

A study on Cultivating Learning Culture as a Strategy for Organization Success

Harish Premi*
Mohit Pahwa**

Abstract

Success is a subjective and comprehensive concept and so is the learning. This paper is aimed at studying the importance of learning culture and to identify the drivers to cultivate learning culture and further to develop a conceptual framework as a strategy for Organization Success. Today's business environment is becoming more and more dynamic and complex impacted by various factors such as rapid change in technology, creative destruction and reinvention. The fast paced technology is affecting every industry and area of life, and work is no exception to this. To become successful in changing times, work must become more meaningful and must include constant learning. An organization learning culture is referred to 'a set of norms and values that define the functioning of an organization which motivates individuals as well as the organization for continuous learning'. The present study aims to indentify the variables that affect the learning culture in an organization. Based on the literature review and subsequent study, six main independent variables are indentified i.e. growth oriented mindset, lead by example, reflective mindset, test-and-learn culture, feedback and reward mechanism, while the mediating variables are increased job satisfaction, lower turnover rates, increased profitability, profits and flexibility and 'Organization Success' is taken as the dependent variable. This study is significant for an organization to indentify the most valuable driver that can contribute to cultivate a learning culture as a strategy. After all, it's the learning of each and every individual which helps an organization to grow not only in terms of physical resources but also in terms of intellectual capabilities which is the only fundamental requirement to achieve the success in real terms.

Keywords: Keywords: Learning Culture, Continuous Learning, Growth Oriented Mindset, Test-and-learn culture, Reflective Mindset

Introduction

Learning has been a man's inner most urge since time immemorial. Following this urge,

man has constantly been engaged in learning about various aspects of human life; say

* Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Gian Jyoti Institute of Management & Technology, Mohali

** Assistant Professor Department of Management, Swami Vivekanand Institute of Engineering and Technology, Banur

Nature, Environment, Science & Technology, and Human Behavior etc. Innovation is affecting each industry and everyday issue, and work is no special case. One of the primary vocation ramifications of the computerized insurgency is a move sought after for human mastery. For example, LinkedIn's ability examines shows that half of the present most sought after aptitudes weren't even on the rundown three years back. The developments in the fields of science and technology require every individual and organization to keep on learning. Continuous learning is becoming a must for every individual and organization to develop analytical capabilities and thinking skills to be more creative, innovative & productive. Therefore, the theory and concepts of learning need to be applied in the lives of individuals and in an organization. Learning is an effort and of course an instrument towards the goal of self-actualization, that is considered to be as the ultimate goal of a human being as an individual entity of this creation. Continuous learning gives many benefits to the organization and for life. Continuous learning is the only way and instrument both for short-term and long-term goals and achieving success, for individuals and organizations as well. The importance of learning is for everyone of any age. Therefore, a learning culture should be embedded in organizations as a necessity. Every individual in an organization must understand that they must always learn in order to compete, since the challenges ahead will always change as the development of science and technology is very intense and rapid nowadays. Today, more and more organizations are realizing the significance of creativity, innovation and continuous development and improvement, and learning is the main concern in this regard. A strong learning culture creates an effective place for an individual to grow and nurture.

However, have organizations or individuals in an organization understood about a learning culture? Has the organization provided an opportunity for its members to continue to learn and develop? Many professionals of learning realize the challenges they face, but they have not developed their own practices to meet responsive and adaptive training needs. As a Bersin report pointed out: "The single biggest driver of business impact is the strength of an organization's learning culture." However, true learning cultures, defined by CEB (Corporate Executive Board) as "a culture that supports an open mindset, an independent quest for knowledge, and shared learning directed toward the mission and goals of the organization," are still the exception rather than the norm. Deloitte reports that organizations having a culture of continuous learning have many advantages over other organizations, like:

- These organizations are 46 percent more likely to take an initiative in the market
- Their overall productivity is 37 percent higher than other organizations.
- They have 92 percent higher chances to be more innovative than other organizations

An organization usually has a certain set of rules which its members have to obey in working. However, different problems or challenges cannot be dealt in the same way. The members have probably carried out work in accordance with the rules or procedure, but the output is not as expected or it is unusual. It may be due to advancement and development of technology, change in customer needs or demands, or different challenges in the field. Therefore, this paper discusses the literature on the learning culture, the importance of continuous learning and ways to build it as a strategy for organization success.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the drivers that help to cultivate learning culture in an organization.
2. To study the importance of cultivating learning culture for organization success.
3. To propose a conceptual framework to study and foster learning culture in an organization.

