

Role of Career Competencies in Organizational Learning Capability

Malikeh Beheshtifar

Management Department, Rafsanjan Branch, Islamic AZAD University, Rafsanjan, Iran

Rezvan Mohammad-Rafiei

Management Department, Rafsanjan Branch, Islamic AZAD University, Rafsanjan, Iran

Mahmood Nekoie-Moghadam

Research Center for Health services Management, Kerman University of Medical Sciences,
Iran,

Abstract

With change as the only constant in today's global economy, organizations need to build learning capability - 'adaptive learning' as well as 'generative learning', to enhance the ability of employees at all levels to learn faster than competitors from their own successes and failures as well as that of others. Recent years have seen increased attention being given to the organizational capability that facilitates organization to learning. Studies pointed that failure is a key condition for effective organizational learning. Although, there are many factors lead to it, but career competencies is a forgotten one. The studies show a variable to promote organizational learning capability is focus on career competencies. Competence allows not only to assess and reflect upon one's work in an efficient way but also to take responsibility for the results of the work to take responsibility for the results of the work. Career competencies are those behavioral competencies that are common to the all jobs, and combined with the organization wide (core) competencies, make up the suite of behavioral competencies necessary for success. Also, these competencies are an important force to move toward a learning organization. In conclusion, it is possible to state that organizational learning capability is not static and need to be renewed taking into consideration a person's goals and plans of actions needed to achieve them. In this case, understanding which career competencies and skills are instrumental in a successful learning capability become critically important for organizations.

Keywords: Competencies, Career Competencies, organizational learning, organizational learning capability

Introduction

Organizational learning is since some time ago one of the most claimed concepts by academic and business worlds (Nekoei-Moghadam & Beheshtifar, 2008). Additionally, learning in organizations can be aimed to 1) generate knowledge variation within organizations and 2) acquire knowledge of the knowledge already available within organizations. Therefore, learning processes in organizations involve a tension between creating and assimilating new knowledge –knowledge exploration- and diffusing and using what has been learnt from the past –knowledge exploitation- (March, 1991).

Organizational learning might be defined as the process through which organizations change or modify their mental models, rules, processes or knowledge, keeping or improving their performance. Therefore, organizational learning capability (OLC) has been considered a key index of an organization's effectiveness and potential to innovate and grow (Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005)

Recent years have seen increased attention being given to the organizational capability that facilitates organization to learning (Goh, 1998). Sitkin (1996, p. 541) pointed that failure is a key condition for effective organizational learning (Chiva and Alegre, 2009). Although, there

are many factors lead to it, but career competencies is a forgotten one. The studies show a variable to promote organizational learning capability is focus on career competencies.

Organizations increasingly incorporate self-development features into their career management interventions. In general, these initiatives emphasize job-related issues, reinforced by the use of competencies that focus on performance at work. However, individual career development goes beyond the assessment of strengths, weaknesses and training to improve job performance (Haase, 2007). Career competencies include the knowledge, skills and attitudes by which individual act successfully in the organization (Education Council Nassaulaan, 1993). This condition could lead to expand learning organizations.

Organizational Learning Capability (OLC)

At present, learning capacity development is one of the most focal areas of research, becoming an interdisciplinary topic which advance is influenced from a variety of fields such as organizational theory, production management, strategy, psychology or management science (Easterby-Smith, 1997). Also, Senge (1990) argues that learning organizations require a new view of leadership. In a learning organization, leaders are responsible for learning, for *building organizations* where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models. Learning organizations will remain a 'good idea'... until people take a stand for building such organizations. Taking this stand is the first leadership act, the start of *inspiring* (literally 'to breathe life into') the vision of the learning organization (Senge 1990, p. 340).

With change as the only constant in today's global economy, organizations need to build learning capability - 'adaptive learning' as well as 'generative learning', to enhance the ability of employees at all levels to learn faster than competitors from their own successes and failures as well as that of others; to expand their capacity to create the results they desire, and to nurture new and expansive patterns of thought (Senge, 1990). Following a comprehensive literature review, Chiva, Alegre and Lapiedra (2007) identified five essential facilitating factors of organizational learning: experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participative decision making.

