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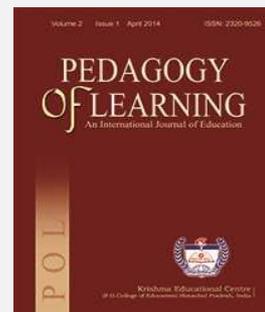
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Transforming an Educational Institute into Learning Organisation: An Innovative Strategy

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Abstract

This is a theoretical paper based on innovative strategy for transforming educational institute to a learning institute. To keep pace with the dynamic society, education institute ought to be dynamic itself thereby creating a need to transform itself into a learning organisation. In this regard this paper discusses the origin of learning organisation and the dimensions and characteristics of the learning organisation. Then innovative strategy is suggested by the author for the transformation of an Educational Institute into a learning organisation. Finally it ends with the benefits of learning organisation and some barriers to learning organisation that needs to be overcome.

Keywords: Educational Institute, Learning Organisation, Innovative strategy

LEARNING ORGANISATION DEFINED

The change is the solely permanent thing in the world. The changes in the society make it dynamic. Thus there is a demand of a dynamic Education System to keep pace with the dynamic society. For this the Educational Institute needs to transform itself into such a powerful organisation that can imbibe the felt changes of the society keeping its regular functioning of teaching and learning, conducting research and community service intact. In this case, Learning Organisation is the concept that can come to rescue. This needs a meticulous examination of the principles of the Learning Organisation and then embracing it. There is a lack of sufficient literature regarding the pertinence of Learning Organisation to an Educational Institute. This makes the concept of Learning Organisation seem less viable for

educational institutes than for entrepreneurial organisations. The most significant work that can help here is of Ortenblad (2013) where he cited several studies to examine the relationship between the Higher Education Institutions and The Learning Organisation and found it to be positive.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term 'Learning Organisation' was coined by Peter Senge and his colleagues in 1990. According to Senge (1990) organisation which nurtures new thinking and where people continually learn together and expand their capacity to achieve the desired results can be termed as a learning organisation. This implies that only those learning organisations can excel that encourage their people for continual learning. Because it helps the learning organisation to become more adaptable and productive.

In this definition, Senge (1990) clearly states that for the positive growth of an organisation both the individual as well as organisational learning are essential. Moreover this also necessitates for a conducive environment that allows for independent thinking, new ideas and continuous learning. The transformations to learning organisations can make the organisations flexible, adaptive and productive so as to perform exceptionally in this competitive world. Senge(1990) identified five disciplines of a learning organisation namely *team learning, personal mastery, building shared vision, mental models and system thinking* to transform an organisation into a learning organisation. Franklin et al. (1998) summarizes organisation learning to be interactions of individuals with their own learning style and interactions with groups.

Evans (1998) defines a learning organisation is the organisation that itself learns from the learning of its workforce. According to Evans the nature of a learning organisation are as follows:

- i. The structure of learning organisation is not highly formalised;
- ii. Workforce is believed to be comprising of a group of active members;
- iii. Equal importance is given to both individual learning and organisational learning;
- iv. Work is structured such that Work tasks is viewed as opportunities for continuous learning.
- v. Continuous reflection for improvement is done by all the members of the workforce;
- vi. Technology is not completely relied upon for solving future organisational problems;

Similarly Ortenblad and Koris (2014) identified four aspects of Learning Organization namely: Learning Structure, Organisational learning, Learning at work and Climate for learning. He discussed the relevance of the learning organisation idea to higher educational institutions.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING ORGANISATION

Senge (1990) identified that a Learning Organisation has five disciplines namely:

- a) **Personal Mastery:** Lifelong learning should be encouraged for the continuous growth of the individual and the organisation. The focus should be on practical knowledge and skills that can be applied to the real world environment.
- b) **Mental Models:** Here the Learning Organisation implies a two fold idea. First the individuals of the Learning Organisation should assess their cognition and over their limiting beliefs that challenges their progress. They should also find ways to serve the institution. Secondly innovative ideas and new theories should be tried out for the development of the organisation without the fear of the risk involved. If met with failure then they should learn from it and move forward.
- c) **Building shared vision:** This is all about forward thinking leadership. The Supervisor and the trainers should have a shared vision of progress of the institution. There should be ample amount of communication and interaction among the staff. For example hosting webinars, scheduling regular meetings, holding online discussions and staying active on social media. The leaders must encourage self reflection and allow room for mistakes.
- d) **Team learning:** Sharing knowledge is more important than acquiring it. This can be done in two ways. Firstly whatever is learnt by an individual can then be shared by him. For example an employee who has attended a training program can communicate it to other colleagues. Secondly all the employees can learn together and exchange their view for example in a workshop held in the organisation.
- e) **System Thinking:** This is the most important discipline of a successful Learning Organisation. Here the system is viewed as a whole rather than sum of its parts. It gives importance to collaborative learning. For example while framing a policy, it should be kept in mind that different individuals have different view. So every individual should be honoured and his idea should be noted.

