

BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION: CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to study the characteristics of the learning organization and to determine influencing factors which would allow a private higher education institution to achieve such status, in order to formulate the organization development plan. The study considered five aspects of the organization's subsystems in accordance with Michael J. Marquardt's theory, namely, learning, organization, people, knowledge, and technology. It was found that the institution studied had high degree of learning organization, in compliance with the five aspects framework. Thirteen influencing factors were identified as well as six weak points which would obstruct the development.

Keywords: learning organization; learning dynamic; private higher education institution; knowledge management.

I. INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of changes in the World in the 21st century, affect the social, economic, environmental, technological, science, and political aspects of every countries. Especially the advance in information technology which widely open the door for the world of learning, as well as allow easy access. At the same time, the workforce market demands staff with creative ideas, academic excellence and fully skilled for private life and work life, eager to learn and adaptable to the constantly changing world. Business organizations experience such intense effects, especially the scarcity of skilled workforce which is the result of the learning institutions did not sufficiently prepare the students for work in the 21st century. In the United States of America, there is a concept of "Skill for the new future: learning in the 21st century". The Partnership for 21st century skills or the P21 Network had developed a frame work which proposed each person should receive learning development in three aspects which are skill in life and work, skill in learning and new technology, and skill in information, media, and technology, (Partnership for 21st century skills, 2002)

Thailand is faced with the education quality problem, as well as preparing for joining the Asean Community. These force the Thai organizations to implement the development of learning system for staff at every level quickly and continuously. The learning process must be truly integrated into the system and work procedure. Clever organizations which are capable fast learning process will become learning organizations. The academic paper; "The challenge of organization learning", supports this concept that the learning organization is the key to lead the organization to success in the 21st century, (Milway & Saxton, 2011). Thailand has also appreciated the need, therefore, in 2003 the Royal Decree on the criteria and procedure for good governance, 2003 had come into effect. The decree states that the government agencies must be developed into learning organization. Therefore, all organizations require development in order to be competitive and to survive sustainably.

Educational institutes are principal organizations which will build and develop knowledge which will assist the country development (Mousavi, et al., 2012). Therefore, such institutes must have characteristics of the learning organization,

which directly affect the student's quality, especially at university level which directly responsible for producing workforce (Prayoon, 2009). The researcher is interested in studying the development of learning organization in the context of a private higher education institution. The literature review showed that factors influencing learning organization development are different in the case of state owned and private institutions (Balay, 2012; Patnaik, Beriha, Mahapatra, & Singh, 2013). This is because the private institutions need to stay competitive and sustainable businesswise. Therefore, the researcher was focused on the buiding of learning organization, a case study of a private higher education institution.

2. THEORY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Michael J. Marquardt's concept described learning organizations as a type of organization development which develops a company-wide learning process among organization staff. This enables an organization which has the individual, and group learning environment. The organization which has dynamic learning processes, where staff would be taught to have analytical thought processes. The integration of such knowledge is deployed for continuous organization development which is capable of handling changing environment and competitiveness. Everyone is aware of changes and can adapt efficiently. The learning process can only be created and exist sustainably when the organization learning development is systematically dynamic, interrelated and complementing. It is essential to have five related subsystems. These subsystems are learning, organization, people, knowledge, and technology. All five are necessary to sustain viable, ongoing organizational learning and ensuing corporate success. The organization, people, knowledge, and technology subsystems are necessary to enhance and augment learning, which, in turn, permeates the other four subsystems. They are indispensable partners in building and maintaining organizational learning and productivity. If anyone subsystem is weak or absent, the others will be significantly compromised. Details are as follows.

The learning subsystem is the core subsystem of the learning organization. It comprises of three complementary dimensions: levels of learning (individual, group, and organizational), types of learning (adaptive, anticipatory, and action), and skills (systems thinking, mental models, personal mastery, self-directed learning, and dialogue).All are necessary to maximize organizational learning. The learning subsystem refers to levels and type of learning that are crucial for organizational learning and the relevant organizational skills.

The organization subsystem consists of four key dimensions or components; vision, culture, strategy, and structure. These components must be capable of changing to allow organization development to achieve the learning organization goal. The people subsystem includes managers and leaders, employees, customers, business partners and alliances, suppliers, vendors, and the surrounding community. Each group is valuable to the learning organization, and all must be empowered and enables to learn.

The knowledge subsystem of a learning organization manages the acquired and generated knowledge of the organization. It includes the acquisition, creation, storage, analysis, and data mining, transfer and dissemination, and application and validation of knowledge. The six knowledge elements of organizational learning are on-going and interactive instead of sequential and independent. Distribution of information occurs through multiple channels, each with different time frames. Knowledge management is continually subjected to perceptual filters as well as to proactive and reactive activities. The management of knowledge is at the heart of building a learning organization. Successful learning organizations systematically and technologically guide knowledge through each and all of these six stages.

