

Organizational Learning Culture via Creative Climate

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Abstract

Organizational learning culture is under constant construction, moving along an infinite continuum towards a harmonious learning environment. It is organizational phenomena that support the acquisition of information, the distribution and sharing of learning, and that to reinforce and support continuous learning and its application to organizational improvement. Studies show that to create a creative climate within organizations is a good tool to facilitate organizational learning culture. The creative climate encourages people to generate new ideas and helps the organization to grow and increase its efficiency and at the same time it enables members to generate and implement creative ideas more effectively. Creative climate is one of the important elements that play a vital role in organization learning. Findings of this review study were consistent and supported by previous literature and theories discussed earlier. It is suggested that the organization is looking into ways of improving its organizational learning culture by considering creative climate.

Key words: organizational learning, organizational learning culture, creative climate

1. Introduction

Although research on organizational learning has been going on for over 30 years, there is a diversity of perspectives that have been used to define organizational learning (Lopez et al., 2005). Organizational learning is particularly significant in today's workplace where employees may frequently change jobs or hoard what they know because they feel sharing knowledge could be detrimental to their own success (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

Numerous studies have investigated theoretical and operational models of organizational learning culture and its relationship to employee performance, such as innovation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Creating a learning culture within your organization will take you one step beyond just acquiring the skills that you need to deliver its products and services.

Many researchers think of organizational culture as a matter of worth in promoting organizational learning and transforming an organization into a learning organization (Brown & Gray, 2004). Organizational learning culture is under constant construction, moving along an infinite continuum towards a harmonious learning environment (Hsu, 2009).

The concept of organizational learning culture is defined as a set of norms and values about the functioning of an organization. They should support systematic, in-depth approaches aimed at achieving higher-level

organizational learning (Skerlavaj, et al. 2010). But what factors could be facilitated organizational learning culture? Studies show that to create a creative climate within organizations is a good tool to facilitate organizational learning culture. Rickards (1990) suggests that creativity in a changing environment is a corporate necessity, not an add-on luxury.

It is often mentioned among the many streams of research regarding influencing factors on innovation, that having a creative working climate (or environment) within an organization relates to a suitable working culture to facilitate an environment which would enhance the organizational power. This idea had been put forward during the middle 1980's and late 1990's by several scholars including Ekvall, Arvonon and Waldenstrom- Lindblad (1983), Ekvall and Tangeberg-Anderson (1986), Zain Mohamed (1995), Zain Mohamed and Rickards (1996) and Amabile and Conti (1999) who focus on organizational climate factors that can foster creativity and innovation (Ismail, 2006).

Research on innovation has also identified a number of human, social and cultural factors that are crucial to the effective operation of innovation at the organizational level. These factors, according to OECD (1997), were mostly centered on learning (Ismail, 2006). Previous studies have linked organizational learning culture to other positive outcomes within the organization, from both an economic and psychological perspective; but this study try to investigate the main factor to promote organizational learning culture, creative climate.

2. Organizational Learning Culture

The concept of organizational learning has expanded greatly over the last few years, both in the field of research and among practitioners. One of the main reasons for this growth in importance lies in the new characteristics of the business environment.

At the organizational level, organizational learning culture is one of the key contextual components to enhance organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation. By definition, it refers to —an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Joo & Tim, 2008). Antal and Dierkes (2004) defined organizational learning as expansion of behaviors and cognitions through acquiring, sharing, interpreting, using, and storing knowledge to respond the change in better way (Malik,, et al. 2011).

Robey, Boudreau, and Rose (2000) clearly outlined five main characteristics that define organizational learning: (a) organizational learning occurs at the organizational level; (b) organizational learning is a process not a structure; (c) organizational learning is both intentional and unintentional; (d) organizational learning requires organizational memory repositories and mental models; and (e) organizational learning guides organizational action (Hsu, 2009).

According to Watkins and Marsick (1996), there are three levels of organizational learning: individual, team or group, and organization. The individual level is about (1) how an organization creates continuous learning opportunities (i.e., continuous learning center, on-line learning, and global dialogue teams) for its individual employee, and (2) how an organization creates a climate supporting a developmental approach to learning through promoting inquiry and dialogue among individual employees (Watkins and Marsick, 1993, p. 13).

