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Learning Organization

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ABSTRACT

The Learning Organization has recently developed a groundswell of interest from managers and organization theorists looking for new ways to successfully respond to a world of interdependence and change. Many consultants and organizations have recognized the commercial significance of organizational learning. The Learning Company is a vision of what might be possible. It is not brought about simply by training individuals, it can only happen as a result of learning at the whole organization level. A Learning Company is an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself to adapt change, innovation and complexities of modern economic environment and successfully resists the uncertainties of implementation of planned change programme and efforts of organization to achieve competitive advantage in a growing market over its industry rivals.

Keywords : Single-loop learning, Double loop learning, Team Learning, Systems thinking

"The political problem of mankind is to combine three things: Economic Efficiency, Social Justice and Individual Liberty."

- John Maynard Keynes

Introduction

Indian Economy of today has emerged as knowledge economy with increasing number of companies establishing new business models and the economic environment being healthy as ever witnessed the organizational development today has to face two most extreme challenges such as 1. Organizational Change and 2. Stress Management. The implementation of planned change programme in an organization needs continuous learning therefore the "Learning Organization" has recently developed with strong interest from managers and employees looking for new ways to successfully respond to a world of interdependence and change.

Definition

Learning organizations are characterized by total employee involvement in a process of collaboratively conducted, collectively accountable change directed towards shared values or principles. (Watkins and Marsick 1992)

Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. (Peter Senge 1990)

Meaning

A Learning Organization is the term given to a company that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself. It is an organization that has developed the

continuous capacity to adapt and change. Like every individuals learn, organizations also learn things to adapt and change.

Learning Organization Concept

Organizations develop learning capabilities when there is change in the business models and the competition in Industry or Markets demand high qualified managerial skills and talents .As organizations grow and beyond a time period they lose their capacity to learn as company structures and individual thinking becomes rigid hence when the organization faces problems the proposed solutions fails to provide desired results this is more often reality is small and medium size enterprises .In today's dynamic world to create a competitive advantage in an economic environment companies need to learn faster and manage learning compares to their competitors and develop a customer responsive culture.

A basic question of organizational learning is - what to learn?

"Chris Argyris" has identified that organizations need to maintain knowledge about new products and processes understand what is happening in the outside environment and produce creative solutions using the knowledge and skills of all within the organization this requires co-operation between individuals and groups free and reliable communication and a culture of trust.

Classification of Learning Organization

1. Single-loop learning: when errors are detected, the correction process relies on past routines and present policies this type of learning is called "Single-loop learning".
2. Double-loop learning: when errors is detected, it is corrected in ways that involve the modification of organization's objectives, policies, and standard routines this type of learning is called "Double loop learning".

Characteristics of Learning Organization



1. Shared Vision: There is existence of shared vision which everyone agrees on which the staff is motivated to learn, as it creates a common identity that provides focus and energy for Learning.
2. Team Learning: The organizations staff grows quickly through team or shared learning which helps them to build the knowledge and expertise of the staff and increases their capacity to solve problems in key areas. Therefore team members must develop open communication, shared meaning, and shared understanding.
3. Mental Models: Individuals and organizations have certain assumptions which are called "Mental Models" these models should be challenged has individuals tend to espouse theories, which are what they intend to follow, and theories in use, which are what they actually do. Similarly organizations tend to have "Memories" which preserve certain behaviours, norms and values, for creating a learning environment it is important to replace confrontational attitudes with open culture that promotes inquiry and trust.
4. Personal Mastery: The commitment by an individual to the process of learning is known as personal mastery. Individual learning through staff training and development helps organizations to develop their workforce therefore organizational learning is nothing but a sum of individual learning.
5. Systems thinking: Staff members think of all organizational processes, activities, functions, and interactions with environment as part of a system of interrelationship. Learning organizations use this method of Systems thinking when assessing their



company and have information systems that measure the performance of the organization as a whole and of its various components. Managing Learning

Creating a learning organization involves continuous learning. Managers can take a number of conscious efforts to create learning organization such as:

1. Establishing suitable strategy: Management needs to formulate suitable strategy to adapt change, innovation, and continuous improvement process.
2. Redesigning the organization structure: Learning organizations tend to have flat, decentralized organizational structures increasing the use of cross-functional teams, inter-dependence is reinforced and boundaries between people are reduced.
3. Reshaping the organizational cultures: Learning organizations are usually risk taking and growth oriented organizations having openness to communication. Managers should set tone for the organizational culture both by what it says about strategy and what it does about behavior. Managers need to demonstrate by their actions that taking risks and admitting failures are a desirable trait that means rewarding people who take chances and make mistakes. Management needs to encourage functional conflicts which later contributes to effective learning in the organization.

Benefits of Learning Organization

The key benefits are:

1. Maintaining levels of innovation and remaining competitive
2. Being better placed to respond to external pressures
3. Improving quality of outputs at all levels
4. Improving corporate image by becoming more people oriented
5. Increasing the pace of change within the organization

Limitations of Learning Organization

1. Learning organization process is intangible hence its benefits cannot be easily measurable in quantitative terms.
2. Resistance to learning can occur at the individual level.
3. In some organizations where training and development is compulsory it is a form of control and it lacks personal development.
4. Size of the organization can be a disadvantage towards internal knowledge sharing process where number of employees are more in the organization the volume of knowledge sharing decreases.
5. In an learning organization where there is lack of team learning it can lead to individual learning and personal mastery hence conflicts in performance appraisal.
6. Lack of continuous learning opportunities after a specific period of time, say after growth of Company .etc

Conclusion

Learning Organization provides opportunity for managers and staff members for self development and development of whole organization. As enterprise is deeply rooted with economy, increasing effectiveness learning organization promotes the growth of the "Knowledge Economy". Therefore to summarize briefly learning organization is a remedy for 3 basic fundamental problems of an traditional organization such as fragmentation, Competition and reactivity which is a hurdle to every organization in implementing a Change and have smooth functioning of its business.

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