

Learning organization culture

[Business](#), [Organization](#)



This approach emerged during the 1960s by authors such as Argyris (1964) and Chertty & March (1963) and the models are becoming more popular in the late 20th century. In a 'Learning Organization', there is a culture of shared knowledge and collective learning. Employees should be treated as intelligent and specialized individuals rather than being seen as everyday tools. Every single staff should be able to convey and share ideas according to their skills and perspective in achieving the common goal.

Unless the organization is willing to listen and learn, improvement and innovations are impossible to achieve. (Keno and College, 1998) Roister (1997, pop) gave a brief definition as " an organization where all its people , at all levels, continually seek knowledge, work and learn together for continuous improvement, and shared desire for excellence". 2. 2 The need for the shift towards a philosophical approach According to Smith, Snell and Gerhard, (1998); it is no longer sufficient for established organizations to follow the traditional bureaucratic methods of management.

They suggested three reasons stating why firms must adopt new ways of doing things; such as the increasing speed of technological changes, increasing in competitiveness and importance of globalization. Peter Sense supports this assertion in his book 'The Fifth Discipline' (1990); Sense suggests, by adopting learning organization managers would be more capable in solving chaotic issues and meeting higher demands of the global society.

However the traditional management practices are still the most commonly used among public organizations and enterprises. Traditional management

focuses on strict procedures and the concept of hierarchy; therefore it lacks the essence of philosophy and understanding of human behaviors. Since management concerns heavily on human personalities, it is not surprising to witness that the traditional management approach fails to encourage innovation and self-improvement.

In addition to that today's generation and future generations believe that individuals must "work to live not live to work" hence the claim that bureaucratic approaches overlook the most important principle relating to individual incentives; even though effectiveness can only result from the people within the organization. Traditional management separates clearly between the levels of workforce within an organization. This prevents effective communication between managers and their subordinates.

On the other hand if the organization was to allow workers to construct feedback from their direct job experiences, efficiency would be achieved by including frontline employees in developing ideas for a shared vision. 2. 3 Barriers in adopting Learning Organization Approach In order to achieve the status of a 'Learning Organization', executives must believe in this approach and have vivid understanding of its principles. They must allow room for experiments and form a culture where constructive feedback is encouraged.

More than often, we see entities adopt the conservative mindset in where changes are minimized; therefore management relies of fixed strategies and rigid rules which prevent organizations to move forward. Line managers must also create opportunities while not being threatened by the new mindset applied by subordinates. This mindset should be aiming towards

maximizing flow of information in which decisions and strategies would base upon. If line managers were to hold personal interest in legitimate power as the primary concern, it would discourage inputs from employees that would have been constructive otherwise.

Recognition of putting forward ideas is crucial in motivating employees to do their best. Managers must also maximize opportunity of empowerment and rotation of Jobs. People work best when their opportunity in earning is maximized and by rotating roles, employees would feel a deeper sense of belonging to the organization resulting in an enhanced productivity. All employees should be open minded and willing to learn from each other. Managers should focus on roles such as facilitation and mentoring rather than command and control.

By doing so, employees would have a better sense of understanding about the tasks they will undertake as well as they would share the same vision of their managers. Finally rewards should always be given to employees bearing in mind that group work is the norm. Carving, 1993) Roles of managers in respect to the concept involves Trust: Managers must trust in their staff to form opinions and to work with the absence of rules and bureaucracy allowing room for experiment while understanding that every task completed can be viewed as a system that can always be improved therefore punishment is unnecessary.

Managers must provide opportunities for employees to make decisions and value their ideas. Vision: Managers must be approachable; they must be there to inspire and share inputs with their employees and allow them to

fulfill their vision by giving them mentoring support. Objectives would be defined clearly and comprehensive to all members involve. Foster a learning culture: Managers should always seek to improve work environment for the purpose of collective learning. Honest and open communication is crucial to the success of collective learning.

The idea and belief must be developed that all members of the organization can always learn from one another. Rewarding ideas and encourage innovative mindset. Reinforcing shared understanding related to collective goals. Support: Training programs should be individualized for each employee's need and interest. Employees should find themselves improving effectively while learning new skills and strategies for using towards the department goal. Therefore training should be practical and relevant to the employees' vision.

Communication: Leaders must accept the presence of open communication and take employees' input with genuine consideration while actively provides constructive feedback on their performances. 2. Models of learning organization Peter Sense states in his classical management text book 'The Fifth Discipline' (Sense, 1994), the idea of learning organization is a philosophy where managers must respect all members involved. In order to achieve this approach, there are five disciplines in which executives must apply.

