

Learning as a Motivation Factor in Learning Organizations

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors focus on learning organisations, with special emphasis on learning as a motivational factor within the context of leadership in such organisations. Following a literature review, the paper presents a research study on the topic. A qualitative research design was employed, and data were collected using a questionnaire containing open-ended questions. The research sample included 100 employees from micro, small, medium-sized, and large enterprises located in the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. Recognising the importance of integrating learning into an organisation's philosophy, the authors sought to identify the motivational factors applied by respondents' employers in the workplace, with particular attention to the role of providing learning opportunities for employees. The research findings indicate that employees value the availability of opportunities for personal and professional growth, highlighting the need for further research on this topic.

Keywords: Learning Organisations, Learning, Motivation

1 Introduction

Considering that continuous learning (Doppelt, 2003), improvement, and the development of competencies positively influence the functioning of various types of organisations (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2021), three interrelated phenomena emerge as crucial in the context of

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organisational behaviour: knowledge management, organisational learning, and the transformation process from a traditional organisation to a learning organisation.

Integrating formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities—both on-the-job and off-the-job—into organisational policies can significantly impact other aspects of organisational behaviour in a positive way. For this reason, it is essential to focus on the defining characteristics of learning organisations.

2 Learning Organisations

Although the rapid development of digital technologies and the trend of a broader application of AI can be observed in all spheres of life, these still cannot fully replace the human labour force, and so, knowledge remains the key determinant of organisations' sustainable success. Therefore, it is necessary to realise the significance of investments in human capital (Matúšová, 2015) and subsequently employ measures to fulfil the concept of a learning organisation, which is a challenge for leaders.

The notions of 'knowledge management' and 'learning organisation' are interconnected as each organisation should promote their employees' personal and professional growth and thus, learning should become an integral part of their philosophy. Jamali (2006) points out that organisations should have learning characteristics, such as learning culture, team building, and shared purpose. It is evident that from the aspect of cost minimisation and profit generation maximisation, alongside increasing the quality of the provided services, satisfying their customers' needs, or quick handling of customer requests, it is important to distribute the profit to meet the needs, requirements, and expectations of all parties, including the employees. This requires changing organisations' approach and investing in employees' systematic on-the-job and off-the-job training (Barna, 2018). As Krásna (2016) claims, available research results show that opportunities for personal and professional growth, including learning opportunities, significantly contribute to employees' job satisfaction.

Learning organisations can be characterised as those that promote innovations and experimenting, are ready to learn from the past and, thanks to constant learning and development, are able to adapt to changing circumstances without delay (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Following the above, an organisation can be considered a learning ones if it is aware that knowledge forms the basis for an increasing number of fields of human functioning and realises that if it wants to make progress, it needs to introduce changes and innovations, which is impossible without systematic education and training (Barnová & Barna, 2019). Undoubtedly, promoting learning in organisations contributes to increasing performance (Ju et al., 2021), as well as to other parties' satisfaction, including customers, citizens, suppliers, owners, the environment, etc. Leaders have a crucial role in the transformation process of organisations on their pathway towards becoming learning organisations (Hargitai & Bencsik, 2023).

Although leaders do not have full responsibility for the organisation's culture, they have the power to shape it and introduce measures to incorporate learning into their organisation's philosophy.

There are several key features of learning organisations:

1. Clear vision – goals and their understandable wording on the organisational level, as well as the level of individuals.
2. Concept based on the quality of the human capital – creating favourable work conditions, opportunities for learning, and high-quality HR management.
3. Promoting a positive approach to changes, accommodating way of thinking, promoting changes in the employees' mindsets.
4. Promoting teamwork and open communication in the workplace.
5. Strict rules regarding working with data (produced, collected, or used within the organisation).
6. A clear definition of the learning process, the notion of learning, and its forms and principles (Pokorná & Ivanová, 2010).

According to Truneček (2004), learning organisations can be characterised as follows:

1. A particular climate promoting skill development and increasing productivity is typical for them.
2. By their culture, they try to influence their suppliers, customers, and other partners.
3. They have a specific strategy for HR development – the individuals' and the organization's learning are a priority.
4. They change under the influence of the results of individuals' and the organization's learning.

Pokorná and Ivanová (2010) identified five fields that need to be developed in the process of transforming traditional organisations into learning ones with the aim to achieve changes in individual's approach to work and their mindsets.

