizational levels that influence the organization to achieve business performance, sustainability and competitive advantage.

5.1. Organizational Learning Capability and Firm Performance

Many studies were identified that relate organizational learning and performance improvement of firms. (Goh and Richards, 1997; Jacobs, 1995; Kaiser and Holton, 1998). While considering organizational learning and firm performance, Bhatnagar.(2006) measured organizational learning capability based on market indicators of firm performance, i.e. firm's financial turnover and firm's profit as predictors of OLC in Indian organizations, where financial turnover was predicting organizational learning capability. Akhtar et al (2011) identified significant positive impact of the organizational learning on organizational performance. The study was conducted to estimate the impact of explanatory variable 'organizational learning' with "Culture" as a moderator on the response variable 'organizational performance'. Ellinger et al. (2003), has established a link between financial indicators of performance and organizational learning, through empirical research.

Recent researches has shown a positive link between organizational learning capability and organizational performance, considering either focusing on general performance (Camps and Luna-Arocas, 2012) or on specific organizational performance aspects like innovation performance (Ar and Baki, 2011; Robinson and Stubberud, 2011) or export performance (Alegre et al., 2011).

Few researchers have also contributed in recognizing causal relationship between learning growth and firms' performance. (Hasan, 2002; Kaplan and Norton, 2001). Goh, et al. (2012) findings set forth a positive relationship between learning capability and organizational performance, acclaiming stronger results for non-financial than financial performance.

5.2. Organizational Learning Capability and Innovation

Several authors have established the close linkage of organizational learning to innovation (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Watkins and Marsick, 1993). They declared a positive link between organizational learning and innovation. Among many others (Hurley and Hult, 1998; Ismail, 2005; Weerd-Nederhof et al., 2002) identified the linkages between organizational learning and innovation among nonprofits organizations too.

Managing organizational innovation in an effective manner is the key to construct and maintain competitive advantages of organizations to face changing environment (Lemon and Sahota, 2004; Liao, Fei, and Liu, 2008). However, Baker and Sinkula (1999a), Ismail, (2005), Thomas and Alien, (2006), considered organizational learning as a factor that enable organizations to respond in a quick and effectual way to rising market opportunities by helping to create the optimal innovation environment. Baker and Sinkula (1999b and 2002) have firmly demonstrated that profit based organizations need organizational learning for the successful launch of new products or services into the market to meet consumer requirements and thus achieve enhanced performance and sustainable competitive advantage.

Moreover, some authors (Burt and Taylor, 2003; Voss et al., 2006) have examined the relation between innovation and performance, while others have been assessing the impact of organizational learning on performance (Barrett et al., 2005; Grieves and Mathews, 1997; Zeilstra, 2003). Further Salim and Sulaiman (2011) explained that organizational learning contributes to innovation capability, and that innovation is positively related to firm performance. Fang et al (2011) in assessing the relationship between organizational learning capability and organizational innovation postulate organizational learning capability positively and significantly related to organizational innovation. Knowledge inertia moderated the relationship between organizational learning capability and organizational innovation.(Chung et al,2011)

Research shows that innovation is linked to the concepts of generation, acceptance, and implementation of new ideas, processes, products and services (Damanpour, 1991; Drucker, 2002), and is determined by the firm's learning orientation (Baker & Sinkula, 1999a ; Calantone et al 2002).Past researches suggests a positive association between the OLC dimensions and product innovation.. Experimentation is a basic learning mechanism for a company to innovate: the development of a new product requires a number of experiments to test market and technology issues (Thomke, 2001). New ideas and proposals represent the starting point of innovation (Koc and Ceylan, 2006). Risk taking is necessary for the generation of new ideas (Amabile et al., 1996), and should therefore be tolerated in order to promote innovation in the organization.