The five disciplines on which Gene's (1994) learning organization model is based are: System Thinking Peter Sense made an assertion " in a successful learning organization, every single task completed should be seen as a

system". He suggests that when one looks at a task as a system, one would integrate the philosophy considering that every system can be improved consequently individuals would never blame various factors regardless of results. 'Systems Thinking' encourages problem solving behaviors. Rather than blaming each other, employees who adopt this mind set would instead Penn their efforts in finding ways to do things right.

When this idea is employed, the common problem of 'blaming culture' commonly found within the bureaucratic approach, would be eliminated. Personal Mastery Sense believes in the effectiveness of empowerment. He believes that in order for employees to be the most productive, they should be treated as masters of their specialized discipline. By removing the rigid rules and strict procedures each employee would found their most effective way in fulfilling the task given. This creates a sense of pride for employees and they will become highly motivated. However rules and procedures and still be used sparingly.

Mental Modals Executives can reinforce the learning environment and culture by simply by making a lucid assertion in terms of the direction that the organization will undertake. So that members would realize the change in mindset of executives, they must believe that their voice will be heard. This includes facilitating the social aspects within the organization. Most importantly the sense of hierarchy must be removed including the principles of bureaucracy. Shared Vision Sense believes that each member of the organization must understand clearly what he company is trying to achieve, hence open communication is crucial.

Individuals must internalize their understanding of the company's identity. Vision shall never be held only within the executives. By involving everyday employees in sharing vision, they would feel involved and this allows them to contribute ideas that will lead to overall improvements. Team Learning Sense emphasizes the final element which is the concept of team learning. He said " team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of the team to create the results its members truly desire".

Sense, 1992: 236) By bringing people together, he believes that firms could achieve the most innovative successes therefore ideas shall not be constructed in isolation. Employees should be offered numerous opportunities in sharing and constructing ideas both within the department and with members outside the department. Lasses(1998) Learning Organization Comparative Model From Gene's publication on five disciplines, Lasses has developed an extension called the 'Comparative Model' which allows researchers to compare insights between a learning organization and a traditional bureaucratic point of view.

This also helps firms to identify where they stand on the scale of being a learning organization or a traditional one. A learning organization allows individuals to learn from their mistakes whereas bureaucratic approach would punish for mistakes. A learning organization would allow practices to adapt according to the purpose and employees needs whereas bureaucratic approach would generally stick with the traditional procedures and practices. A learning organization customizes training for each employee according to

their learning needs whereas bureaucratic approach would send their staff on set courses regardless of individual needs.

A learning organization opens to risks and experiment whereas bureaucratic approach will always play safe. In learning organization a manager coaches and develops staff. In the bureaucratic approach, managers focus on monitoring and supervising. In learning organization employees are encouraged to carry out evaluations on their performances and allowing them to recognize success. In the bureaucratic approach, reviews are carried out when something has gone wrong. A learning organization allows suggestions and questions while the bureaucratic approach doesn't encourage questions and suggestions.

Employees only role is to work. 2. 5 Organizational Metaphor Carving summarizes that a learning organization focuses on four aspects. First aspect is the way in which individuals figure out different solutions to solve issues. He calls this systematic problem solving; where individuals based their decisions on knowledge rather than guessing. Second aspect involves experimentation; employees are allowed to experiment different ways of fulfilling tasks without the burden of a blame culture. If something works, the company would reward the person who came up with new ideas but if not no one would blame him.

They would treat it as a system that could have worked. Third aspect concerns the process of continually reflecting past experiences to ingrain the beliefs that things can always be improved. Finally, the fourth aspect focuses on transferring knowledge; Carving believes that in a learning organization,

transferring information and learning should be easy. Everyone should share ideas and develop interpersonal familiarity within the organization. There should be endless opportunity for collaboration and communication within the entity. Carving, 1993) Analyzing the Case Study Organization: identifying issues 1 . The case study organization is currently relying on managers who have the legitimate powers and are responsible for making decisions. The manager's task is to ensure that the objectives of the department will be accomplished in time at the best of staffs' ability. This management practice follows the traditional approach which creates a gap between subordinates and managers, therefore the flows of information from the operating employees are minimized.

Suggestions and decisions are not made by the employees who are directly fulfilling the tasks. Instead, decisions are formed within the higher level of operation; consequently managers who are determining the overall direction are too distant from the task itself. 2. As stated in the case study organization, the staff performance is being observed closely to assure the task achievements. The organization arranges to have the meeting to discuss the performance status every three months.