So, learning capacity in organizations is often characterized by two essential dimensions (Vera and Crossan, 2000):

- 1) a static dimension, based on the structures that hold the stocks of knowledge –tacit or explicit- which are internal to the organization;
- 2) a dynamic dimension, based on the knowledge flows –representative of learning processes- that embody the knowledge streams into the organization which make knowledge stocks evolution possible. Knowledge stocks are the input of numerous knowledge flows as knowledge generation, accumulation, distribution and utilization, which may be assimilated and developed into stocks of knowledge. Therefore, flows of knowledge are a continuous and dynamic interaction, which shapes different stocks of knowledge and qualifies organizations to create, sustain and generalize effective knowledge.

The construct of OLC is grounded in principles of organizational learning as they relate to second-order organizational change. Here we distinguish between change processes involving first-order, adaptive, incremental, or continuous change and those that focus on second-order, transformational, radical, or discontinuous change. We define second-order organizational change as involving a qualitative change in the structural or cultural systems of an organization that requires the development of new cognitive schemas among members for understanding the organizational setting or context in relationship to its purpose or mission. Two classes of change process theories, teleological and dialectical, focus on second-order change processes and their underlying mechanisms (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

Organizational learning capability is "the capacity to generate and generalize ideas with impact across multiple organizational boundaries, through specific management initiatives and practices" (Yeung, Ulrich, Nason & Von Glinow, 1999, p. 11). OLC is defined as the organizational and managerial characteristics or factors that facilitate the organizational learning process or allow an organization to learn (Yeung, et al.1999).

Organizational learning capacity can be understood as the level of investment an organization makes in (1) aligning its vision and values with its structural systems and practices, both internal and external to the organization; and (2) promoting a culture of staff learning and development that includes (a) open communication systems and practices, (b) exploration, information seeking, and learning, (c) staff empowerment, (d) support for professional development throughout the organization (Bess, et al. 2010).

According to Yeung et al. (1999, p.vi) organizational learning capability = generating ideas × generalizing ideas with impact. It is a multiplicative rather than an additive function and provides a much more accurate view of an organization's learning environment. In the organizational context, "learning" means that knowledge has been transferred beyond individual learners to other people, units, and functions (*ibid.* p. 11).

Also, "Building Organizational Learning Capability" is a program to enhance the capability of work teams and their institutions to learn from their own experiences (success and failures) and from the experiences of others. By using this program, the organization will:

- Assess its learning strengths and weaknesses
- Recognize team learning styles
- Develop strategies to learn and improve performance
- Understand how to align its learning portfolio with corporate strategy
- Enhance learning and the dissemination of knowledge across the institution
- Eliminate the recurrence of identical failures, errors, or mistakes
- Increase its ability to adapt to change (organization *transitions*, inc. 2008).

Career Competencies

Competency based career development practice is defined as the extent of development template is used to enhance the employee performance in their jobs or to prepare improvements in their future tasks (Azmi, et al. 2009). Czerepaniak – Walczak (1997) defines career competence as a special ability which is characterized by demonstrating, at society defined level, the ability to behave adequately and to take responsibility for one's behavior. Competence allows not only to assess and reflect upon one's work in an efficient way but also to take responsibility for the results of the work to take responsibility for the results of the work (Ordon, 2008). Arthur (1997) explains:

"...career competencies are typically framed in conventional schema of "technical competencies", "interpersonal competencies" and "conceptual" or "strategic competencies". In contrast, the "career" spans wider social roles, occupies a much longer time-frame than the "job" and provides a more complex framework for conceptualizing competencies and their accumulation."

Career competencies are those behavioral competencies that are common to the all jobs, and combined with the organization wide (core) competencies, make up the suite of behavioral competencies necessary for success. Career competencies could be seen as a person's self-management of his or her working and learning experiences in order to achieve desired career progress (Beheshtifar, 2011).

