THEORIZING CAREER SUCCESS PERCEPTION AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN MANAGERIAL LEARNING AND THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

This analytical research paper was prepared by using literature review on the relationships among three variables composed of managerial learning, career success perception and the learning organization. Managerial learning is the exogenous variable whereas the learning organization is the endogenous variable. Career success perception is the third variable. Supported by literature review on the linkages among the three variables on the premises of cause and effect, the role of career success perception as a mediator was justified using Baron & Kenny's (1986) criteria on properties of variables to distinctively differentiate between mediating and moderating variables. Henceforth, a model was suggested for future research using career success perception as the mediator between managerial learning and the learning organization.

Keywords

Managerial Learning, The Learning Organization, Career Success Perception, Learning Behavior, Learning Opportunity, Theorizing, Relationship, Mediator

1. Introduction

This research was an exploration on the role of career success perceptions among managers in the current scenario of any organization that is driven by innovation and rapid change to maintain and progress as a learning organization. An organization that can sustain and evolve as a learning organization will have a clear competitive advantage and the right capabilities to become prominent in the business community (The Boston Consulting Group, 2008, 2010). According to Tuggle (2016) progressive work on the learning organization still remain on finding the meaning, effectiveness and the influencing variables affecting the learning organization. This is in spite of a plethora of ideas, views and questions that exist on measuring the learning organization and ways to become a learning organization (Santa, Nurcan & Terziev, 2014) Hence, every organization provide opportunities for its leaders to create a learning culture to encourage and improve their knowledge by their own effort or guided by the management to achieve its objectives (Hester van Breda-Verduijn, 2016).

The key learners in any organization are the managers. As managerial learning consists of learning behavior and learning opportunities at workplace, it can be argued that, based on the work of Cohen & Levinthal (1990), as in Beeby & Booth (2000, p.78), a manager's "learning and absorptive capacity" differs from that of others working in the same organization. Based on these notions, it was not an anathema that research has shown that both the learning situation and learning behaviorcan influence job performance (Hoeksema, 1995, as in Van der Sluis, 2002, p.19-20). Research by Van der Sluis & Peiperl (2000) has shown that there was a relationship between managerial learning, and career success. As a result of this career success perception, the managers' contribution to the learning organization can be said to be affected.

Generally, this research was approached on the probability that career success has a certain level of intervention between learning by managers and the holistic learning of the organization they work for. All managers exhibit their own learning behavior (intrinsic motivations) within the prevailing learning opportunities at their workplace. The manager's learning behavior in a workplace was always subjected to contextual situations (extrinsic motivations) that comprises learning opportunities. Hence, managers take responsibility for their own learning and to drive the organizational culture for employees to learn and contribute to a strong learning culture within the organization (Hester van Breda-Verduijn, 2016).

The capacity and ability to learn from "the same kinds of experience" differ amongst individuals or managers (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Morrison & Brantner, 1992; and Burke, 1989, as in Van der Sluis & Poell, 2003) due to various reasons; one of the reasons being career success perception held in their mind. This research aims to theorize on using the career success perception as the mediating factor between managerial learning and the learning organization, as there were clear evidences that a manager's career or job satisfaction level influences his/her motivation to manage and lead the learning organization in order to build and sustain its learning environment.

1.1 Problem Statement

Antonacopoulou (2002, p.3-7) and Teare & Dealtry (1998, p.47-49), have indicated that there is a strong linkage between managerial learning and learning organizations. By studying the relationship of managerial learning with learning organizations, the effect level in the relationship of various learning behavior factors and learning opportunity factors (predictors) on the learning organization (criterion) can be revealed. Awareness of how the predictor factors (learning behaviors and learning opportunities) affect the criterion factor (the learning organization) can help human resource developers to effect appropriate intervention. This will help managers to perform better role models as change agents in managing and leading the organization they work for.

Managerial learning was found to impact upon career success perception (Van der Sluis, 1999d; 2000) and on the learning organization (Moilanen, 2001c).In connection to this, the researcher was of the view that in managing and leading a learning organization, the status of managers' perceptions on their careers in the organization may affect the continuous transformation of organizations as learning organizations. Hence, being an outcome of learning behavior and learning opportunities, career success perception can possibly intervene the development of learning organizations. As research by Moilanen (2001c) has strongly indicated that managerial learning was linked to learning organizations, it was logical to deduce that career success perception could possibly mediate the relationship of managerial learning with building and sustaining learning organizations.

