



GIAP Journals

Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews
Vol 4, No 2, November 2016, pg 76-87
ISSN 2395-6518, Dol: 10.18510/hssr.2016.423

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING MECHANISMS IN SOHAR UNIVERSITY

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Article History: Received On 20th September, Revised On 30th October, Published On 10th November 2016

ABSTRACT

PURPOSE

The objective of the study is to critically examine the mechanisms of organizational learning in Sohar University and to identify the relationship between stages of organizational learning and mechanisms of organizational learning and to examine the effectiveness and the nurturance of the pedagogical practices.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH

The study was conducted with 76 employees from all the departments of Sohar University, who were selected on a simple random sampling basis and were contacted through a well-defined questionnaire.

FINDINGS

The study reveals that the employees of Sohar University are encouraged to attend external programs and seminars on new developments have been organized and the university prepares detailed plans reflecting contingency approaches. The study also confirmed that there is no relationship between demographic factors (Gender, age, qualification and teaching experience) and the Organizational learning. The study also reveals that there is an association between the Innovations, Implementation and Organization learning.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study has thrown light on the organizational learning process, which is the key driver in innovating, implementing and stabilizing.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

The study was restricted to the academic staff from all the faculties of Sohar University. Many of them did not understand the concept. So the researcher has to explain them in detail before furnishing the detailed questionnaire.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study can be extended to other colleges and universities in Oman so that the accuracy of the tools and techniques of organizational learning can be ascertained. This will induce high transmission goals to equip and uplift the participants in a positive and creative contribution.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE

Only a very few have examined the impact of Organization Learning in the Universities of Oman, and it is a first-hand study of its kind.

Keywords: *Organizational learning in University, Sohar University, Stages of Organization Learning, Innovation and implementation, Stabilization, Decision making.*

INTRODUCTION

Organizational learning (OL) is regarded as a social procedure including connections among numerous people towards promoting excellent decision making. Organizational learning is the scope of the association to obtain or to produce information to endeavor and contend with its environments (Bennet and Bennet, 2003). Organizational



learning is the process of improving existing or creating new capabilities (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). Organizational learning is the procedure where an association can gain, hold and use the data for its advancement and it is also the procedure results in an improved capacity for both continuing self-learning and self-development (Pareek and Purohit, 2009). Therefore, a society that learns and adjusts to the major aspect of ordinary working practices is vital. Organizational learning has grown-up dramatically in the recent years. Usually, the possibility for learning is highest at the innovation, followed by the implementation and then stabilization stage. Innovation is the process of getting an input for development and examining it whereas Implementation deals with the process of retaining the acquired input. Stabilization is the stage at which the usage of the new input occurs whenever it is needed. The mechanism followed by experimentation and the least was for temporary systems.

By and large, one can recognize two procedures of organizational change that are connected with organization learning – Adaptive learning and Proactive learning. Adaptive learning is one in which changes will be carried out as a response to change the natural conditions and Proactive learning in which organizational changes is carried out on a more obstinate premise.

Sohar University, the first private university in Oman provides staff with training and development programs such as workshops, conferences etc. help its staff who are from different countries to complete their studies inside or outside the university which are of all levels from diploma to the doctorate. Applying the principles of organizational learning, knowledge and application have become core factors for an organization's competitive advantage in today's environment and Sohar University is no exception to it.

Organization learning in Sohar University is based on three stages representing the three subsystems viz.

- Acquiring and examining – Innovation stage
- Retaining and integrating – Implementation stage and
- Using and adapting – Stabilization stage.

Further, five other categories of mechanisms include the items that relate to the mechanisms of Experimentation and Flexibility, Mutuality and Teamwork, Contingency and Incremental planning, Temporary systems, and Competency building.

This study explores the organizational learning prevailing in Sohar University and attempts to add to the dynamics of organizational learning - the stages and mechanisms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leeuw, Rist, and Sonnichsen (2000) defined organizational learning as the 'process of detecting and correcting error' and evaluation is the key to organizational learning and the acquisition of knowledge is important to the learning process. Argyris and Schon (1978, 1995, 1999) proposed the idea of Double Circle learning being used taking into account the intelligent process of the organizational learning. The emphasis was on the persistent and collective learning practice which put more accentuation on the procedure arranged concept - organizational learning that supported the learning rehearses. Organizational learning suggests that learning processes are not integrally positive and might differ in their significance (Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011, Crossan and Berdrow, 2003).