3. Literature Review

"In the long run, the only sustainable source of competitive advantage is your organization's ability to learn faster than its competition" (P.Senge) In the 1990s Peter Senge's seminal text, 'The Fifth Discipline', proliferated the notion that the future of business excellence lay in the ability of an organization to acquire, create, and transfer knowledge amongst its staff.

3.1 What Is Organizational Culture?

Organizational culture involves an organization's expectations, experience, philosophy and values that hold it together, and is expressed in its self-images, internal working methodology, interactions with the stakeholders and the outside world, and future expectations in the form of vision, mission and goals. It is based on shared values, goals, attitude, beliefs, customs and written and unwritten policies, rules etc. that have been developed over a period of time and are considered valid. "The set of beliefs, values, and norms, together with symbols like dramatized events and personalities that represents the unique character of an organization, and provides the context for action in it and by it." (Morgan, 1997). "Organizational culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well

enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new employees as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 2009). If we perceive organizational culture as the roots of a tree, then the branches of this tree will indicate decision making policies, goal setting and fixing priorities, devising policies, values, group behavior, making strategies, incorporating practices and politics. Others will be traditions, people who are valued or important, vision and mission etc. It should be noted that organizational culture does not eliminate the influence of individuals' ethnicity in the work place. Organizations having developed a strong and supportive culture are more likely to attract highly competent and qualified employees, who are more loyal and strive to work towards the organization's best interests. "An organization's culture often explains why certain systems, practices, and behaviors do or do not occur" (Trice & Beyer, 1993). In some organizations, their cultures are well defined, structured and controlled that help in governing employee behavior through rules and standard procedures. Whereas for some other organizations, their cultures are characterized by embracing creativity and individuality, encouraging and supporting decision making involving high levels of risk taking capabilities. Research shows that "an organizational culture that values learning can be a key facilitator of data use for continuous quality improvement" (Derrick-Mills, Sandstrom, Pettijohn, Fyffe, & Koulis, 2014). Organizations that foster and develop a continuous learning culture have their employees who are interested in learning and implementing what they have learned to improve their individual performance as well as organizational performance.

3.2 Organizational learning

According to Don Brown, “a learning organization is one in a continual state of readiness-and adapting and supporting enterprise wide collaboration”. Brown asserted that “learning organizations focus on receiving knowledge, disseminating knowledge across the enterprise, and implementing the knowledge to attain organizational goals” (Brown, 2011). This can be attained only through an organization’s environment where organizational leaders believe in creating knowledge for action, not just for their own sake. Henry Mintzberg noted that “learning organizations are characterized by leaders who involve themselves in systematic thinking, which is the competency to see the broader perspective and focus more on underlying factors and forces of change and their trends instead of just fulfilling day-to-day tasks”. (Mintzberg, 2003). The transformation from being a routine tactician to an advisor and learned expert can only occur in organizations where the leaders understand and develop a culture that tends to adapt, motivate and advance learning to innovate and create, in effect, a learning organization. Learning organizations are more flexible in finding out and demarking the skills set needed of their stakeholders, and they are more likely in providing them with opportunities to take initiative and create progressive learning events where employees can acquire and develop new skills, remediate deviation in knowledge, and communicate information and knowledge internally and externally. “If an organization is to survive, it must adapt their managerial philosophy to one better suited to the needs, expectations and attitudes of individuals” (Handy, 1996). Accordingly, these leaders should create a learning organization effectively to have a better and sustainable relationship with their

stakeholders.