1.2 Research Objective

The specific research objective with the support of problem statement above is to justify via literature review whether the career success perception variable has the properties

or characteristics of being a mediator between the relationship of managerial learning and the learning organization.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Learning Organization

Peter Senge, a world renowned figure and the pioneer in the studies on the learning organizations, was unable to provide a simple and sharp definition of a learning organization in his study (Moilanen, 2001c). Senge (1990a) gave the definition of the learning organization as a place where staff and management continually grow their ability to plan and achieve results they justly aspire. It is a place where creative ideas and desires are encouraged to be shared, nurtured and explored collectively. However, for the purpose of this research based on definitions given by numerous scholars in this field, a learning organization was defined as a 'whole concept' in that it was used to address an organization that readily provides an environment that is a natural learning infrastructure for the employees to learn and develop (Moilanen, 2001c). The concept of the learning organization is much needed in any organization, including in spiritual based organizations that wants to manage rapid changes for better performance and human resource development (Watthanabut, 2016; Dhammabhojo, 2016)

2.2 Managerial Learning

According to McCauley *et al.* (1994), managerial learning entails independent ability touse workplace experiences to derive understanding and apply what has been learnt in decision making. This kind of learning was referred to as being effective beyond the norm (Senge, 1992). Hence, McCauley *et al.* (1994) has defined managerial learning, in the context of their research, as the broadening of the manager's capacity for improved and better managerial level accomplishment. This definition was also applied in this research where managerial learning was a required managerial action to a manager's career success and development of learning organization.

Based on the definition by McCauley *et al.* (1994, p.545), two questions arise as to: (i) the nature of "capacity" that need expansion, and (ii) the nature of "effective managerial action". Managers' need to expand their capacity was viewed in terms of their abilities to continuously improve and deepen their skill, knowledge and positive attitude in order to effectively build and maintain the learning organization, as well as manage and lead with constant awareness to these effects. Also, the expansion of the managers' capacity relies on

several factors that contribute to their learning. If the factors were weak or not present then the managers' capacity will not lead to effective managerial action. The suggestion by Pearn, Roderick & Mulrooney (1995), as in Rosengarten (1999, p.83), that "all organizations are learning organizations", supports the notion that learning always takes place in some form in workplace; hence, logically, the meaning of "effective managerial action" (mentioned by McCauley *et al.*, 1994, p.545), in the context of this research, was taken to be understood as managing the learning organization in a holistic manner.

For the purpose of this research, managerial learning or learning by managers, was defined as learning that occurs in the course of work as a manager, leading to the expansion of his/her competency for effective managerial action. Learning by managers vary due to their inclination towards certain learning behavior/s and the impact of contextual factors emanating from their work environment that poses various challenges to their job performance. Hence, managerial learning was an essential element in building and sustaining the learning environment as they manage and lead.

2.3 Career Success Perceptions

Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz (1995, p.486) defined career success as "the positive psychological outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of experiences over the span of working life". Career success was viewed as "learning outcomes" as a result of an accumulation of achievements due to work experiences (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.49).

According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.14-17) career success perception can be defined as an individual's notion on the achievement level resulting from job based experiences or workplace learning outcomes. It also includes feelings and thoughts on one's progress at work, based on opportunities available from the working environment as well as his or her learning behavior. A person's idea of career success keeps changing in the duration of one's working life as s/he experiences various work processes, procedures and tasks that keep changing on regular basis. It can be said that career success is a measure of both extrinsic/objective and intrinsic/subjective items. From literature reviewed, it can be said that Van der Sluis (2000, p.49) also viewed career success perception as "learning outcomes" that emanate from managerial learning.

2.4 The Link between Managerial Learning and the Learning Organization

Building, sustaining or managing and developing a learning organization as a whole entity was a very challenging management task (Moilanen, 1999a; 2001c). Creating and

developing the learning organization as a whole entity involves combination of two main conceptualization of learning organizations. The first concept of a learning organization was that learning happens at every level and circumstances in organizations. The second concept is that as a result of accumulated learning by all individuals in the organization, the learning takes place at the organizational level holistically, reflected through managerial actions (Moilanen, 2001c).

A main conclusion by Moilanen (2001c) from one of her studies was that managers play important role in leading and managing learning organizations. Managers do work very hard in their roleto create the resources and infrastructure for workplace learning. Additionally, changesto processes and structures undertaken by managers to accommodate learning at all levels were strongly indicative that managersdo vast amount of learning to manage learning organizations (Moilanen, 1999b).

2.5 The Link between Managerial Learning and Career Success Perception

Based on the literature reviewed earlier, managerial learning was identified as a composition of learning behavior and learning opportunities. Studies by Van der Sluis (2000) have shown that these two components of managerial learning were strongly linked to career success perception.