Garvin (1993) noted that the most discussions of organizational learning focus on high philosophy and grand schemes, sweeping metaphors rather than the gritty details of practice. Bauman (2005) has checked that organizational learning was advanced among the groups when three circumstances occurred:

- The vicinity of new thoughts
- The development of uncertainty in existing information and practices and
- The improvement and exchange of learning among institutional players.

A study by Easterby-Smith, Araujo and Burgoyne (1999) mainly characterized a call for more study of organizational learning such as the development of organizational structures. Organizational learning itself is generally accepted as a 'good thing' and the main variations consist of different emphases on the components or pre-requisites for firms especially to become 'learning organizations'.



The idea of the learning organization is an expanding territory of enthusiasm for the fields of Human Resource Development (HRD), administration, and even educational systems (Egan, Yang and Bartlett, 2004, Marquardt, 2002, Wang, 2007). Senge (2006) characterized the learning organization as the association that is ceaselessly growing its ability to make its future and he stated that the learning organization is the place individuals could grow their competency through sustained intuitions, wherein the individuals determinedly figuring out on how to learn together. Garvin (1993) distinguished five primary actions (processes) that associations use to be a learning organization:

- Systematic critical thinking
- Testing with new methodologies
- Learning from the past practices and the old history
- Learning from the past practices and best experiences of others and
- Transferring information rapidly and proficiently all through the organization.

Learning is a procedure coordinated with and running parallel to work. Learning additionally upgrades organizational capacity for development and growth. Scharmer (2002) depicted the significance of observing, detecting, knowing, forming and executing in the learning context. Thus, the three shared characteristics are:

1. The key of the learning organization is the organizational learning operation
2. The basis of the effective learning organization are aggregate thinking, the harmony of individuals, and human capability and
3. A learning organization is a methodical environment in which ceaseless learning could occur by a method (Argyris and Schon, 1995; Leonard and McAdam, 2003; Garvin, 1993, 2000; Marsick and Watkins, 2003; and Senge, 2006).

Leiberman (2005) verbalized how faculty improvement in today's foundations of higher education infers promoting faculty to endure and flourish inside the learning organization. Ghosh (2004) recommended that an HRD framework working on a learning criterion would situate its actions by making an ambitious behavior, training and employee's advancement. Argote et al. (2003) have considered the components of learning management and how those systems influence a unit's capacity to make, hold and exchange information. Based on them, capacity, inspiration, and opportunity are the three causal components which clarify why certain relevant elements influence learning administration results. The degree of exploration characterizing a strategic innovation moderates the relationships between learning activities and innovation (Crossan, Lane, White and Djurfeldt, 1995). Innovation refers to change that result in commercial benefit and that is based on new ideas or implementation of existing knowledge in novel ways (Garcia-Morales, Ruiz-Moreno and Llorens-Montes, 2007). As Nonaka (1994) and others have outlined, the ideas underlying the improvement of old capabilities and the creation of new capabilities emerge from individuals. Thus, the learning that accompanies organizational capability development includes the discovery and internalization of new information as well as new experiences and feedback by individuals. For individual-level learning to be transformed into organizational capabilities, however, new ideas and experience must be interpreted and integrated within groups (Chadwick and Raver, 2015, Nonaka, 1994). These group-level processes, therefore, are a crucial mediator between learning at the individual level and the development of organizational capabilities (Edmondson, 2002). Milam (2005) contended that with a specific goal, to boost learning new applications and learning histories are required and inaccuracies must be esteemed towards disappointment perceived as a component of the learning growth. The mechanism for organization learning can be given through certain activities that an association can take to accomplish its motivation viz. Adaptability, Collaboration Probability and accumulative planning, Provisional framework and Making teams (Pareek and Purohit, 2009).

The characteristic marks which have been utilized to portray the Organizational learning are the Single Loop learning (adaptive learning) versus the Double Loop Learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978), the Minor Level versus the Superior Level Learning (Fiol and Lyles, 1985), the Tactical versus the Strategic Learning (Dodgson, 1993), and the Adaptive versus the Productive Learning (Senge, 1994). The different patterns in a learning organization show that organizational learning and learning organizations are ideas showing up repetitively of the old studies identified with organizational advancement. The earlier research works offer clues about the impact of different learning activities – 'searching' for information versus 'codifying' the newly acquired knowledge – on initiative

performance, and whether and how this impact varies under different learning conditions, such as the degree of exploration associated with strategic initiatives.

