A critical evaluation of efqm excellence model deployment management essay

The deployment of the EFQM Excellence Model provides a means for focusing resources of educational establishments upon critical success factors.

Null Hypothesis:

The deployment of the EFQM Excellence Model does not provide a means for focusing resources of educational establishments upon critical success factors.

Aims:

The project will have two fundamental aims, first to establish the rationale for educational institutions engaging in the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model. Secondly to develop an appropriate methodological approach for Excellence Model implementation.

Objectives:

To establish the historical development of EFQM and its Excellence Model.

To identify the constituent parts of the EFQM Excellence Model.

To determine the validity of implementing the EFQM Excellence Model within an educational environment.

To develop a suitable methodology for engaging in the implementational process within an educational establishment.

To monitor and evaluate the developed methodological approach in order to provide a generic implementational model for educational establishments.

METHODOLOGICAL MODEL

For EFQM Excellence Model – Research Project

Establish Rationale for EFQM. E. M Deployment

Objective 1

(Literature Review)

Determine the Constituent Parts of EFQM. E. M

Objective 2

(Literature Review)

Commence Questionnaire

Design

Objective 3

Determine Advocated Advantages and Strategy for Implementing EFQM. E. M within Manufacturing Objective 3

(Literature Review & Interviews)

Test Validity of Implementing EFQM. E. M within Education

Objective 3

(Questionnaires, Case Study & Interviews)

Develop a Suitable Implementational Methodology for Educational Establishments

Objective 4

Monitor & Evaluate

Methodology for Implementation

Objective 5

Aim 1

Aim 2

EXAMPLE 2 – DISSERTATION PART ‘ A’

SUBMISSION

Title:

A Critical Examination of the Key Issues Influencing a Construction Company in Becoming a Learning Organisation.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

“ It’s not the strongest species that survive nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change” – Charles Darwin

The construction industry with its innate conservatism has long proved resistant to change and innovation. Several government reports, including ‘ Constructing the Team’ (Latham 1994) and ‘ Rethinking Construction’ (Egan 1998) have identified the need for radical change in the way the industry operates. It comes as no surprise then that construction organisations have been slow to embrace concepts such as the learning organisation and knowledge management that emphasise innovation and experimentation, relying instead on imitative, incremental approaches to learning such as benchmarking and best practice.

Whilst there is a plethora of research on learning organisation implementation in the wider business context, surprisingly little is specifically focused on the construction industry. This research project seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge relating to the construction-learning organisation and perhaps, along the way, stimulate some interest in the subject amongst the organisations that participate in the research.

Aims:

The research project aims are twofold; firstly, to evaluate the problematic issues surrounding the implementation of learning organisation concepts for medium / large construction companies operating in the UK and secondly, to develop a generic model that will provide an effective and efficient, structured approach for those companies wishing to employ learning organisation practices.

Objectives:

To research and establish the historical development of the learning organisation paradigm during the last forty-five years.

To identify the key characteristics that a company should develop in order to become a learning organisation.

To determine the problematic issues that may prevent the successful implementation of learning organisation concepts in order to inform the development of a generic model.

To develop a generic model that could assist medium / large UK construction companies who are seeking to become learning organisations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Initial Questionnaire / Interview Script Design and Pilot Study

Once the literature review has been undertaken, the initial questionnaire and interview design will begin. On completion of this stage, the draft questionnaires and interview scripts will be piloted to test their validity.

The pilot study should establish whether or not:

The questions are clear and unambiguous and provide the information required

The questionnaire / interview can be completed in the time envisaged

The questionnaire layout is simple and easy to complete

Any relevant areas of research have been overlooked

Any adjustments, if necessary, can then be made to the questionnaires and interview scripts, prior to their distribution/completion.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire approach has been chosen to provide a quantitative dimension to the research, providing data that can be analysed with a view to identifying patterns and/or establishing relationships between the variables identified in the literature review. It enables primary data to be obtained from a relatively large amount of respondents in a limited time frame (Naoum 1998). The questions will be predominantly closed, as this will make subsequent analysis of the data easier; however, some open-ended questions will be included to solicit more in-depth data from the respondents, particularly with regard to problematic issues that can prevent the successful implementation of learning organisation concepts.

It is recognised however, that there are disadvantages associated with this approach. The rigidity of the predominantly closed question format will give the respondents little opportunity to freely express their opinions; however, the shallow nature of the questionnaire data will be supplemented by the more in-depth data provided by interviews and participant observation. The questionnaire will need to be designed carefully, to prevent the responses to open questions being influenced by, '…the response alternatives provided by related and preceding closed questions.' (Fellows and Liu 1997, p. 91).

All questionnaires will be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope to increase the likelihood of the respondents returning them.

