

Cultural Learning Organizations: A Model

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III. 3 The 'learning organization' infrastructure

III. 3. 2 Individual learning and development

The key of a LO is its people, its members. Organizational learning can only happen in organizations if individuals learn although individual learning does not ensure that the organization is learning (Senge, 1990).

There have been two main approaches in LO literature to individual learning and development. The first one was initiated by Senge who focused on the fact that individuals should be continuously learning how to make their personal visions reality, in an unceasing process of personal growth through inquiry and reflection (1990).¹ This way of being is not about training or developing competence and skills, but about trying to be reflective and proactive in life to pursue and reach personal vision (Barker et al., 1998).² In this same direction Stephen Covey has in recent years become the big guru about individual growth as the key for efficiency and effectiveness in companies (Covey, 1997)

However, Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell interpreted these terms from a different point of view. They introduced the idea of 'self-development opportunities for all' concentrated on the idea of training and 'open access' learning promoted by the company (Pedler et al., 1989). According to these authors, organization members should be responsible for their own learning

¹ This is what he called 'personal mastery' discipline.

² This trend has been mainly followed by consultants that try to implement Senge's discipline of 'personal mastery' through exercises to encourage motivation and discover vision and personal values (Senge et al., 1994, for example).

and development but learning organizations should provide materials, resources and opportunities to allow them to decide how to develop their professional career. In this case learning and development are understood in the sense of training in order to expand capabilities, aptitudes and skills that can be useful for individual professional progress and for the organization (Kelleher, 2004; Van Wert, 2004).

Senge's approach implies that organizations convince their members to adopt a different way of dealing with their lives and personal careers. As this can be judged as interfering and intrusive by organization members and has been highly criticized by its normalizing character³ (Symon, 2002; Newfield & Rayner, 2005), Pedler's approach has been much more successful because it is easy for organizations to make courses and seminars available to employees and to place self-development responsibility upon workers.⁴ However, formal training opportunities in organizations are just a small component in personal development. Organizations that only focus on providing some courses to employees or that put complete self-improvement responsibility on their members will fail to become LO. LO concept is not about formal knowledge and skills (although they are important) but about work-based knowledge, self-reflection and reflection on the organization. This is only possible, then, integrating both LO trends about individual development, encouraging people to reflect on their work and their organization, to learn through their successes and failures and to complete their knowledge with formal instruction when necessary. A personalized professional and organizational career plan for every employee would be, in my opinion, a plausible way of integrating both paths.

³ LO personal development has been viewed by some authors as "less about being highly skilled and more about being highly moulded into what the employer wants the employee to be" (Symon (2002:166) after Du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London, Sage).

⁴ This connects with 'human capital' theory that has informed UNESCO concept of 'life long learning' as a workplace- or work-based learning grounded on the idea that "in contexts of rapid change, it is primarily workers who have to lift their 'own' productivity by becoming more skilled and flexible" and "individuals are essentially responsible for their own learning" (Garrick & Clegg, 2001). 'Human capital' is understood as "the productive capabilities of human beings that are acquired at some cost and that command a price in the labour market because they are useful in producing goods and services. Thinking in terms of value as a return on investment in a cost-to-benefit ratio, education is seen as a major means for organizations and individuals to increase the net worth of the worker's skills and abilities." (Marsick, V.J. and Watkins, K.E. (1990) *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*. London, Routledge. Quoted in Garrick & Clegg (2001:121)).

In addition a reward and incentive system should be well designed to award individual's learning and development effort (Bennett and O'Brien, 1994; Pedler, 2006) and knowledge sharing (Hansen et al., 1999). Monetary rewards have to be complemented with non-monetary ones. Both of them are important to incentive organization members and to communicate how important LO concept is for the organization. Reward systems should be discussed individually and collectively inside the organization, allowing people to be involved in deciding their character (Pedler, 2006). These systems also have to be flexible and adaptable to different kind of workers' contributions.

Thus, individual development in the model I am proposing includes a process of progressive individual integration in the 'ethics of the LO' combined with a career development plan elaborated by the individual in collaboration with the organization in order to foster one's own personal growth and organization improvement through reflection, action and experimentation. Likewise, individual effort has to be recompensed through a reward system, elaborated individually and collectively in the organization.