FINDINGS

76 questionnaires were collected from the six faculties of the university. A summary of the demographic data is presented in table 1.

Table No. 1 Demographic information about the respondents

| Characteristics | | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 42 | 55.3 |
| | Female | 34 | 44.7 |
| Age | 20-30 Years | 15 | 19.7 |
| | 31-40 Years | 24 | 31.6 |
| | Above 50 Years | 37 | 48.7 |
| Qualification | Post Graduate | 14 | 18.4 |
| | Master Degree | 31 | 40.8 |
| | Ph.D. | 26 | 34.2 |
| | Professional Qualification | 5 | 6.6 |
| Faculty | Education & Arts | 5 | 6.6 |
| | Business | 7 | 9.2 |
| | Computing &IT | 13 | 17.1 |
| | Engineering | 20 | 26.3 |
| | English Language Studies | 15 | 19.7 |
| | General Foundation Program | 16 | 21.1 |
| Nationality | Omani | 30 | 39.5 |
| | India | 17 | 22.4 |
| | Pakistan | 3 | 3.9 |
| | Algeria | 5 | 6.6 |
| | Syria | 3 | 3.9 |
| | Iraq | 5 | 6.6 |
| | Sudan | 2 | 2.6 |
| | Tunisia | 1 | 1.3 |
| | UK | 2 | 2.6 |
| | Libyan | 2 | 2.6 |
| Others | 6 | 7.9 | |
| Work Experience | 3 Years and Below | 10 | 13.1 |
| | 3 -5 Years | 10 | 13.1 |
| | 5-10 Years | 24 | 31.6 |
| | 15-20 Years | 12 | 15.9 |
| | > 20 Years | 20 | 26.3 |

Source: Questionnaire

Table 2. Acquiring and examining at the innovation stage

| Statements | SA | A | N | D | SD | K-S value | Chi ² value | p-value |
|---|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|---------|
| Innovations are rewarded | 7 9.2% | 39 51.3% | 25 32.9% | 5 6.6% | | 4.09 | | |
| Realistic appraisals are made up of the support needed for continued use of innovations | 4 5.3% | 43 56.6% | 20 26.3% | 7 9.2% | 2 2.6% | 3.68 | | |
| Working committees meant for data base of the innovations. | 6 7.9% | 28 36.8% | 34 44.7% | 7 9.2% | 1 1.3% | 3.60 | 30.439 | 0.000 |
| Periodic meetings are held by top or senior management to review innovations | 5 6.6% | 28 36.8% | 33 43.4% | 5 6.6% | 4 5.3% | 3.56 | | |
| Working committees are created to evaluate report negative aspects of innovations | 5 6.6% | 21 27.6% | 31 40.8% | 10 13.2% | 7 9.2% | 3.10 | | |
| Working committees meant to examine common elements between old practices and innovations | 5 6.6% | 29 38.2% | 31 40.8% | 6 7.9% | 5 6.6% | 2.98 | | |

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the statements related to the acquiring and examining at the innovation stage and the choices of the respondents.

From the above table, it can be seen that the p-value < 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis get rejected i.e. there is a significant relationship between these statements and the choices of the respondents. Therefore comparing the

Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) values it can be noted that the ‘Innovations are rewarded’ ranked first followed by the factors ‘Realistic appraisals are made up of the support needed for continued use of innovations’ and ‘Working committees are meant for database of the innovations.’

Table 3. Retaining and integrating at the implementation stage

| Statement | SA | A | N | D | SD | K-S value | Chi ² value | p-value |
|--|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------------------|---------|
| Periodic meetings are held for sharing results of experiments | 7 9.2% | 42 55.3% | 23 30.3% | 3 3.9% | 1 1.3% | 3.31 | 27.295 | 0.000 |
| Periodic meetings are held for sharing on-going experiments | 7 9.2% | 33 43.4% | 27 35.5% | 7 9.2% | 2 2.6% | 3.69 | | |
| Employees are encouraged to attend external programs. | 7 9.2% | 25 32.9% | 18 23.7% | 16 21.1% | 10 13.2% | 4.62 | | |
| Employee seminars on new developments are organized | 5 6.6% | 27 35.5% | 26 34.2% | 12 15.8% | 6 7.9% | 4.31 | | |
| Newly proposed practices are linked to known practices | 6 7.9% | 33 43.4% | 19 25.0% | 14 18.4% | 3 3.9% | 4.07 | | |
| Detailed plans reflecting contingency approaches are prepared | 6 7.9% | 27 35.5% | 30 39.5% | 11 14.5% | 2 2.6% | 4.16 | | |
| Working committees are created to follow-up on new experiments | 4 5.3% | 35 46.1% | 27 35.5% | 8 10.5% | 2 2.6% | 3.83 | | |

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the retaining and integrating at the implementation stage and the choices of the respondents.