Van der Sluis (2000) have mentioned that the way a manager learns may affect individual career outcomes or career success perceptions. Each manager has her/his own way in terms of learning behavior developed over time due to job experiences (Judge, Boudreau & Boswell, 1997). According to Van der Sluis & Peiperl (2000, p.9) managerial learning behavior can act as a "personal system of reference that provides a platform for adding knowledge" which consequently "will influence the way a person learns from the environment and therefore, the learning outcomes". There were some evidences that career attainment and advancement differences are affected by changing learning behaviors (Dreher & Bretz, 1991; Howard & Bray, 1988). Van der Sluis (2000) have also cited that both behavioral and cognitive ability to learn can explain: (i) income earned (Gottfredson & Crouse, 1986; Siegel & Ghiselli, 1971; Hoeksema, Van der Vliert & Williams, 1997) and (ii) "job performance", both subjective and objective, and "perceived career development" (Hunter, 1986; Tannenbaum, 1997; Judge *et al.*, 1997).

According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.74-75) challenges in working environment were developmental in nature in that the challenges present opportunities to learn and thereby a

manager can predict success in her/his career. Learning opportunities arising from challenging job experiences increases and enhances managers' employability, competitive advantage, career development and learning intensity (Lowy, Kelleher& Finestone, 1986 and Wick, 1989). Even researches by Berlew & Hall (1966), Hunt (1991), Wexley & Baldwin (1986) and Keys & Wolfe (1988), as in Van der Sluis (2000, p.75), have scientifically proved that there were links between learning opportunities and career outcomes.

Literature review by Van der Sluis (2000, p.75-77) on learning environment and career success have found that learning opportunities were predictive of: (i) "income" (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1992), (ii) an "objective job performance" (Tannenbaum, 1997), (iii) a "subjective job performance" (Weick, 1996), and (iv) a "perceived career development" (Tannenbaum, 1997).

2.6 The Link between Career Success Perception and the Learning Organization

Managerial learning, consisting of learning behavior and learning opportunities, has two consequences from the perspectives of management development: (i) consequences for the individual in terms of determining career success, and (ii) consequences for the organization in terms of its development as a learning organization (as implied by Van der Sluis, 2000, p.81, 148). A career success was more at individual level (or micro level within the organization) driven by various factors or experiences connected to on-the-job learning. From the literature reviewed on learning organizations, "a career oriented manager is [viewed as] a continuous learning entity" (Van Gelderen & Van der Sluis, 2001, p.2).

It was only logical to state that without continuous learning on-the-job, chances for career success will diminish, hence affecting the level of management and leadership capability to build and sustain the learning environment in organizations. As Watkins & Marsick (1993, p.8) have mentioned, learning in organizations "is a continuous, strategically used process ….[resulting] in changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors", and hence the organization transforms continuously as it learns continuously in changing itself to be a better learning organization.

Mention must be made here that an empirical research conducted by Rowden & Connie (2005, p.223) have shown the existence of "positive linear relationship between all measures of workplace learning [which was vital to building and lead the learning organization or the learning environment] and job satisfaction [career success]". Since the link between learning and career evolves "in a virtuous cycle" (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle,

1999as in Mallon & Walton, 2005, p.469), managers continue to enhance their job knowledge by learning from new experiences and share their acquired knowledge via formal and informal interaction with their subordinates and peers at departmental and organizational level. This result in collective learning that can bring about career satisfaction and success among other staff in the organization.

From the literature reviewed so far, it can be theorized that a career success has causal effects towards the structure of the learning organization and vice versa. Hence, a positive (or even negative) state of feeling of one's career may link positively (or even negatively) to the learning organization.

3. Analysis and Discussions

3.1 Career Success Perceptions as the Mediating Variable

The purpose of this research paper was to justify that career success perceptions mediate, and not moderate, between managerial learning and the learning organization. According to Baron & Kenny (1986, p.1173), there was a "distinction" between moderator and mediator variables in that they have distinct properties and operate under certain conditions. The definition, properties and conditions were tabulated below:

Table 1: *Comparison of Mediator and Moderator Variable Properties*

|	**Mediator Variable**		**Moderator Variable**
1.	*Definition*: The mediator functions as a third variable that represents the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest	1.	*Definition*: The moderator functions as a third variable that partitions a focal independent variable into sub-groups that establish its domains of maximal effectiveness in regard to a given dependent variable
2.	The variable is correlated with both the exogenous and endogenous variables	2.	The variable is uncorrelated with both the exogenous and endogenous variables
3.	The exogenous variables are causally antecedent to the mediator	3.	Moderators and exogenous variables are at the same level in regard to their role as causal variables exogenous to the endogenous variables
4.	Mediators can **shift** roles from effects to causes	4.	Moderators **always** function as independent variables
5.	Mediation is best done when the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable is strong	5.	The relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable is either weak or inconsistent
6.	Affects the significance of relationships between stimulus (exogenous) and response (endogenous) variables	6.	Affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between the exogenous and endogenous variables