Kuijpers, Schyns, and Scheerens (2006) identify five distinctive career competencies: capacity reflection (observation of capabilities that are important for one's career), motivation reflection (observation of wishes and values that are important for one's own career), work

exploration (researching job possibilities), career directedness (making thoughtful decisions and taking actions that allow work and learning to correspond with one's capabilities and motivation and challenges at work), and, finally, networking (building and maintaining contacts focused on career development). It is clear that developing career competencies is a higher-order learning process that needs a nontraditional learning environment.

According to DeFillippi and Arthur's (1994) theory on career capital as the accumulation of career competencies, three career competencies exist: (1) knowing-why competencies; (2) knowing-how competencies; and (3) knowing-whom competencies (Cappellen & Janssens, 2008). In this model, they describe knowing: knowing-why (why do we do a job), knowing how (how do we do a job) and knowing-whom (with whom do we work):

- Knowing-why relates to a person's identification with the culture of the employing organization and stems from their values, interests and beliefs. It embodies the factors that influence a person's overall commitment and adaptability to the employment situation, such as career motivation, personal meaning, and sense of purpose. It also incorporates accommodation of family and other non-work factors.
- Knowing-how refers to the expertise and abilities that a person brings to an organization's know-how. It reflects career-related skills and job-related knowledge and is based on occupational learning and the accumulation of experience.
- Knowing-whom refers to the individual's contribution to organizational communication. It describes the social contacts, relationships, reputation and attachments that are established within as well as outside of the organization while in pursuit of a career (Haase, 2007).

Effect of Career Competencies on organizational learning capability

The importance of the factors that facilitate organizational learning has traditionally been dealt with in the learning organization literature, which mainly focuses on the development of normative models for the creation of a learning organization (Easterby-Smith and Araujo, 1999). This literature proposes a facilitating factor of organizational learning as OLC.

The role of OLC is an important to enables product development successful and improves firms' performance (Hult et al., 2004). So, managers should identify factors that influence on OLC. Career competencies, as studies show, is a main one to promote OLC.

Career competencies also go far beyond the technical skills and managerial abilities on which company development programs tend to focus. They reflect individuals' interpretations of their career situation and are subject to constant change, in line with changing circumstances (Haase, 2007).

Career competencies developed by function and talent team. They applied to key roles to encourage career planning and long term development in critical roles (Summerfield, et al. 2008). Therefore, Career competencies provide a possibility to achieve organizational success (Education Council Nassaulaan, 1993).

Kuijpers (2001) adopts an even broader perspective and proposes a typology of competencies that consists of three levels:

- General working competencies which she defines as competencies required for different working situations and at different time periods
- Learning competencies which consists of a bundle of competencies which facilitate the development of working competencies
- Career related competencies which are defined to manage working and learning competencies within a personal career path

Conclusion

Learning is one process that plays an important role in enhancing a firm's capabilities and competitive advantage and which may benefit from the application of career competencies. Greenhouse (2000) emphasizes, individuals need to take responsibility to understanding the type of career they wish to pursue and making career decisions that are consistent with these preferences. Therefore it is possible to claim that the career success depends not only on specific professional knowledge and abilities. Individual's career competences help identifying frustrations arising in career situation and making appropriate decisions to solve that situation. Career competencies are reflected the individual interpretation about her/his career path.

It is resulted to various outcomes such as learning capability. Organizations can support their success by reinforcing competencies which focus on employees' performance. Also, these competencies are an important force to move toward a learning organization. In conclusion, it is possible to state that organizational learning capability is not static and need to be renewed taking into consideration a person's goals and plans of actions needed to achieve them.

In this case, understanding which career competencies and skills are instrumental in a successful learning capability become critically important for organizations. Furthermore, this research also contributes to the organizational learning capability literature by suggesting the importance of managers and their attitudes on career competencies.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to acknowledge the department of research, Islamic Azad University, Rafsanjan Branch for their support and contribution to this study.