From the above, it is evident that the p-value < 0.05 i.e. null hypothesis gets rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between these statements and the choice of the respondents. Therefore, comparing the K-S values of the statements it can be noted that that the ‘Employees of are encouraged to attend external programs’

ranks first among all factors the followed by, ‘Employee seminars on new developments are organized’ and ‘Detailed plans reflecting contingency approaches are prepared.’

Table 4. Using and adapting at the Stabilization stage

| Statement | SA | A | N | D | S D | K-S value | Chi ² value | P-value |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|---------|
| Working committees are created for implementing and monitoring new experiments | 24 11.9% | 76 37.6% | 67 33.2% | 29 14.4% | 6 3.0% | 3.16 | 19.890 | 0.001 |
| Relevant existing skills are utilized in implementing change | 5 6.6% | 40 52.6% | 24 31.6% | 6 7.9% | 1 1.3% | 3.15 | | |
| Widespread debates are held on experiences of implementation | 5 6.6% | 20 26.3% | 36 47.4% | 12 15.8% | 3 3.9% | 4.07 | | |
| Implementation is done when experience indicates that modification is needed | 7 9.2% | 29 38.2% | 29 38.2% | 9 11.8% | 1 1.3% | 3.50 | | |
| Employees are encouraged to experiment | 5 6.6% | 32 42.1% | 28 36.8% | 10 13.2% | 1 1.3% | 3.59 | | |
| Each working committee is encouraged to prepare an implementation method | 4 5.3% | 34 44.7% | 28 36.8% | 9 11.8% | 1 1.3% | 3.53 | | |

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between using and adapting at the stabilization stage and the choices of the respondents.

From the above table, it can be seen that the p-value < 0.05 and thus the null hypothesis get rejected i.e. there is a significant relationship between these statements and the choices of the respondents. Therefore, comparing the K-S values of the statements it can be noted that ‘Widespread debates are held on experiences of implementation’ ranks first followed by the factors ‘Employees are encouraged to experiment’ and ‘Each working committee is encouraged to prepare an implementation method.’

Table 5. Organization learning

| Statement | SA | A | N | D | S D | K-S value | Chi ² value | p-value |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|---------|
| Periodic meetings are held to review and share experiences | 8 10.5% | 44 57.9% | 15 19.7% | 6 7.9% | 3 3.9% | 3.15 | 23.920 | 0.000 |
| Experiences and concerns are shared with other organizations | 5 6.6% | 31 40.8% | 29 38.2% | 11 14.5% | 5 6.6% | 3.84 | | |
| Records of experiences are maintained | 6 7.9% | 35 46.1% | 29 38.2% | 6 7.9% | 6 7.9% | 3.61 | | |
| Self-learning and self-development will help personnel to gain transfer knowledge | 11 14.5% | 46 60.5% | 14 18.4% | 4 5.3% | 1 1.3% | 2.92 | | |
| Sohar University motivates employees to improve self-learning and self-development | 5 6.6% | 37 48.7% | 20 26.3% | 12 15.8% | 2 2.6% | 3.71 | | |
| Experts and experienced creative practitioners are invited to share their ideas with the members of the organization | 4 5.3% | 31 40.8% | 35 46.1% | 6 7.9% | 4 5.3% | 3.77 | | |

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the organization learning and the choices of the respondents.

From the above table, it can be seen that the p-value < 0.05 null hypothesis gets rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between these statements and the choices of the respondents. Therefore, comparing the K-S values of the statements it can be noted that ‘Experiences and concerns of Sohar University are shared with other organizations’ ranks first among all factors the followed by ‘Experts and experienced creative practitioners are invited to share their ideas with the members of the organization’ and ‘Sohar University motivates employees to improve self-learning and self-development.’