On the other hand, Watkins and Marsick (1993) defined the learning organization as one that captures, shares, and uses knowledge to change the way in which the organization responds to challenges (Pimapunsri, 2008) and Senge (1990) described the learning organization as “one that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future”.

The more employees perceive that an organization provides continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, established system, empowerment, system connection, and strategic leadership, the higher they are psychologically attached to their organization. Moreover, when employees perceive that an organization provides better organizational learning culture, they are more likely to realize job complexity, which, in turn, affects organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation. An increasingly uncertain environment requires an organizational learning culture and knowledge workers prefer complex jobs to simple and routine work (Parker et al., 2001).

The seven items represent each sub-construct of organizational learning culture, such as continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, empowerment, embedded system, system connection, and strategic leadership (Joo & Tim, 2008). In a recent study, Hermine et al. (2010) confirmed that learning was fully implanted as an accepted part of a necessary function of the organization but learning and the identity of being a learner were sometimes resisted in the everyday culture of work. They further suggested when it is acceptable to articulate learning as part of work and be identified as a learner at work (Malik, et al. 2011).

The results of a study indicated that R&D professionals' perceptions of a high level of organizational learning culture has a positive effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and job satisfaction has a negative effect on turnover intention and a positive effect on organizational commitment. However, the results showed no significant relationship between organizational learning culture and turnover intention, or between organizational commitment and turnover intention (Hsu, 2009). Zhang et al. (2002) suggested that building learning practices within an organization is vital in order for the organization to achieve a competitive position in the market. However, organizational learning is still a very new topic for leaders of both private and public organizations.

To become an organizational learning is to accept a set of attitudes, values and practices that support the process of continuous learning within the organization. A true learning culture continuously challenges its own methods and ways of doing things. This ensures continuous improvement and the capacity to change.

3. Creative Climate

Creative climate has extensively been studied just in the last ten or fifteen years (Bavec, 2009). Bruce and Bessant (2002) define innovation as the successful application of new ideas in practice in the form of new or improved products, services or processes.

In an overview of creativity and what it entailed, Rhodes (1961) described four overlapping themes:

- Characteristics for personal creativity (e.g. curiosity, openness),
- Creative process (e.g., properly defining problem or opportunity),
- Outcomes or products (e.g., focus on clients', donors', ultimate users' needs),
- Context or climate (e.g., workplace that encourages individual, group, and organizational creativity) (Barrett, et al. 2005).

The definition of organizational climate for creativity, takes the definition by Ekvall (1996) and Ekvall *et al.* (1983) who regard climate as an attribute of the organizations, a conglomerate of attitudes, feelings, and behavior which characterizes life in organizations, and exists independently of the perceptions and understandings of the members of the organization; it is conceived as an organizational reality in an 'objectivistic' sense and therefore is not identical to organizational culture (Ismail, et al. 2003).

Ekvall (1996) appoints 10 dimensions of climate which are characteristics of climate in a way they reflect the possibility for certain, creative behavior that enables change/innovation:

1. Challenge (How emotionally involved, and committed are employees to the work).
2. Freedom (How free employees are to decide how to do their job).
3. Idea time (The amount of time employees have to elaborate ideas).

4. Trust and openness (Do employees feel safe speaking their minds and offering different points of view).
5. Dynamism (The eventfulness of life in the organization).
6. Playfulness (How relaxed is the workplace).
7. Debates (To what degree do people engage in lively debates about the issues)
8. Conflicts (To what degree do people engage in interpersonal conflicts).
9. Risk-taking (The promptness of response to emerging opportunities and fear of failure).
10. Idea support (Are there resources to give new ideas a try) (Bavec, 2009).

The creative climate encourages people to generate new ideas and helps the organization to grow and increase its efficiency and at the same time it enables members to generate and implement creative ideas more effectively (Ekvall et al., 1983).

4. Organizational Learning Culture via Creative Climate

Mc-Cloy and Wise (2002) clearly stated that motivation to progress work through learning is an important factor for organizations interested in individual performance improvement (Malik et al., 2011). To create a learning culture involves building a culture where employees are encouraged to exercise their initiatives and to whom organization and responsibility are delegated and where individuals take a personal ownership in their personal learning and development, at all levels within the Organization.

