

Organizational learning in Asia – issues and challenges

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Why is organizational learning in an Asian context so relevant to scholars and practitioners?

Organizational learning (OL) is a complex phenomenon influenced by cultural context, and it impacts directly on human capital, performance and competitiveness. In fact, OL has differences of behavioral patterns influenced by national cultures (Patel, 2017; Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2011).

OL had a huge development as emerging academic field since the seminal work of Cyert and March (1963) and the special issue of Organizational Science (1991), which influences management science, human resources development, operation management and business administration (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2011). OL remains a relevant emerging research field.

OL is relevant in contributing to firm productivity, innovation, new product development, and human resources development. OL supports knowledge sharing from employees to their organization and from its tacit to its explicit forms. It is also stimulates cooperation and teamwork based on interactive work on problems (trial and error) as a learning process.

At the same time, emerging countries as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) increased their influence in the global economy, and Asia has been leading this process. *Asian Multinational Corporations (MNC's)* such as Toyota (Japan), Tata (India), Lenovo (China), Samsung and Hyundai (South Korea) are benchmarks for many world-class companies.

In this context, Hong, Snell and Rowley and their contributors' team[1] combine academic and practical experience within their book *Organizational Learning in Asia: Issues and Challenges*, hence providing relevant assistance to OL and knowledge management communities, with an accessible and rigorous approach.

The four-part book structure aims to support key insights and contributions based on OL approaches focusing on different levels of analysis (Firms, Alliances, Teams) and covering different countries (China, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam).



Hong, Snell and Rowley introduce the debate OL based on Asia context and present an overview of the contributions to the book (Chapter I). The contributors' chapters are summarized in [Table I](#).

Part I discusses Asia as a research context and presents an overview of the chapters contributions (Hong, Snell and Rowley). Zhao discusses OL in institutional voids, government intervention and business networks.

Part II discusses unlearning by individuals and relearning as a team based on knowledge sharing (Yeo and Dopson), experimentation, wicked problems and also links KM strategies, imitation and innovation (Nguyen and Pham).

Part III analyses the entrepreneurial perspective on developed economy firm's potential lessons learnt from Asia (Cuervo), learning capability acquisition in Chinese exporters (Mac and Evangelista), knowledge transfer in public-private partnership in Chinese hospitals (Antonio and Feng). Finally, the book concludes with a contextual perspective on OL (Örtenblad), with challenges and directions for future research about OL in the Asian context (Hong, Snell and Rowley).

The book consolidates substantive findings and conclusions, comparing empirical outcomes from China, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam. Differences in contexts may result in different opportunities and also barriers to effective learning and knowledge sharing among stakeholders. This well-grounded discussion evidences key insights and contributions related to the following:

- OL-based occurrences on formation of distinctive business networks from firms to face Asian market economies, institutional voids and subsequent government intervention (Zhao);
- the role of knowledge sharing to promote meaningful dialogue, as well as constructive and reflective inquiry into complex work challenges (Yeo and Dopson);
- role of Imitation in early stages of development and use of codification and personalization strategies to innovation (Nguyen and Pham);
- systematic learning routines with the aim to acquire and retain market knowledge to guide product adaptation and positioning decisions for particular export markets (Mac and Evangelista);
- cooperative learning dependence of the knowledge transfer and legal system (Antonio and Feng); and
- guidelines to conduct an applicability examination of particular models of OL (Örtenblad).

Therefore, the book provides a comprehensive overview of OL across Asian countries with relevant research approaches, methods, and findings to support further research projects, i.e. replication studies to other BRICS countries; and analyses based on chapters' propositions and frameworks.

Managerial actions and human resources are relevant ingredients to development of engaging learning context. The book is useful for those whose responsibilities lie in the scope of planning, implementation and evaluation of firms-related learning or, and specially, for those responsible for managing complexity and diversity in strategic and operational learning activities. These professionals include scholars, lecturers, instructors, trainers, learning and development advisers, HR managers, training managers and managers in general, and also consultants who provide learning-related services. They are often confronted with a complex set of contingencies that require them to embrace ambiguities associated with learning and its context and

Author (*) (Part, Chapter)	Methodology	Level of analysis	Country coverage	Organization learning analyzed	Key insights and contributions
Hong, Snell and Rowley (II.1)	Descriptive	Multi-level	N/A	Summary	Debate on Organizational Learning based on context-free or context-specific Discussion about Asia as a Research context Summary of contributions to the chapters
Zhao (II.2)	Conceptual	Countries	China, Japan and India	Cultural and institutional context Adaptation Learning in networks	Institutional voids and subsequent government intervention are key features of Asian market economies OL occurs when foreign and local firms find substitutes for such institutional voids through formation of distinctive business networks
Yeo and Dopson (II.3)	Case Study	Teams	Saudi Arabia	Knowledge sharing Unlearning Experimentation Boundary objects	Knowledge-sharing encourages individuals to engage in meaningful dialog and constructive and reflective inquiry into complex works challenges "Wicked" problems serve as boundary objects for facilitation of deeper inquiry into contexts and paradigms, promoting self-transcendence Negative and positive feedback trigger unlearning in different ways
Nguyen and Pham (II.4)	Survey	Firms	Vietnam	Personalization, codification, imitation, innovation and knowledge management	Role of imitation in early stages of development and use of codification and personalization strategies in pursuing innovation Implication for how firms engage in innovation in the absence of institutional support and with sparse resources
Cuervo (III.5)	Conceptual	Firms	China and India	Entrepreneurial Learning by experience Reverse knowledge transfer	Draw on the Ownership, Location and Internalization paradigm and a dynamic model of effectuation to develop two parallel levels of entrepreneurial learning Enabling mechanisms proposed for reverse-transferring learning from foreign affiliates in developing markets in Asia to the firms' respective headquarters in developed economies
Mac and Evangelista (III.6)	Survey	Firms	China	Learning capability Learning orientation Learning mechanisms	Internalization induces enhancement of export performance through cultivation of market learning capability Systematic learning routines can help acquire and retain market knowledge to guide product adaptation and positioning decisions for particular export markets, thereby constituting an enduring competence
Antonio and Feng (III.7)	Case Study	Alliances	China	Knowledge transfer Tact knowledge Cooperative learning	Success of cooperative learning depends on process of knowledge transfer, governed and monitors by legal system Individual initiative should be fully mobilized to facilitate flow of knowledge and enhance inter-organizational knowledge transfer

(continued)

Table I.
Summary of chapter and their contributions

Table I.

Author (*) (Part. Chapter)	Methodology	Level of analysis	Country coverage	Organization learning analyzed	Key insights and contributions
Orthenblad (IV.8)	Conceptual	Multi-level	N/A	Context Universalism Practical theory	Develops guidelines for how to conduct critical an applicability examination of particular models of OL Argues that different models of OL, relevant for different industry, cultural and institutional contexts, needs to be sculpted
Hong, Snell and Rowley (IV.9)	Conceptual	Multi-level	N/A	Institutional context Cross-border knowledge and Context	Challenges for OL related to a variety of perspectives and foci based on the chapters Directions for future research, such as: Role of institutional voids and of resource deficiencies in shaping and inspiring unique and effective models OL Recognition of the importance of local knowledge in contributing to OL in MNC's OL in Asia requires understanding at multiple levels of analysis

Sources: Adapted from Hong, Snell and Rowley

take responsibility for creating a favorable context to learning and knowledge sharing.

Practitioners, academics and graduate students could benefit from reading this book. The book may be used as a key resource for graduate courses in operations management, business, management, strategy or related disciplines. The book provides a good introduction to students, challenging them to understand the relevance of OL and international issues.

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Note

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