References

1. Arthur, M.B., Inkson, K., Pringle, J.K., 1997, *The New Careers. Individual Action and Economic Change*, Sage, London
2. Azmi, I.A., Ahmad, Z.A. & Zainuddin, Y., 2009, *The Effects of Competency Based Career Development and Performance Management Practices on Service Quality: Some Evidence from Malaysia*
3. Beheshtifar, M., 2011, *Role of Career Competencies in Organizations*, *European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Sciences*, ISSN 1450-2275 Issue 42, 6-10
4. Bess, KD., Perkins, DD. & McCown, DL., 2010, *Testing a Measure of Organizational Learning Capacity and Readiness for Transformational Change in Human Services*, *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 39:1, 36
5. Cappellen, T. & Janssens, M., 2008, *Global managers' career Competencies*. *Career Development International*. 13(6), P. 516.
6. Chiva R, Alegre J., 2009, *Organizational Learning Capability and Job Satisfaction: an Empirical Assessment in the Ceramic Tile Industry*. *Br. J. Manage.* 20:323–340
7. Chiva, R., Alegre, J., and Lapidra, R. 2007. *Measuring organizational learning c*
8. Easterby-Smith, M., 1997, *Disciplines of organizational learning: contributions and critiques*. *Human Relations*, 24, 48
9. Easterby-Smith, M. and Araujo, L., 1999, *Organizational learning: current debates and opportunities*, in Easterby-Smith, M., Burgoyne, J.G. and Araujo, L. (Eds), *Organizational Learning and the Learning Organization*, Sage, London, pp. 1-21
10. Education Council Nassaulaan, 1993, *A Life of Learning, Particularly in Vocational Training and Adult Education*. www.onderwijsraad.nl.
11. Haase, S., 2007, *Applying Career Competencies in Career Management*, A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University of Coventry's requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Coventry University in collaboration with the University of Worcester, PP. 2-62.
12. Hult GTM, Hurley RF, Knight GA., 2004, *Innovativeness: its antecedents and impact on business performance*. *Ind. Mark. Manage*, 33, 429–438.
13. Goh SC., 1998, *Toward a Learning Organization: The Strategic Building Blocks*, *Sam Adv. Manage. J.*, 63(2):15-22.
14. Greenhouse J., Callanan, G., Godshalk, V., 2000, *Career management*, The Dryden Press, harcourt College Publishers.
15. Jerez-Gómez, P., Céspedes-Lorente, J. and Valle-Cabrera, R. 2005. *Organizational Learning and compensation strategies: evidence from the Spanish chemical industry*, *Human Resource Management*, 44(3): 279-299.
16. Kuijpers, M., 2000, *Career Development Competencies*, *Proceedings of the Second Conference of HRD Research & Practice Across Europe*, 309 – 314. University of Twente.
17. Kuijpers, M., Schyns, B., & Scheerens, J., 2006, *Career competencies for career success*. *Career Development Quarterly*, 55, 168–179.
18. March, J.G., 1991, *Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning*. *Organization Science*, 2 (1): 71-87.
19. Nekoei-Moghadam, M. & Beheshtifar, M., 2008, *Learning Organizations*, Medical Science Un. Of Tabriz, 1th edition.
20. Ordon, U., 2008. *Professionalism and Career Competencies of Tertiary School Teachers*, *Visnyk Lviv Univ. Ser. Pedagog.* 25, p. 26.

21. *Organization Transitions, Inc.* 2008, *Specialty Program: Building Organizational Learning Capability*, 75 Huguenot Drive East Greenwich, RI 02818.
22. Senge P., 1990, *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation*. New York: Doubleday.
23. Sitkin SB., 1996, Learning through failure. In: Cohen, M., Sproull, L. (Eds.), *Organizational Learning*. Sage Publications, California
24. Van de Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S., 1995, Explaining development and change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 510–541.
25. Vera, D. and Crossan, M., 2000, Organizational learning, knowledge management, and intellectual capital: an integrative conceptual model. *Working Paper*
26. Yeung, A. K., Ulrich, D.O., Nason, S.W. and Von Glinow M. 1999, *Organizational Learning Capability*. New York: Oxford University Press.