The technology subsystem is composed of supporting, integrated technological networks and information tools that allow access to and exchange of information and learning. It includes technical processes, systems, and structures for collaboration, coaching, coordination, and other knowledge skills. It encompasses electronic tools and advanced methods for learning, such as simulation, computer conferencing, and collaboration. All these tools work to create knowledge freeways. The two major components of the technology subsystem apply to managing are 1) technology

for managing knowledge : the computer based technology that gathers, codes, stores, and transfers information across organizations and worldwide 2) technology for enhancing learning involves the utilization of video, audio, and computer-based multimedia training for the purpose of delivering and developing knowledge.

The objective of this research is to study the characteristics of the learning organization and to determine influencing factors which would allow a private higher education institution to achieve such status, by deploying Michael J. Marquardt's conceptual framework of five dynamic subsystems (Marquardt, 1996) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Five dynamic subsystems

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is the research and development type of research which principally employed the qualitative research technique. Initial data collection was undertaken using questionnaires which were developed from Michael J. Marquardt's learning organization conceptual framework; namely learning organization profile. The questionnaires were used for the opinion survey of academic and administrative staff of a private higher education institution under study, over a period of more than six months. The survey inquired about the present condition, and the expectation on becoming a learning organization. The survey was conducted across 38 work units, a total population of 187. A total of 162 questionnaires were completed at the ratio of 114 academic staff and 48 non-academic staff. An analysis was undertaken to determine the present condition and the expectation on each subsystem using mean and paired t-test methods. The results were then used to set up topics of in-depth unstructured interviews which used informal dialogue style. The dialogue followed the checklist of five subsystems topics, as well as the components of each subsystem. The purposive sampling method was used. The samples were selected based on the required key informants whom were executives of the institution who were knowledgeable about the learning organization, and involved with the implementation of the institution's learning organization either at policy level or operational level. A total of four persons were interviewed, these were President of the university council, College Council Member, the Rector and the Chairman of the Knowledge Management Committee.

The results were classified by data code and analyzed using the analytic induction method. The data were checked for accuracy by employing member checking and the researcher's bias identified. The results were concluded to describe the characteristics of the learning organization and the factors involved. The data was synthesized as groups

of factors in accordance with the theory of subsystem and related literature. The researcher also proposed recommendations for the development of the learning organization.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The result indicates high level of the overall characteristics of learning organization. The ratios of present condition / expectation are high (a mean of 3.54) / and very high (a mean of 4.38), respectively. In the case of subsystem classification, the present condition's means range between 3.39 – 3.61, and the future expectation's means range between 4.34 – 4.38. Therefore, it can be concluded that the characteristic of each subsystem is close to the theoretical characteristic of the learning organization and the acceptable practice, both in present condition and the expected future, as indicated by the high level of means shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Means of the characteristics of learning organization in the present condition and expected future for each subsystem and overall value

Subsystem	Present Condition		Expected Future	
	Means	Interpretation	Means	Interpretation
Organization	3.6191	High	4.3827	Very High
People	3.5401	High	4.3543	Very High
Learning	3.5340	High	4.3414	Very High
Knowledge	3.4574	High	4.3562	Very High
Technology	3.3920	Average	4.3802	Very High
Overall Learning Organization	3.5404	High	4.3816	Very High

The comparison of the five subsystems of the learning organization shows that the academic and non-academic staff had higher expectation on the development of the learning organization in the future in all subsystem. These are technology (t = 22.57), learning (t = 20.62), knowledge (t = 20.24), organization (t = 19.34), people (t = 19.18), respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that the academic and non-academic staff were of an opinion that the characteristics of the learning organization of the private education institute were in accordance with the theoretical framework of the five subsystems.

The interview of the executives revealed that the executives' opinions were in accordance with the five subsystems. And the factors supporting the learning organization and the weak point required further development are the most important components. The comparison of the research results on the learning organization of the higher education institution and the theoretical concept of other academics on the learning organization can be concluded as follows:

1) Learning subsystem is the strong point of the institute as there are two supporting factors are 1) the organization staff was eager to learn from the individual, team and organization levels. The most exceptional skill of the staff are (1) personal mastery staff, as many staff are specialists with long and skilled work experience, (2) staff are capable of self-directed learning, as all staff are aware and are responsible for self-evaluation and connected with the need to further develop toward the institute's common goals or visions, for the actual and continuous organization development. The skill perceived as weak point are the staff lack listening skill or frank dialogue which would allow unbiased development which would lead to integrated learning (as shown in Table 3). This skill is very important as it can affect the knowledge subsystem, in the transfer of knowledge. This conclusion is in accordance with the

research “Exploring the relationship between organizational learning and career resilience among faculty members at Qatar University (Abu-Tineh, 2011)”, as well as complies with the learning organization theory by Peter M. Senge (Senge, 1999).