Interviews

Additional primary data of a qualitative nature will be obtained by conducting interviews with construction employees. This will allow more in-depth probing which may uncover avenues of research not anticipated and perhaps reveal data of a more insightful nature. In order to generate comparable data a structured interview format will be used, with the same questions asked in the same order. A structured approach will be used help maintain the focus on areas relevant to the research. Care must be taken to ensure that any probing by the interviewer does not “ lead” the interviewee to a response.

Where permitted, the interview will be tape recorded to facilitate in-depth analysis. This particular research instrument is an expensive and time-consuming method, so it will be limited to four interviews with key organisational figures known to have a particular interest in knowledge management / collective learning.

Participative Observation

An ethnographic facet will be incorporated into the research in the form of participative observation in order to capitalise on the researcher’s involvement in a joint venture construction project. This will give the research a perspective on how learning is approached in a construction environment, providing contextually rich data that may reveal relationships or causal factors that would otherwise remain undetected by utilising a purely quantitative approach.

The participant observation approach to research, like the case study method, has been criticised for its limitations in respect of representation; there may be factors peculiar to the organisation under observation that render it atypical of other, seemingly similar organisations (Bell 1999). There is also the problem of subjectivity; in other words, the extent to which different researchers would arrive at the same conclusions given a similar situation (Lashley and Best 2001).

Historical Case Study

In order to collect additional secondary data, historical case studies will be used to provide more depth to the research. This may provide data that will support or discredit the data provided by the other research instruments used in the project.

However, it is recognised that case studies conducted by third parties are often subjective in nature, influenced as they are by the author's mental model of the subject area. Consequently, it will be necessary to undertake critical analysis of any conclusions drawn by the author in order to maintain objectivity.

Sample

The sample will be restricted to medium / large construction organisations, with medium / large being defined as an organisation having an annual turnover of £50 million or more.

Fellows and Liu (1997) and Holt (1998), concur that approximately 30 respondents is required as a minimum sample size. Whilst it can be argued

that such a generalised view takes no account of the fact that a representative sample size will vary according to the section of the population being sampled, 30 respondents will be used as a benchmark. Assuming a response rate of 20%, it follows that 150 questionnaires will have to be sent out, split between 18 different organisations. Each organisation will be sent eight questionnaires; four to be completed by head office based employees, with the remaining four to be completed by site based employees.

Where possible, a contact, preferably with an interest in knowledge management and/or collective learning, will be established within each company. The contact will be asked to distribute the questionnaires to employees of varying levels within the organisation in order to obtain data of a more representive nature.

The following allocation will be suggested as a guide:

A senior director

A senior line manager

A graduate with 2 – 3 years experience

A trainee

Rationale for Using Multiple Research Methods

The main reason for utilising multiple research instruments is to achieve a degree of triangulation. Triangulation helps crosscheck the accuracy of the data, as well as enhancing the clarity of the constructs developed during the

research. Argyris and Schon (1974) identified that an individual’s theory in use often bears no resemblance to their espoused theory; adopting a multi faceted approach may assist in highlighting where this occurs.

Methodological Model For Learning Organisation Research Project

Aim 1

Research the Historical Development of the Learning Organisation Paradigm

Objective 1

(Literature Review)

Initiate Interview Design

Initiate Questionnaire Design

Develop a Generic Implementational Model for UK Construction Companies to Utilise

Objective 4

Establish the Problematic Issues that can Prevent the Successful Implementation of Learning Organisation Concepts

Objective 3

(Literature Review, Questionnaire, Participative Observation, Historical Case Studies and Interviews)

Refine Interview Design

Conduct Pilot Interviews

Conduct Questionnire Pilot Study

Identify the Key Characteristics that a Company Should Develop in Order to Become a Learning Organisation

Objective 2

(Literature Review, Questionnaire, Participative Observation, Historical Case Studies and Interviews)

Refine Questionnaire Design

Aim 2

Literature Review

Definition of a Learning Organisation

There is still no clear consensus as to what constitutes a learning organisation and a multitude of definitions abound. These range from aspirational type definitions of organisations,'...where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and

expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together' (Senge 1990, p. 3), to normative definitions such as that espoused by Garvin, ' A learning organisation is an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights' (Garvin 1993, p. 80).

Nyhan et al (2004, p. 71) suggest that, ' The prescriptive and simplistic formula based view of the learning organisation does nothing more than discredit the concept'. In their opinion, becoming a learning organisation involves more than simply applying a formula; each individual organisation needs to, '…devise its own unique theory based on its own distinctive practice' (Nyhan et al 2004, p. 72).

Historical Development

The concept of the learning organisation has been around for some time; Burns and Stalker published their theory of mechanistic and organic systems in 1961 following lengthy studies of a large number of Scottish electronics companies operating in increasingly competitive and innovative technological markets during the 1950's.