The organizational climate is influenced by many factors within organization and as a result affects organizational and psychological processes. Organizational processes include group problem solving, decision-making, communication and coordination. Meanwhile, psychological processes include learning in the organization, individual problem solving, creating, motivating and committing (Ekvall and Britz, 2001). Maria (2003) argued that learning culture can be seen as a precondition for successful organizational change and novelty. The emerging literature on learning organization assumes that learning will improve organizational performance (Malik, et al. 2011).

Organizational learning culture is a type of organizational culture that integrates with organizational learning. According to Bate and Khasawneh (2005), organizational learning culture is organizational phenomena that support the acquisition of information, the distribution and sharing of learning, and that reinforce and support continuous learning and its application to organizational improvement (Hsu, 2009). Creative climate is one of the important elements that play a vital role in learning organization. The creative climate is the organization characteristics as perceived by its members. These characteristics include learning climate or culture that encourages creativity and innovativeness (Samad, 2003).

Bates and Khasawneh (2005) collected a sample of 450 employees from 28 organizations in Jordan and examined the relationship between organizational learning culture, learning transfer climate, and organizational innovation. They also used the learning transfer climate as a mediator between organizational learning culture and organizational innovation. They concluded that all three relationships were positive (Hsu, 2009).

The creative climate encourages people to generate new ideas and helps the organization to grow and increase its efficiency and at the same time it enables members to generate and implement creative ideas more effectively (Ekvall et al., 1983). Park (2001) stated that business organizations are paying increasing attention to increase organizational positive attitudes, having good organizational climate and creating learning organization (Samad, 2003).

Therefore, creative climate have more effect on organization learning culture. In other words, to create a creative climate among employees could be leaded to continue learning, to make dialogue and inquiry, to focus on team learning, to begin empowerment, to bring embedded system, to make system connection, and to emphasize on strategic leadership (figure 1). Findings of this review study were consistent and supported by previous literature and theories discussed earlier.

5. Conclusion

Creative climate is one of the important elements that play a vital role in learning organization (Samad, 2004). A good learning culture will not only help employees to show high level of performance but also keep those good employees in the organization. Organizational learning culture has been proposed as a fundamental strategic process creating sustainable competitive advantage for the future. Learning culture devoted to the development of knowledge gives several key benefits: develops leaders at every level of the organization, attracts and retains the best and brightest, increases productivity, enables succession planning through a leader pipeline.

Organizational learning culture can significantly influence job complexity in many ways. For instance, enriched forms of job design are most appropriate where uncertainty is high and autonomy has been identified to be particularly salient for knowledge workers (Joo & Tim, 2008).

Service and Boockholdt (1998) concluded that organizational climate is related to and has a major impact on psychological processes particularly in learning organization. Consequently, these components exert a direct influence on the performance and outcomes in individuals, working groups and the organization. Study conducted among managers of information technology in Malaysia revealed that creative organizational climate had a positive and significant impact on learning organization (Samad 2004).

Therefore, HR managers should know what factors can affect organizational learning culture and encourage employees to transfer their learning into their real jobs. Thus, it must develop better practices and policies geared toward a greater organizational learning culture. It is suggested that the organization is looking into ways of improving its organizational learning culture by considering challenge, freedom, idea time, trust and openness, dynamism, debates, conflicts, risk-taking, and idea support within organization.

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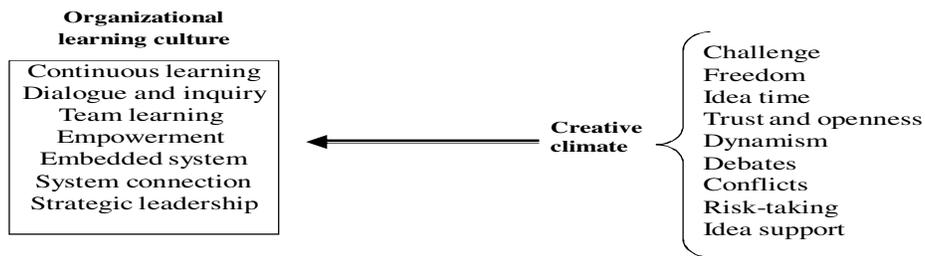


Figure 1. Effect creative climate on organizational learning culture