3.3 Learning Culture

“An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage.”-Jack Welch. Learning culture means an environment that is characterized by a certain set of values, processes, and practices that encourage and support continuous learning and development, knowledge-sharing, growth mindsets and improved performance both for individuals and enterprise as well. “A learning culture is also defined as a collective, dynamic system from basic assumptions, values, and norms that direct one’s learning in an organization” (Breda-Verduijn & Heijboer, 2016). “A learning culture also has a strong positive relationship with the incorporation of technological innovation into daily work activities” (Reardon, 2010). Thus, a learning culture possesses immense importance for the sustainability of the organization. A continuous learning culture for a learning organization tends to enhance job satisfaction for its members with an opportunity for them to continue to develop and explore best of their human potential. The job satisfaction and self-development can have a significant impact on improving performance and innovation capabilities of members and also support the development and growth of the organization. Workplaces having a strong learning culture excel at providing their members with a more effective learning experience, which is also instrumental in a better employee engagement. “A learning culture also offers an openness to contradictory information, helps avoid repeating mistakes, and ensures the retention of important and useful knowledge regardless of key people leaving the organization” (Garvin, Learning in Action: A Guide to Putting the Learning Organization to Work, 2000) .

Hurley points out that “adult learning theory tells us that generally people learn primarily by being motivated to face challenges, attempt, experiment, fail and correct failure, and reflect on their own experiences” (Hurley, 2002). “An effective learning culture empowers its employees, encouraging them to consider others in the organization when planning their work” (Aksu & Bahattin, 2005). “Employee involvement in organizational learning culture promotes cooperation at an intellectual level” (Stonehouse & Pemberton, 1999), and “leads to an effective utilization of learning from all employees to increase organizational efficiency and to add to its competitive advantage” (Dymock & McCarthy, 2006).

4. Data and Methodology

4.1 Data Data were collected from literature related to learning culture, continuous learning, and learning organizations from several researchers and experts.

4.2 Research Methodology

The method used in this paper is a qualitative research method that is literature study. Data is collected from journals, books, and articles about learning culture, continuous learning, and learning organizations. Then the data is selected, analyzed to obtain information, and processed so that it can be presented in a concise manner to further propose a conceptual framework.

5. Importance of Cultivating Learning Culture

Let us understand the importance and usefulness of learning culture by taking few examples from corporate world.

How Nokia lost it to Apple?

If we look at its competitive advantage, it appeared that Nokia had a lots of core competency factors viz. a wide range of products (ranging from basic phones that simply allow one to make calls to those high technology enabled models as Lumia that look like a little computers packed in a phone), a high market reputation for producing quality products (that apparently indestructible Nokia 3310), and a loyal customer base. The customers were so loyal that for them Nokia was a synonym of mobile phone. And at that point entered Apple, and the rest, as is commonly said, is history.

The reason is clear and straightforward: Nokia lost since it neglected to learn.

Let’s take another example of search engine organizations which have entered the market and exited soon after (some exceptions like Yahoo and Bing are as yet surviving and moving around in the shadows), however Google remained on and is growing constantly? There is a motivation behind why Google is one of the most significant organizations on the planet, because it innovates.

To survive, flourish, in cut-throat competition, one must innovate and stay a step ahead of customers’ needs, desires, tastes and preferences. One has to stay on top of change, which, of course, happens at an uncertain and unexpected speed. The ‘culture of learning’ needs to be created, developed and maintained in an organization.

The importance and significance of organizational learning can be understood by the various advantages that happen in associations to build up a learning environment:

1. Flexible and adaptive organizational culture

2. Developing leadership qualities in individuals
3. Increased job satisfaction and motivation level among employees
4. Lower rate of employee turnover
5. Increased profitability and profits
6. Increased efficiency at individual and organizational level
7. High level of cooperation among members and stakeholders
8. Development of core competencies and competitive advantage

When an organization is ready to contribute its time, efforts and resources for building up and developing a learning culture and actualizing organizational learning, it becomes more competitive. This enhanced capacity to respond quickly to sudden changing economic situations is the only reason why organizational learning is important and significant. An organization that is ready to accept and learn the lessons from a failure and focuses on developing its own processes and procedures will be an organization that encompasses more knowledge about the best procedures, and will be considerably more ready to adapt. By creating an environment where all employees are teachers as well as learners, there is an equivalent and constant exchange of knowledge and information that enables every employee to contribute in a significant manner. By making a domain where all representatives are instructors and understudies, there is an equivalent trade of data that enables every individual to contribute in a generous way.