1. Promoting system thinking – the ability to see the associations between individual tasks and events, search causes rather than focusing on consequences, and predict.
2. Promoting the development of personal mastery – developing specific skills and characteristics in individuals, especially in the context of lifelong learning, which contribute to proactivity, systematicity, and the application of an innovative, non-traditional approach in a variety of situations.
3. Changing mental models – eliminating deeply rooted ideas and prejudices, and developing positive attitudes (towards the employer, the job, customers, products, etc.) and desired mental models.
4. Creating a shared vision – a shared (organisational) vision should be superior to those of individuals. It sets the direction of the organisation, as well as groups and individuals within it. It gives a sense to individual steps and procedures, provides a picture of the

future, and allows evaluation of the organisation's current situation. As pointed out by Choi (2007), employees' participation in decision-making and creating the organization's vision contributes to their feeling of empowerment and subsequently increases their job satisfaction.

5. Promoting team learning – creating teams, departments, sections, divisions, etc., that should learn together and contribute to meeting the organisation's goals and vision. Employees can achieve better learning results when confronted with different modes of thinking and the ideas of others (Osagie et al., 2020).

All the five fields identified by Pokorná and Ivanová (2010) should be developed simultaneously as a whole since they build on each other and condition each other.

In learning organisations, mentoring as a form of workplace learning has an important role to play. A mentor is an experienced colleague trusted by the employer and the mentee, who takes over the role of a counsellor, consultant, and guide. A mentor can be helpful in a broad range of fields:

1. Identifies the mentee's skills, interests, and aspirations.
2. Guides the mentee in identifying key knowledge and skills from the aspect of performing a particular job.
3. Helps understand the unwritten rules and explains what should not be said or done in the organisation.
4. Helps to find answers to questions and shares insights.
5. Provides emotional support.
6. Serves as a role model.

This helps create a positive environment in which the mentee is not afraid to make mistakes and maintains self-confidence (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2021).

3 Methods

The main objective of a research project under realisation is to find out about organisational behaviour as perceived by employees and to analyse the obtained results according to the variables of the size of the organisation, its location, the respondents' gender and years of experience. In the present part of the research study, we attempted to answer the research question of whether the organisations, the employees of which participated in the study, can be considered learning organisations, and the extent to which they use learning opportunities as a motivational factor was examined.

For the research study, a qualitative research design was employed. While acknowledging the limitations of the chosen method, a questionnaire was used as the research instrument, as it is less time-consuming and more convenient compared to conducting interviews. Questionnaire surveys allow for faster data collection, and, due to the anonymity of respondents, they are likely to yield more honest responses.

3.1 Research Instrument

In the study, a self-constructed questionnaire containing four open-ended questions was administered online, allowing us to collect qualitative data.

1. What do you consider the specific features of your organisation's culture?
2. What forms of motivation are applied inside your organisation?
3. What are the strengths of your organisation?
4. What are the weaknesses of your organisation?

The questionnaire was administered online because, compared with traditional methods, it has several advantages: 1. it is a faster way of collecting data; 2. the potential respondents are more likely to take part in a research study if they can fill in a questionnaire when it is convenient to them, and 3. the processes of sorting, processing, and storing data are less demanding. One part of the collected qualitative data was quantified to get a more detailed picture of the situation in organisations. The gathered data were processed by using the statistical software ATLAS.ti 23.

3.2 Research Sample

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Size of Enterprises</i>		
Micro Enterprises	10	12.50
Small Enterprises	12	15.00
Medium-Sized Enter.	37	46.25
Large Enterprises	21	26.25
<i>Location of the Organization</i>		
Slovakia	74	92.50
Czechia	6	7.50
<i>Years of Experience</i>		
0-1	9	11.25
2-10	43	53.75
11-20	24	30.00
21 or more	4	5.00
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	38	47.50
Female	42	52.50
Total	80	100

Table 1: Composition of the research sample according to variables

3.3 Research Procedures

Following on from the theoretical part of the study, where special attention was paid to the characteristics of learning organisations and the importance of learning in the context of achieving success, in the empirical part of the study, the focus was on finding the answer to the question whether the respondents spontaneously, i.e. without being asked, reported promoting education being a part of the philosophy of their organisation and if they perceive it as a specific feature of their organisation's culture and identify. Another observed phenomenon was learning as a motivation factor and whether organisations use it with their employees.