Source: Extracted from Baron & Kenny (1986, p.1173-1178)

Based on the comparison between mediator and moderator variable in Table 1, and the literature review made for this research in the above sections, the following explains why or how career success perception fits the six conditions of mediator:

- 1st and 2nd condition: Career success perception, as the third variable in this research, was plausibly shown to have possible correlation to both managerial learning (predictor/exogenous/ independent variable) and the learning organization (criterion/ endogenous/dependent variable). This being the case, career success perception acts as the multiplicative mechanism through which managerial learning was able to effect the dependent variable.

- 3rd. condition: Also, in the literature reviewed made on the research done by Van der Sluis (2000), managerial learning, comprised of learning behavior and learning opportunities, was an antecedent to career success perception.

- 4th condition: Based on literature reviewed, career success perception takes on the role of an effect of managerial learning (Van der Sluis; 2000) and on the other hand assumes the role of a causal factor of the learning of the organization as a whole (Rowden & Connie, 2005).

- 5th condition: From the literature reviewed, the linkage between the independent variable (managerial learning) and dependent variable (the learning organization) was evident substantially (Moilanen, 2001c).

- 6th condition: Having met the 5 conditions as analyzed above, statistical tests for mediating effectsis expected to show how the presence of career success perception as a mediator, affect the significance of relationship between the main predictor (managerial learning) and the criterion variable (the learning organization).

Therefore, career success perception, being the third variable in this research, has sufficient properties to fit as the mediating variable rather than as a moderating one. This was justified, to a large extent, with the support of literature reviewed on the relationships between the variables mentioned in previous sections above, which support the expectation of a fit test as a mediator.

Based on the above analysis, the following model, diagrammatically shown below as Figure 1, can be derived as a result to depict the relationships of exogenous, mediator and endogenous variables.
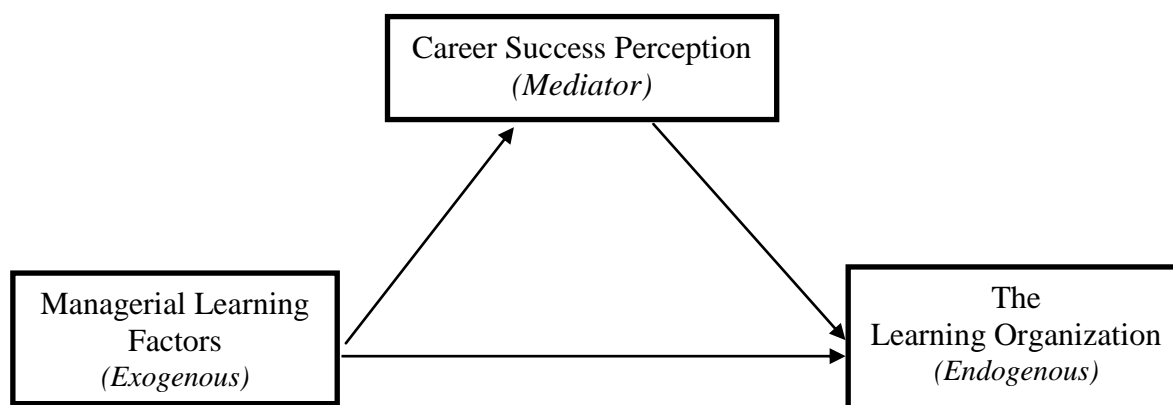
Figure 1: *Theoretical Framework for Current Research*

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this research, based on the literature reviewed, it can be mentioned that managers learn at workplace for two reasons. Firstly, to contribute to the learning culture that takes within the organization in holistic manner. Secondly, to achieve career success by increasing their job knowledge. However, it was understood that career success is at best a perception held in the managers' mind. This perception may have impact the way they learn and contribute to the overall learning culture within the organization they work for. It was deduced that the relationship between managerial learning and the holistic learning of the organization can be mediated by career success perceptions. Therefore, the resultant theoretical framework for research in this research, which focuses on learning by managers affecting learning organizations, mediated by career success perception, was as shown in Figure 1 below. Based on these relationships, future research can focus on investigating how career development can be designed to act as an effective mediator to strengthen the growth of learning organizations. Further research can be directed towards development of appropriate programs to support managers in their quest for continuous learning for career advancement.

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