Similarly Ortenblad and Koris (2014) discussed the relevance of Learning Organisation concept to higher educational institutions. He focussed on different stakeholder perspectives and recognized four dimensions of Learning Organisation viz.

- a) **Learning at work:** After entering upon a job as a faculty it is important for one to keep up-to-date knowledge in the particular field so as to progress. Learning at work through formal courses can often be a strenuous task. So the tasks and processes in the job can be so designed as to involve an implicit method of learning. This means that the work can be structured in such a way that the responsibilities can be used as opportunities for continuous learning (Evans, 1998). For example, supervision of graduate student research, using innovative instructional technologies in the

classroom, research grant proposal writing etc. Even the Educational Institutes can conduct seminars, workshops and short courses.

- b) **Organisational Learning:** Organisational learning implies that the people of the organisation learn from problem solving, experimentation, their own past experiences, from others and transfer this knowledge (Curado, 2006). Research plays a vital role in such a case. But it is often remarked that research is done with a focus to national and global concerns rather than the institutions benefitting themselves by resolving their own problems. Moreover individual or group learning may not necessarily mean organisational learning as sometimes these may not contribute to the welfare of the organisation but for their personal benefits.
- c) **Climate for Learning:** A democratic ambience in the institute can significantly contribute to its improvement. Here the employees are involved in the decision making and creating process. They are encouraged for their active and innovative contribution. Here all the stakeholders should be involved. The management should remember that the development of the individuals in the organisation can be harnessed for the improvement of the organisation.
- d) **Learning Structure:** Curado (2006) presented two types of learning structures namely mechanistic and organic. The mechanistic learning structure follows rigid procedures, strict performance control and high degree of specialization as it involves a highly formalised structure, low integration and high centralisation. On the other hand organic learning structure involves a low formalised structure, high integration and low centralization. A learning organisation prefers the organic structure.

An Innovative Strategy for building Learning Organisation

An organisation can be transformed into a Learning Organisation by embracing the principles of the Learning Organisation. The Process can be as follows:

- i. **Prepare:** Prepare a list of characteristics of a Learning Organisation as given in Table 1 below.
- ii. **Evaluate:** Examine and Evaluate the Educational Institute under the lens of the list prepared.
- iii. **Plan:** In case any gaps are found, plan a strategy to fulfil the needed requirements.
- iv. **Implement:** Practically carry out the strategy.

In the ever changing society, the education needs to be dynamic. In order to keep pace with the changes this should be done repeatedly, thus following a cyclic process.

Table 1: Characteristics pertaining to the Disciplines of a Learning Organisation

Discipline	Discipline specific Ability	Characteristics pertaining to the Disciplines of a Learning Organisation
Learning at Work	The ability to learn continuously from daily work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Learning • Team Learning • Practical Learning at work • Practical Learning through work • Continuous Learning • Continuous Evaluation System • Continuous Improvement • Unlearning Obsolete practices • Learning New and Updated practices • Usage of experimental or trial and error methods of learning • Usage of reflective observation • Searching for better ways to do things
Organisational Learning	The ability of a group of individuals to contribute to the good of the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting upon the causes of problems • Devising an array of possible solutions • Deciding the best solution to adopt with reasons • Implementing the chosen solution • Conducting Research for the good of the organisation • Vision for the future of organisation • Learning from past experiences • Learning from others' experience • Transfer of knowledge • Trust is vital • Empathy towards others • Cooperation is emphasised • Effective communication flows
Climate for Learning	The creation of a conducive atmosphere for learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving the members in decision making • Encouraging them for active contribution to organisation matters • Democratic leadership • Providing room for flexibility and creativity • Building confidence in members • Rewards and recognition • Tolerance of mistakes • Openness to new ideas

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring to plough back individual knowledge into the organisation
Learning Structure	The creation of an organic learning structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low formalised structure • High integration • Low centralization i.e decentralisation • Documentation and Dissemination of knowledge • Knowledge management • Knowledge transfer from outside of the organisation • Routine analysis of errors • Focus on measuring both process and product • R&D department to raise performance of the organisation

BENEFITS OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

The benefits that are accrued from the transformation of an Educational Institute to a Learning Organisation are as follows:

- i. Improving the output of the organisation
- ii. Enhancing the efficiency of the workforce
- iii. Creating a conducive workplace
- iv. Maintaining innovations
- v. Remaining competitive
- vi. Improving the problem solving skills among the employees
- vii. Building better relationships among the workforce
- viii. Increasing the pace of change in the organisation
- ix. Integrating critical reflection
- x. Giving room for flexibility and Creativity

Though there is multitude of benefits accrued from the transformation of an Educational Institute into a Learning Organisation yet there still remains certain barrier to Learning Organisation that needs to be overcome. Some of these may be fear of failure, overconfidence, structural barriers, political barriers, time constraints, lack of direct leadership, inertia to change, a focus on individual success rather than team success, short term focus, and lack of value for learning. Thus by overcoming these aforementioned barriers and embracing the strategy suggested can bring the transformation of an Educational Institute into a Learning Organisation into reality and help to reap the benefits of it.

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