Although aware that it does not allow for creating a holistic picture of the emphasis placed on on-the-job and off-the-job learning opportunities in organisations, the collected data were categorised and quantified in the first phase of data analysis. The ratio behind doing so is that we wanted to know what share of respondents mentioned education without being particularly asked about. On the other hand, it is possible that some respondents did not mention education since they consider it a natural part of their organisation's functioning; they do not assign it such importance or simply forgot to mention it. In the following phase of the research, a thorough data analysis of data divided in categories was carried out.

4 Results

4.1 Education as a Component of the Organisational Culture

Education as a specific feature of an organisation's culture was reported by 26 participants (32.5 %). The collected data indicate that organisations focus on a variety of areas of education following their peculiarities and needs. Some participants responded only in phrases but did not specify the educational activities within the organisation. Their answers were as follows: „... continuous education and training, the training programmes are often updated, and new ones are introduced because there is always something new to learn ... “; “education”; “educational opportunities”; “professional training”; “regular education and training activities based on the organisation's needs”; “regular employee training”; “permanent learning and improvement”; and “training”.

Other participants provided a more detailed picture: “... excellent adaptation programmes and training as a part of professional growth and in the case of advancement ...”; “... organising health days and seminars on prevention and employees' health protection”; “self-education”; “occupational health and safety training”; “credit system of education”; “education or training for every field of expertise”.

4.2 Learning as a Motivation Factor in Organisations

Learning and training opportunities provided by the organisation (on-the-job training) or allowing participation in such activities outside the organisation (off-the-job training) are considered a motivation factor by 35 among the 80 participants (43.75 %), including 19 (54.29 %) females and 16 (45.71 %) males. This is a surprisingly high share of employees and a very good signal from the perspective of organisations' work since it indicates that at least these employees are interested in educational activities and developing and improving their competencies necessary for performing a particular job. In the most interesting responses, the participants specified, which learning or training opportunities are attractive for them: "For me personally, participation in various workshops where I had an opportunity to see how art supplies can be used in practice, or opportunities to attend public events organised by "Kultúra Snina" were motivating."; "... Constant provision of training opportunities either within their area of expertise or languages."; "We subsidise our employees' and directors' learning activities, including online courses and webinars."; „The organisation offers its employees a variety of courses and training opportunities for gaining qualifications and acquiring new information for performing their jobs."; "Employee development is supported by employee training focused on updating knowledge in the form of supervision, individual learning opportunities, and practical training."; "The organisation promotes lifelong learning in the form of training opportunities and courses."; "... providing systematic lifelong learning opportunities for all employees." Other participants provided shorter responses, for example: "accessible learning opportunities"; "promoting development"; "promoting learning"; "employee training"; "professional and non-professional training"; "professional lifelong learning and development"; "courses"; "foreign language courses for employees"; "courses focused on professional and personal skill development"; "professional training"; "requalification"; "training based on the employer's needs"; "training new employees by experienced and well-trained colleagues"; "a possibility to earn a bachelor's or master's degree alongside employment"; "own system of education and training".

The findings revealed the existence of a positive trend in organisations and their willingness to invest in their employees' training. Many organisations also support learning activities that are not directly connected with improving skills or knowledge related to performing a particular job, which could suggest, that leaders recognise the importance of their employees' job satisfaction, but also their life satisfaction which can be positively influenced by opportunities for their personal growth.

5 Conclusions

Learning is the fundamental prerequisite for an organisation's successful functioning. It is important to recognize that only knowledge, combined with human effort and performance,

can drive progress in achieving the organisation's goals, mission, and strategies. While this is indisputable, it is also clear that in the digital era, material resources—such as digital technologies, financial resources, raw materials, and access to information — are key determinants of success.

In the present qualitative study focused on organisational behaviour as perceived by the employees of micro, small, medium-sized, and large enterprises in the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, we aimed to determine whether the organisations where our respondents were employed at the time of the study meet the standards of learning organisations. Although being aware of the limits of the research study given by the composition and size of the research sample, based on the obtained results, it can be assumed that a surprisingly high share of organisations promotes their employees' learning activities and as subjectively evaluated by the participants, recognize the importance of education and training from the aspect of their organisation's success. Such positive results were not expected since the respondents were not directly asked about the role of learning in their organisation. On the other hand, there is a high probability that in the case of asking them questions targeted on the accessibility of on-the-job or off-the-job learning activities, the number of respondents mentioning education as a part of organisational culture would be even higher.

Although the obtained results could suggest that the transformation process of traditional organisations to learning ones is among the priorities of all types of organisations, these findings cannot be generalised, and a high degree of cautiousness is needed in interpreting the obtained data. Therefore, it is important to conduct extensive research studies in the field.

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