The 1980's was a decade of immense upheaval for many large corporations who increasingly found, '…their success eroded or destroyed by the tides of technological, demographic, and regulatory change and order of magnitude productivity and quality gains made by non-traditional competitors' (Hamel and Prahalad 1994, p. 6).

A fresh wave of literature on the learning organisation emerged during this period, heavily influenced by organisational learning and action learning theories such as those developed by Revans (1983). Much of the work from this period recognises that survival in the new competitive environment is dependant on an organisation’s ability to learn faster than its competitors, and that this ability may be the organisation’s only form of sustainable competitive advantage (De Geus 1988).

Nonaka (1991, p. 96) recognises that in an economy typified by shifting markets and technological proliferation, successful companies will have to, ‘…consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organization, and quickly embody it in new technologies and products’.

However, it was Peter Senge’s seminal text, “ The Fifth Discipline” (Senge 1990) that really popularised the concept of the learning organisation. Senge describes five vital dimensions or “ disciplines” that he considers are essential if an organisation is to become a learning organisation: team learning, personal mastery, managing mental models, shared vision and systems thinking. The fifth discipline, systems thinking, is seen as the integrating discipline that unites the organisation, individual and total environment, based on a conceptual framework that describes a system as a set of interrelated subsystems. Senge proposes that it is the relationship between these subsystems that ultimately influences the functioning of the whole.

Senge’s work however, has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to knowledge management systems, the structures of the organisation and

their implication as a resource to learning (Sun and Scott 2003), whilst Garvin (1993, p. 79) considers Senge's model as too ethereal, and lacking a, '…framework for action'.

Organisational Structure

Johnson and Scholes (2002, p. 583) assert that organisations have traditionally been viewed as hierarchical, bureaucratic structures geared towards stability rather than change, characteristics, '…not suited to the dynamic conditions for change of the 21st century.'

Goh (2001, p. 335) describes learning organisations as '…non-bureaucratic, with decentralised decision making structures, empowered employees and open lines of communication'. He proposes that by adopting policies and work procedures of a less rigid nature, a more fluid organisational structure is created. This sits well with Griffith & Watson's (2004) view that a hecterarchical approach, which involves maintaining high levels of fluidity, is a fundamental requirement for construction companies operating in areas of ever-increasing complexity.

Ã-rtenblad's " learning structure" model (Ã-rtenblad 2004), builds on this idea by describing a decentralised, flatter organisational structure that is team based, with learning depicted as an input, and flexibility as an output.

A Learning Climate

Garvin (1993, p. 91) opines that a learning organisation is that which fosters, '…an environment that is conducive to learning'. He proposes that in order for employees to learn, they need '…time for reflection and analysis, to think

about strategic plans, dissect customer needs, assess current work systems, and invent new products'. (Garvin 1993, p. 91). This highlights an important prerequisite for implementing any new initiative, the provision of adequate resources, particularly time and funding.

However, a further examination of learning organisation literature reveals that time and money alone will not create the required climate for learning.

Ho (1999, p. 116) proposes that the learning organisation provides an environment where, '…people are excited in trying out new ideas and recognise that failure is an important part of success'.

Love et al (2004, p. 115) underpin this view describing an atmosphere where, '…experimenting with new approaches is encouraged and errors are not perceived as failures'… These traits, when viewed in the context of an organisational environment typified by ever increasing complexity and uncertainty (Malhotra 1996), clearly point towards a morphogenic culture utilising processes that, '…allow for change and development…' and where, '…the exciting nature of change is always highlighted' (Griffith & Watson 2004, p. 80).

Knowledge Management

In the late 1980's, Pedler et al (1988, p. 10) recognised the importance of utilising information technology to, '… " informate" as well as " automate"…' [in order to] …seek information for individual and collective learning…'. More recently, Loermans asserts that a, ' corporate architecture' needs to be in place to facilitate learning and to, '…create knowledge sharing and dissemination mechanisms across the organisation' and that the capture and

systemisation of knowledge is a prerequisite to being a learning organisation (Loermans 2002, p. 290). The growing number of organisations utilising intranets and “ lessons learned” databases gives some indication of the perceived value of knowledge management systems.

However, recent research into cross-project learning led Newell to conclude that, ‘…there is accumulating evidence that the medium of capture and transfer through ICT such as databases and corporate intranets is limited in terms of how far such technology can actually facilitate knowledge sharing’ (Newell 2004, p. 13).

Newell’s study (2004) also found that where transfer of learning had occurred, it had depended far more on social networks and a process of dialogue, than on ICT[1].