Table No. 6 Gender vs. Organization learning

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 20.192 | 15 | .165 |
| N of Valid Cases | 76 | | |

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is $.165 > 0.05$ i.e. there is significance difference between gender and Organizational learning stage. In other words, there is no relationship between the Gender and the organization learning stage.

Table 7. Age vs. Organization learning

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 35.489 | 30 | .225 |
| N of Valid Cases | 76 | | |

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is $.225 > 0.05$ i.e. there is significance difference between the age and Organizational learning stage. In other words, there is no relationship between the age and the organization learning stage.

Table 8. Qualification vs. Organization learning

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 55.638 | 45 | .133 |
| N of Valid Cases | 76 | | |

It is evident from the above table that the p-value is $.133 > 0.05$ i.e. there is significance difference between Qualification and organizational learning stage. In other words, there is no relationship between the qualification and the organization learning stage.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The regression analysis shows that the p-value for perception is 0.071 which is more than 0.05. So after removing this variable, the regression analysis is carried out again the find out the regression fit. Thus

Table. 9 a, b, c and d

| Variables Entered/Removed ^a | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Model | Variables Entered | Variables Removed | Method | |
| | Implementation, Innovations ^b | . | Enter | |
| a. Dependent Variable: organization learning | | | | |
| b. All requested variables entered. | | | | |
| Model Summary | | | | |
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| | .767 ^a | .588 | .576 | 2.06482 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Implementation, Innovations | | | | |

From the above table, it can be seen that 58.8% of the respondents are influenced by the equation given below.

| Anova | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 419.694 | 2 | 209.847 | 49.220 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 294.181 | 69 | 4.263 | | |
| Total | 713.875 | 71 | | | |
| a. Dependent variable: Organization learning | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Implementation, Innovations | | | | | |

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 3.676 | 1.148 | | 3.202 | .002 |
| Innovations | .266 | .080 | .329 | 3.325 | .001 |
| Implementation | .443 | .085 | .517 | 5.234 | .000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Organization learning | | | | | |

From the above ANOVA table, it is clear that the p-value < 0.05 and thus the obtained linear regression will be as follows:

$$OL = 3.676 + .266 \text{ Inno} + .443 \text{ Imp}$$

where Inno is Innovations and Imp is Implementation.

It can be seen from the above linear expression that the Organization learning is dependent on Innovations and Implementation.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

From the above statistical analysis, it is evident that the 'Innovations are rewarded' ranked first followed by the factors 'Realistic appraisals are made up of the support needed for continued use of innovations' and 'Working committees are meant for database of the innovations.' It is also observed that the 'Employees of are encouraged to attend external programs' ranks first among all factors the followed by 'Employee seminars on new developments are organized' and 'Detailed plans reflecting contingency approaches are prepared.'

Further, it is noted that 'Widespread debates are held on experiences of implementation' ranks first followed by the factors 'Employees is encouraged to experiment' and 'Each working committee is encouraged to prepare an implementation method.' It can also be seen that the 'Experiences and concerns of Sohar University are shared with other organizations' ranks first among all factors the followed by 'Experts and experienced creative practitioners are invited to share their ideas with the members of the organization' and 'Sohar University motivates employees to improve self-learning and self-development'. Also, note that there is no relationship between the Gender and the organization learning stage whereas it is found that there is no relationship between the age and the organization learning stage. It is also noted that there is no relationship between the qualification and the organization learning stage.



Further a linear expression is derived in such way that the Organization learning is dependent on Innovations and Implementation i.e. there is an association between the Innovations and Implementation.

To sum up, the study reveals that the employees of Sohar University are encouraged to attend external programs. Also confirmed that the university employee seminars on new developments are organized and the university prepares detailed plans reflecting contingency approaches. The study confirmed that there is no relationship between demographic factors (gender, age, qualification and teaching experience) and the organizational learning stage. The study also reveals that there is an association between the Innovations, Implementation and Organization learning. Thus, it can be concluded that the various dimensions of organizational learning in the university are influenced by organization learning.

SUGGESTIONS

The study has thrown light on the organizational learning process, which is the key driver in innovating, implementing and stabilizing. Thus, to increase the learning in the university

- There have to be more opportunities towards the creation of task groups for data-based innovations.
- Assessment of innovations and follow-up on innovation methodologies.
- Openings of experiences' sharing have to be encouraged and sharing the same between the teams has to be done on a periodical basis.
- Effective documentation on innovative practices to be made available as and when needed.

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