In his book, *Drive*, author Daniel Pink proclaims that money is not the best way to motivate employees. Further he says that people perform better and feel more satisfied

with their jobs when they feel they can lead their own lives, learn and create new things, and improve themselves and the organization. He suggests that these are three motivating factors: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Out of these three, Mastery can be achieved through constant learning, he iterates.

6. Drivers to Cultivate Learning Culture

6.1 Growth-oriented Mindset

In today's competitive environment, to expand and flourish business, continual learning, strong leadership, creativity and innovation are critical factors. An environment of continuous learning and leadership must be cultivated throughout an organization for that organization to really flourish. Despite the fact that this frequently begins at the top, this phenomenon must prevail throughout all the levels of the organization.

On the contrary, a constant culture based on a fixed mindset and philosophies doesn't uplift any of these standards. Nor does it enable employees to develop their skills and help them to rise as new leaders. As a result, various symptoms of a fixed or constant culture might show up like reduced risk-taking capabilities, less freedom, less cooperation, reduced opportunities for creativity and innovation and less acceptance of failure, all of which can be detrimental to organization success.

6.2 Lead by example.

Another factor which is important to create a learning culture in an organization is to inspire others to learn through leadership. It means what a manager or leader, actually does to create the desired environment of learning. The actual behavior and attitude of managers and leaders particularly what and how they perform their day to day tasks, have a strong impact on the attitude, behavior and

performance of their team members. Further, the degree and magnitude of the impact also depend upon the level or position of the leader or manager. Higher the level or position of the manager or leader, more likely it is to impact the behaviors of members of the team or organization. As it says 'you should practice what you preach'. It means if a leader or manager wishes to unleash the hidden or untapped potential of its members, it must definitely initiate the process first in order to set an example. A manager must take the lead to start by displaying some learning attitude by unlocking his curiosity to learn and innovate. It is a sort of Kantian imperative: Don't ask your employees to do what you don't do yourself. Let's say, if one wishes his people to read more, then he must read and make others aware of their voracious reading habits. For displaying he may share his favorite books or most recent findings or the knowledge which he got through reading recently. And if he wants his employees to take new initiatives and some challenging projects and tasks, then he must, in order to inspire, take on a new and challenging task first by himself. For example, to learn a new skill or software, showing willingness to volunteer to work on something different and not related to the main job, or take on some new projects or tasks which are beyond the comfort zone even if one is not good at it, one will be able to show that with a bit of curiosity and consistency one can get better and this must motivate others.

6.3 Test-and-Learn culture

"Test and learn" means as a process where any new initiative or change may be treated as a hypothesis that needs to be tested. It is like experimenting with the new. Test and learn culture implies that organizations show willingness to make those experiments whose results are unknown, to analyze the outcomes of the experiments and then take decisions

based on the data and information obtained thereof. Here, the decisions are not based on the past learning or experience or already devised mechanism, rather they are based on data which is verifiable and reliable. Therefore, organizations that implement the test and learn methodology believe in allocating its scarce resources in those experiments where decisions can be taken based on verified, reliable and proven data rather than just on feelings and opinions. In an organization where consistent application and implementation of test and learn culture is followed, people are more likely to be productive, innovative which can help an organization to have a competitive advantage. To understand the advantages to test and learn culture, here are few important points:

1. A test and learn culture gives the members of an organization some degree of freedom to try and experiment. When the organization is not afraid of accepting the consequences of the experiments, whether they result in success or failure, and does not condemn failures, then it boosts the morale of its members to try and learn new things and they would be able to find right solutions to their problems easily and rapidly.
2. It also saves the heavy cost of investing in major changes and development projects that otherwise may not be that profitable. Therefore, it's better to bring the changes in a sequential manner involving small steps that are tested and verified for better effectiveness of an organization.
3. It also helps in fostering a sense of team work among the members of the organization. It motivates all the members to work together in an organized manner where everyone gets a chance to contribute his ideas in form of proposals,

utilize his creative and innovative skills to explore new ways of doing certain task and contributing to the best of his potential in achieving success.