These findings concur with the view of Nonaka (1991) that the key to organisations gleaning greater knowledge is through facilitating:

The sharing of tacit knowledge[2]through socialisation

The collation of discreet pieces of explicit knowledge[3]to create new knowledge

The conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge i. e. externalising what individuals know

The conversion of explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge, i. e. internalising explicit knowledge

Single Loop Learning Versus Double Loop Learning

Argyris and Schon (1978) first developed the idea that there are two basic types of organisational learning, “ single loop” or “ double loop”. Single loop learning is where organisations respond to changes in their internal and external environments by detecting and correcting errors in order to’… maintain the central features of the organisational norms’ (Barlow and Jashapara 1998, p. 87). It could be argued that incremental, imitative learning methods such as benchmarking and best practice are examples of single loop learning.

Double loop learning involves a more demanding approach to learning, where an organisation’s norms, policies, assumptions and past actions are critically examined in order to inform new strategies for learning (Argyris and Schon 1978). Inevitably, such introspective organisational analysis may bring about conflict; Love et al (2000, p. 325) maintain that, ‘ Frequently organisational conflict is a correlate of double loop learning inasmuch as the status quo is challenged.’ Engeström (2001, p. 151) proposes that conflict or ‘ conflictual questioning’ as he describes it, does not constitute a barrier to learning, rather, it leads to ‘…deepening analyses’ as well as, ‘…sharper and more articulated questioning’.

Mental Models

Senge’s discipline of managing mental models recognises that ‘…new insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting’ (Senge 1990, p. 174). He advocates that mental models be brought to the surface and reflected on by ‘ balancing advocacy

and inquiry' which he describes as being '...open to disconfirming data as well as confirming data – because we are genuinely interested in finding flaws in our views' (Senge1990, p. 200).

This contemplative approach, which is aligned with the double loop learning concept of Argyris and Schon (1978), is necessary in order for organisations to escape what Shukla calls ' the success trap' (1997, pp. 78 – 81). He describes how successful companies try to replicate their achievements by formalising their effective practices and procedures, standardising their products and services and investing in tried and tested technologies. This single loop approach to learning results in the organisation becoming less sensitive to competitive demands; they lose touch with their environment and as Shukla explains, '...their past learning becomes a hindrance in the way of the necessity of new learning; they must ' unlearn' to learn' (Shukla 1997, p. 81).

Hamel and Prahalad (1994, p. 50) use the term ' frame' in place of mental model, proposing that ' Although each individual in a company may see the world somewhat differently, managerial frames within an organisation are typically more alike than different', and, ' Almost by definition, in any large organisation there is a dominant managerial frame that defines the corporate canon'. This suggestion that there can be an institutional model echoes the view espoused by De Geus who sees the mental models of each learner as'...a building block of the institutional mental model' (De Geus 1988, p. 74).

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of the learning organisation has evolved as a response to a rapidly changing, dynamic business environment, which is constantly in flux. The idea then, that a fluid, flatter, less hierarchical organisational structure that offers less resistance to the seepage of knowledge through the organisation appears to have credence.

However, the organisational structure only provides the skeleton of the learning organisation; a capillary system is needed to transfer knowledge around the organisation. The utilisation of knowledge management in the construction industry appears to be one dimensional, very different from Löerman's grand vision of, ' a corporate architecture' for knowledge sharing and dissemination (2002, p. 290). It seems that most knowledge management strategies focus solely on the electronic collation of information, failing to take account of how different types of knowledge are internalised and externalised via social networks.

There also appears to be a degree of consensus that a " learning climate" needs to be created, where individuals feel free to experiment with new ways of doing things. This requires a blame free culture where mistakes, instead of being hidden, are learned from.

The literature review has highlighted how deeply held " mental models" inhibit the implementation of new concepts; models based on replicating previously effective practices. The models, though individually held, collectively form and reinforce the organisational model, which is focused on maintaining the status quo.

The idea of surfacing mental models (Senge 1990) seems closely aligned with the concept of double loop learning (Argyris and Schon 1978). The introspective organisational analysis associated with both concepts is a quantum leap away from the morphostatic culture (Griffith and Watson 2004) prevalent in many construction organisations, and may prove to be one of the most difficult learning organisation characteristics to attain. Clearly, this issue must be addressed in the construction of the generic implementational model.

Finally, several key characteristics that typify a learning organisation have been identified through undertaking the literature review.

These characteristics are as follows:

A flat, decentralised and hecterarchical organisational structure

An emphasis on team learning

A tolerance of experimentation

An environment conducive to collective learning

A strategy for creating, acquiring and disseminating all types of knowledge

A willingness to challenge organisational norms, policies and assumptions

Double loop learning encouraged

Recognition that conflict can be constructive

Collective aspiration

An emphasis on continuous learning

A holistic, ‘ systems thinking’ approach to learning that recognises the interrelatedness of the organisation, the individual and the external environment

These characteristics will be used to inform the design of the questionnaire and interview script.

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