According to Lassus 'Comparative Model', in order for an organization to optimize its efficiency; employees should be encouraged to carry out evaluations on their performances regularly. By doing so, there will be more opportunities for employees to recognize their success. However the company only allows evaluations every three months, sharing only results and procedures while the concept of shared vision is being left out. This

results the company's interest being irrelevant in the eyes of operating employees.

Hence such meetings and evaluations are often ineffective. 3. With the presence of hierarchy, managers tend to adopt the command and control approach which overlooks the workers' ability to think and operate on their own. The bureaucratic approach treats workers like machines rather than intelligent individuals. Therefore employees would be lacking in the sense of empowerment, leaving them unmotivated. In addition to that managers' main role should be mentoring and coaching staffs according to their learning needs.

Monitoring and commanding should be minimized while mentoring and trust should be adopted by managers. Discussion Even though the company aims to satisfy the external regulatory influences and expectations, the issues stated above suggest that the utility company (case study organization), utilizes the traditional bureaucratic management approaches. The current approach is becoming obsolete, considering the key influential factors such as the increasing speed of technological changes, increasing in competitiveness and rising expectations.

Gene's theory suggests that philosophical approach should be adopted to encounter these factors. However due to the role of this organization requires the power and energy supply organization to maintain its standards in terms of its prices, services, health and safety requirements; some regulations and procedures are still essential. Therefore to shift of firm's

management approach in order to become a 'learning organization' requires time and efforts by the executives.

An immediate change in policies may result in confusion and devastating outcomes hence the management level must change their mindsets first; then adopt the way of 'learning organization' gradually over time. 3. 0

Recommendations The five disciplines model by Peter Sense would be appropriate for the change in this organization's direction. 1 . Executives must exercise the concept of 'Systems Thinking Currently, our case study organization evolves their aims around the idea of 'get things right first time every time'.

This ideology discourages innovation and therefore efficiency is unlikely to improve. The company should view every single task as a system that can always be improved. When an issue arises, it should be viewed as a result of an imperfect system rather than a failure of the individual. 2. Adopt 'Personal mastery " Managers are encouraged to ensure staffs are clear about the role requirements, objectives they must achieve and that their performance is monitored closely to ensure conformity and task completion. Managers are encouraged to focus on the achievement of their own departmental objectives. (Quoted from the case study) Currently the company is treating their operating employees as tools of the company. Their only role is to work and carry out the tasks given by their supervisors. Instead the company should treat all members, at all levels as masters in their own spelling. Managers should stop focusing on rigid rules enforcement and shift their mindsets towards trust. Managers should allow workers to operate in ways

that they find most beneficial to them and the department. 3. Improve 'Mental Model' The company shall improve the staff working space.

By improving facilities, managers will be making a statement that their staffs are important to the company and therefore will improve morale. In order to communicate with the employees the message that sends out must be effective, believable and persuasive. It is good to have a meeting every three months o discuss the work performance but what about how the employees feel? How are they doing in the organization? Are they under too heavy pressure? The organization needs to take these things into consideration. 4.

Start introducing the idea of shared vision Current issue " Decisions are, in the main, made at strategic levels within the organization and fed down vertically to employees through managers and supervisors. Although staff will be consulted over major change initiatives, the final decisions on action lie with the managers. " According to the quote above, there is no shared vision within the entity. Currently there's no opportunity for lower employees to form suggestions nor there any involvement from them in decision making. The organization must change that in order to succeed.

Managers must make sure that all members understand clearly about what the organization is trying to achieve. Furthermore, by involving everyday employees in sharing vision, they would feel a sense of involvement and this allows them to contribute ideas that will lead to overall improvements. 5.

Immediately focus on team learning The company could achieve the most innovative successes therefore ideas shall not e constructed in isolation.

Employees should be offered numerous opportunities in sharing and

constructing ideas both within the department and with members outside the department. . 1 Conclusion The idea of learning organization is a practical model well suited for uncertainty. It involves philosophical approaches that this company can utilize in order to achieve future goals. Gene's publication summarizes the concept surround the ideas of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental model, shared vision and team learning. Carvings model stated that the key roles of managers should be forming trust, sharing Sino, foster a learning culture and to support training and Communication.

Furthermore lasses has extended Gene's model call Comparative model that can be used to identify where a given firm is stand on the scale of organizational learning.