“The willingness to experiment, it turns out, is the main indicator of how innovative a person or organization will be. Experiments are key to innovation because they rarely turn out as you expect and you learn so much” (Jeff Bezos).

6.4 Reward continuous learning.

To acquire conscious changes, your group's or association's way of life except if you really set up formal reward frameworks to entice them and, after it's all said and done there is no assurance you will accomplish change except if the rewards are compelling. Unfortunately, in any event, when directors or managers comprehend the significance of learning from a certain perspective they are regularly progressively keen on boosting transient outcomes and execution, which can be detrimental to learning. By definition, execution is most elevated when we are not learning. Similarly, it is difficult for workers to locate the important existence to realize when they are approached to boost results, proficiency, and efficiency. A report by Bersin noted that among more than 700 organizations studied, an average employee had only 24 minutes a week for formal learning. Note that remunerating interest isn't just about adulating and advancing the individuals who show a push to learn and build up; it's likewise about making an atmosphere that supports basic reasoning, where testing authority and making some noise are empowered, regardless of whether it implies making disunity. This is especially significant in the event that you need your group to create something imaginative.

6.5 Give meaningful and constructive feedback.

It is difficult to enhance any of the skills when you are ignorant of your confinements, completely happy with your latent capacity, or outlandishly satisfied with yourself. Albeit probably the most ideal approaches to improve performance of employees is to mention to them about whether they are doing something right or wrong, employees frequently keep away from troublesome discussions, so they tend to give more positive feedback than negative one. This is especially risky with regard to interest and learning, as the most ideal approach to trigger interest is to feature a knowledge gap, that is, making individuals mindful of what they are not aware of, particularly if that makes them feel awkward. It should be noted that individuals are generally uninformed of their obliviousness and impediments, particularly when they are not equipped, so direction and feedback from others is important to helping them improve. Be that as it may, negative feedback must be given in a constructive and sensitive manner. It is a genuine craftsmanship as individuals are commonly less open of it than of applause and appreciation, particularly in individualistic (otherwise known as narcissistic) societies.

6.6 Reflective Mindset

In a competitive world, pressures on employees are escalating. We have constant and easy access to information all the time. 24-hours news, social media; all this has given an instantaneous flow of communication that urges us to acquire and digest all the information rapidly. Too heavy load of information tends to make us impatient and reduce our level of focus and concentration which directly impacts the productivity. So it is very important to be aware of what we know,

and how we think about it.

Reflection comes from the Latin word reflectere, meaning to turn back or to turn around. Reflective thinking needs to be applied and practiced. To get benefitted, employees need to slow down, to halt and to cut down the inflow of data or information. The process of reflection helps employees to be better in their day to day decision making, to accept challenging situations and to come up with new and innovative ways to deal with these challenges, thus making them free of their habitual and pre-conceived learning and behavior patterns. "A reflective mindset is one of the most powerful instruments which we can use at work". Developed by John Dewey in 1930s reflective practice is process of actively and continually considering and applying prior learning, theory and knowledge to build professional and personal competence. Giving the employees a time to reflect, and afterwards share their reflection, is critical. "Learning is enhanced by structuring opportunities for reflection" (Bowden et al 2000). Reflecting on variations across similar conditions enables learners to draw distinctions between what's significant or important and what's not, about the effects of context, and more. "It is through involving and engaging students in reflecting