Learning also occurs through organizational interaction with the external environment. Customer demand uncertainty, technological developments and competitive turbulence are considered to be crucial environmental factors that need to be monitored and analyzed (Wheelwright and Clark, 1992; Calantone et al., 2002). External learning deriving from alliances and networks (Chang, 2003; Chipika and Wilson, 2006); technology transfers (Edmondson et al., 2003) or R&D collaboration with universities and research institutes (Pedler et al., 1997; Azagra-Caro et al., 2006) might be a critical factor in the successful undertaking of innovation projects. Hence, interaction with the external environment represents another significant learning mechanism for innovation (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995).

This learning mechanism may have a positive impact on innovation by exposing individuals to a greater variety of unusual ideas (Amabile et al., 1996) and by increasing internal group cohesion and co-ordination (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995). Finally, participative decision making increases involvement and the commitment to innovate (Damanpour, 1991). According to Hurley and Hult (1998), when members of a group are encouraged to learn and to develop new ideas, they are able to influence group decisions; the group is thus prepared and put to be more innovative.

5.3. Organizational Learning Capabilities and Knowledge Performance

Knowledge performance is about the ability of individual, teams and organization to understand what they have learned. Kasim and Shoid (2013) analysed the association between organizational learning capabilities (OLC) four dimensions namely shared vision and mission, organizational culture, systems thinking and teamwork cooperation with knowledge performance in an academic library setting which outlined that among all, shared vision and mission shows the most preferred response perceived by the respondents while moderate to strong relationships exist among the OLC dimensions and between knowledge performance. Marsick and Watkinson (1999) suggested human as the vital carrier agent of knowledge awareness or knowledge understanding. It has been agreed that learning organization that engaged with the due concern to knowledge capital of organization is always growing and developing for success.

6. Contemporary Outcomes of Organizational Learning Capability

Though numerous researches have been conducted to study organizational learning capability, there are very limited related literatures available which have touched behavioural or attitudinal constructs of employees as contributing criteria for measuring OLC outcomes. The relationship between employees' belief regarding learning benefits and issues concerning employees' orientation for their 'stay' is as yet unclear. At the employee level, more research is required to analyze the relationships between organizational learning capability and issues concerning employees, i.e. organizational commitment, employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, etc

6.1. Organizational Learning Capability and Employee Satisfaction

In every organization employee satisfaction is considered to be one of the significant issues in assessing the employee's job accomplishment and outcomes to greater effectiveness, efficiency and production as well as personal satisfaction feelings. With the importance of employees and their working attitude in the organization (Chiva and Alegre ,2009) investigated a strong and positive relationship between organizational learning capability dimensions based on self devised measuring instrument (Experimentation , risk taking, Interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participative decision making.) and job satisfaction and suggested that organizational learning capability and job satisfaction are strongly linked.

Job satisfaction is an essential independent variable that can lead to employee behaviours that affect organizational functioning and performance (Rowden, 2002), but also be considered as a dependent variable that is mainly influenced by working and organizational conditions (e.g. Hackman and Oldman,1980). Goh and Ryan (2002) postulate the relation of learning capability with a non – financial performance measure in the organization as, job satisfaction in contrast with other financial performance measures of return on equity and return on assets.

Kontoghiorghes and Bryant (2004) also believe employee satisfaction is a key contributor to organizational success and survival. Emami et al (2012) enlisted relation between organizational learning culture and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction had shown strong negative relationship with turnover intention. Further, it describes impact of organizational learning culture on turnover intention when job satisfaction is considered as a mediator. Jolodar and Jolodar (2012) indicated association between organizational learning capability (experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participative decision making) with job satisfaction. The end result declared five dimensions of organizational learning capability (experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participative decision making) highly related with job satisfaction. As organizational learning culture and job satisfaction enlist correlation with turnover, it is important to reinforce them by applying the right human resource policies.

6.2. Organizational Learning Capability and Commitment

Employee commitment in the organization continues to be one of the most stirring issues for both practitioners and academicians to enhance and manage employee alliance with company. Garvin (1993) posited organizational learning as one of the key contextual components to enhance organizational commitment. Garvin also defined organizational learning as an act by which an organization is skilled to create, acquire and transfer knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insight.