2) Organization subsystem, the institution has six supporting factors which are (1) clear message of common visions, (2) organization culture as the learning culture, (3) clear strategy for the organization development toward the learning organization, (4) the building of supporting system and learning environment in the organization, (5) Line matrix organization structure which allow coordination and command across the command lines for the institute’s benefit, which enable rapid advance and development due to the flexibility, connection, assistance across the command lines, (6) the implementation style which emphasizes on quality orientation system with rapid coordination. The weak point in this subsystem is the lack of clear structure for the knowledge management system (as shown in Table 3). This conclusion complies with Sarah L. Collie’s concept on “The Learning organization and teaching improvement in academic departments (Collie, 2002)”, as well as complies with the learning organization theory by Peter M. Senge (Senge, 1999) and Pedler, M., Burgoyne, J. and Boydell, T. (Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 1991).

3) People subsystem, there are two supporting factors which are (1) leadership characteristic which enables learning process and creativity in the organization including staff supporting through power designation, and (2) the existence of knowledge networking with other education institutes, government agencies, communities and parents which allows continuous knowledge exchange as well as leads to the production of graduates who meet the demands of business sector such as the multi-disciplinary study and work training programs. This system is the most important influencing factor for supporting the institute toward the learning organization. This conclusion complies with the research paper “Is yours a learning organization? (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008)” and the research “Becoming a learning organization through partnership” by Borzsony & Hunter (Borzsony & Hunter, 1996).

4) Knowledge subsystem which have two supporting factors (1) the continuous search and building of knowledge, and (2) the utilization of knowledge. The research papers “Lifelong learning implication for the university of the 21st century (Duke, 1999)” and “Learning organization in the information age: the case of Selcuk University, Turkey (Ogut & Berber, 2003)”, show that these two factors greatly influence the learning organization. However, the institute’s was still unable to suitably utilize these factors (as shown in Table 3). There are problems in two stages which are knowledge upkeep, the analysis, and knowledge mining. These may arise from insufficient emphasize on knowledge subsystem, organization structure in organization subsystem, and lack of dialogue skill in learning subsystem. Thus, knowledge transfer and exchange cannot be implemented. This weak point required immediate rectification.

5) Technology subsystem which has one supporting factor, namely, the appropriate technology utilization to support organization wide learning such as teleconference, e-learning, and web site. This subsystem is in accordance with the research “Utilizing the university as a learning organization to facilitate quality improvement (Meade, 2005).” This factor usually mentioned with the knowledge subsystem. It is still the weak point as the institute is still unable to implement the technology subsystem suitably, thus, creating two weak points which (1) efficiency of the technology system development staff and users and (2) the development of technology for knowledge management and utilization (as shown in Table 3).

The data synthesis showed that the building a learning organization: case study of the private higher education institute had a total of 13 supporting factors among the five subsystems as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors supporting the development of the learning organization: a case study of a private higher education institute (classified in descending order)

Degree of Importance	Factors	Subsystem*				
		L	O	P	K	T
1	Leadership characteristic enabling support an power designation				⊙	
2	Knowledge exchange network				⊙	
3	Staff eager to learn	⊙				
4	Organization learning culture				⊙	
5	Knowledge enable environment (facilitating staff learning)				⊙	
6	Suitable organization structure, flexibility				⊙	
7	Clear vision on learning organization				⊙	
8	Strategy on learning organization implementation				⊙	
9	Quality orientation work system with the analysis on changing environment				⊙	
10	Skilled staff, specialist level(tacit knowledge)	⊙				
11	Continuous search and building of knowledge					⊙
12	Knowledge utilization					⊙
13	Appropriate utilization of technology to support organization wide learning					⊙

*L: Learning O: organization P: people K: knowledge T: technology

All factors are inter-connected from all subsystems. Therefore, the development of all factors must be implemented at the same time in order to develop the learning organization in the overall aspect.

5. CONCLUSION

The data synthesis showed that the building a learning organization: case study of the private higher education institute had a total of six weak points among the five subsystems. The findings can be utilized for the organization development through initiating projects which would rectify or improve these weak points, which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Weak Points and Implications classified by subsystem

Subsystem*	Weak Point	Implication
L O P K T		
○	1) Staff lack of dialogue skill	1) The development of dialogue.
○	2) Lack of clear structure for the knowledge management implementation	2) Structure improvement. 3) Project “learning work unit”
○	3) Knowledge upkeep	4) Develop system and mechanism for knowledge gathering and maintain 5) Designate responsibility in knowledge storage and transfer 6) Project “leadership for learning process”
○	4) Knowledge analysis and knowledge mining	7) Reward the work unit which implement knowledge management 8) Project “Knowledge mining” 9) Train staff for knowledge gathering, analysis and mining
○	5) Efficiency of the system development staff and users.	10) Enable staff to connect with the information highway
○	6) Development of technology for knowledge management and utilization	11) Develop the capability of the executive for utilizing technology for learning. 12) Develop center for learning with mixed media technology 13) Develop and utilize remote learning technology 14) Develop capability in technology search software.

Furthermore, this research can be used as the knowledge in utilizing the study and development of other type of organization toward the learning organization as well as to further other research.

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