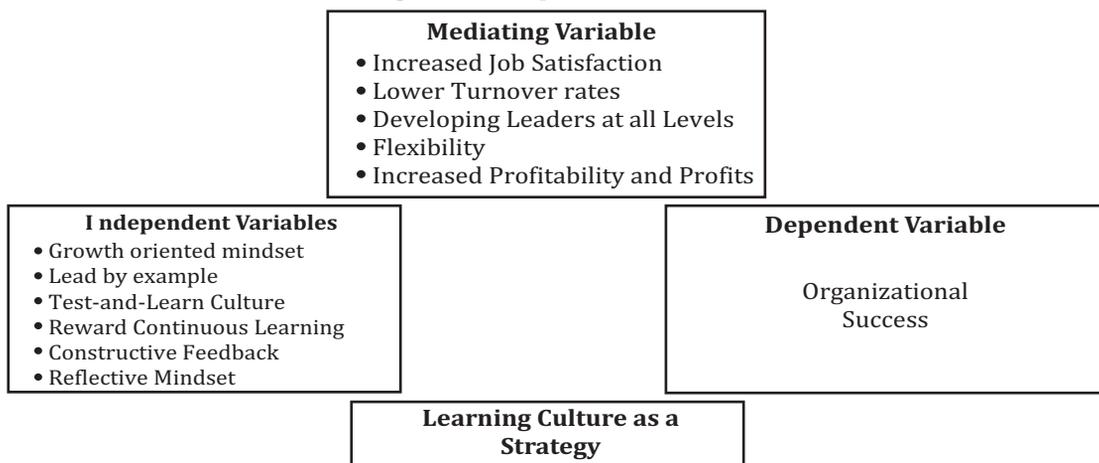
upon the process and outcomes of their studying that progress is made" (Gibbs 1981). Reflective practice at the workplace enables employees to exploit learning opportunity, foster the acquisition of practical knowledge and facilitates the improvements of work performance and the development of professional competence.

7. Theoretical Framework

This part of the study presents the conceptual or theoretical framework related to this study. According to Sekaran (2003), "theoretical framework is a conceptual model to discuss the interrelationship among the variables that are deemed to be integral to the dynamics of the situation being investigated". The present study aims to identify the association or relationship between independent variables (growth oriented mindset, lead by example, reflective mindset, test-and-learn culture, feedback and reward mechanism), mediating variables (increased profitability, profits and flexibility, increased job satisfaction and lower employee turnover rates) and dependent variables (Organizational Success). To achieve organization success, all the independent variables mentioned above probably would

The conceptual framework for this study is shown in Fig. 1:

Figure1. Conceptual Framework



result in cultivating learning culture as a strategy.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has presented a conceptual or theoretical framework which can further be used for more empirical study regarding factors or drivers for cultivating a learning culture as a strategy to achieve organization success. Since this conceptual framework has been developed from the information and literature collected from various sources as journals, books, digitized source and other references which relate to the subject matter, it is expected that the deductions and understanding of this conceptual framework could be extended further for more extensive and empirical research. The present study might also be very helpful for leaders and managers in an organization to have a basic or preliminary understanding regarding the subject as it will help them to identify the best drivers to cultivate learning culture as a strategy for organization success. The rapid and unprecedented changes in the field of science and technology are making it more important and essential for an individual or organization to keep learning and growing. An organization learning culture is referred to 'a set of values and norms that define the functioning of an organization which drives individuals as well as the organization for continuous or life-long learning'. A continuous learning culture is important to build in an organization since it has some benefits, including: employee engagement, increased employee job satisfaction, lower turnover rates and enhanced flexibility at all levels in the organization. In addition, a strong learning culture of an organization also increases profit efficiency, increases effectiveness, develops the leaders, etc. An organizational learning

culture can be cultivated with a strong commitment of the organization, by creating growth oriented mindset, reinforcing positive learning behaviors, showcasing your own curiosity. In addition, a test-and-learn culture can be cultivated which enables an organization to become productive and innovative. To develop curiosity and nurture the desire to learn in the employees there should be some mechanism of meaningful and constructive feedback and they should get time to reflect. A mind which has an appetite to learn is all likely to cultivate a stronger learning culture in the organization and its members. A mind which is ready to learn is the only pre-requisite for a human being to explore its true and highest potential.

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