In organizations, commitment remains an important issue in talent retention and the development of human capital (Krishna and Monappa, 1994; Rao, 1999; Budhwar and Boyne, 2004) .Many studies have attempted to explore its effect on work outcomes such as turnover and job performance. Recently, Organizational learning capability and commitment showed a direct linkage (Ulrich et al., 1993 and Terziovski et al.; 2000). Whereas the result explored by Bhatnagar (2007) was similar with the past results where relation among sub-variables of organizational learning capability and organizational commitment was significant .Earlier, learning organization, knowledge management and commitment linkages have been explored by Brooks (2002). Kontoghiorghes and Bryant (2004) found organizational commitment to be related from moderate to high level with all the variables of organizational learning and considered employee commitment to serve as a tool of competitive advantage. Some studies have focused on the interconnection and the influence of culture and organizational commitment on performance (Rashid et al., 2003).

6.3. Organizational Learning Capability and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

Organizational citizenship behaviour in the organization is considered to be a vital element for organization's effectiveness. It directs the organizational outcomes, like individual and organizational performance and efficiency. Few researchers in the past (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2004; Chi-Cheng et al., 2011) investigated the relationship between organizational learning and organizational citizenship behaviours. Turker (2008) associated organizational citizenship behaviour with organizational learning climate, acting as a

strong factor facilitating higher citizenship behaviour of employees. Furthermore, Chi-Cheng et al., (2011) also highlighted the effect of organizational learning on the organizational citizenship behaviour along with organizational commitment. Later the authors Karimi and Akbari (2013) predicted dialogue and experimentation (components of organizational learning capability) as the best predictor of organizational citizenship in their analysis of mutual relationship among them. Recently, Karimi and Akbari, (2015) postulated the mediating role of organizational intelligence in the relation between organizational learning capability and organizational citizenship behaviour representing to be closely connected with each other.

6.4. Organizational Learning Capability and Intellectual Capital

In today's highly competitive and knowledge based economy that acknowledge human resource as critical and influential resource use their intellectual capital as an important feature for acquiring success and sustainability of the organization. For this demanding position organizational learning capability is the prime feature to support and manage such credibility. Moghadam S.K., et al. (2013) examined the relationship between intellectual capital and organizational learning capability (OLC) and suggested that human capital and structural capital have a significant relationship with organizational learning capability but there was no significant relationship found between relational capital with organizational learning capability.

7. Conclusion

In the past literature the link between organizational learning capability and innovation, organizational learning capability and firm performance, knowledge performance and some of the underlying dimensions has demonstrated to have the major impact on organizational learning whereas the other side of employees concerns related with employee commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, and intellectual capital are researched very little. Some of the unexplored concerns related with organizational trust, employee engagement, are suggested for empirical testing in future. However, the element of employee orientation was little considered in the past without prominence to human centric approach. The variable of sensitivity to people and their potential provides implications for effective organizational learning criteria. If adequate attention is paid to this dimension, then it can lead to gaining of competitive advantage and business sustainability of business through employee performance fostered by their attitudes for work and learning.

Considerable lights are thrown to provide due deliberation to employees aspect of high concern, as they are the one who transforms targets into results. Thus, their interest is included critically as an important and critical element in establishing organizational learning capability criteria. High concern for organizational learning issues and the need to maintain a competitive edge in this hypercompetitive global economy is vital to sustain and gain success and growth. The competitive edge will come from a company's ability to innovate, create and use of entrepreneurial energies of its people. Hence, the need for predominant paradigms shifts in OLC concept to be re-examined in future studies. Thus mapping the organizational learning capability of the organizations, from an employee perspective becomes imperative in this context. Thus, comprehensive view of organizational learning capability outcomes presented here can be distinguished from other perspectives that have focused on specific elements of outcomes in the overall organizational learning system.

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