IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

How can learning organizations support sustainability goals?

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Introduction

When discussing learning organizations (LOs), scholars and practitioners often focus on the LO system or, in other words, its internal operations, which has recently been criticized as limited (Becker, 2018). Although the LO philosophy is based on systems thinking (among other LO disciplines) and, therefore, seeks to establish harmonious and cooperative relationships with its environment, many practitioners (and scholars) see it as another tool to improve performance. For profit organizations, this means improving productivity and profitability, regardless of the interests of external stakeholders, especially society and its sustainability goals. Knowledge and learning, especially organizational learning, have therefore been studied for their contribution to financial performance. For example, Kim, Watkins, & Lu (2017) found that an organization that develops as a LO positively influences its knowledge performance, which in turn positively affects financial performance. Pérez López, Manuel Montes Peón, & José Vazquez Ordás (2005) supported the idea that organizational learning positively affects innovation and competitiveness, which is reflected in financial performance. However, when considering the goal of sustainability, we should take a two-sided perspective and focus not only on organizational viability and sustainability but also on the sustainability of the environment in which organizations (and companies) are embedded. Here, collaboration is key to identifying mutual positions and interests and finding ways to balance them by developing inclusive solutions.

In Volume 29, issue 5 guest edited by Jacky Hong Carla Curado and Paulo Lopes Henriques and titled *Learning Organization, Human Resource Management and Sustainability: Leading the future of organizations*, the focus was on developing sustainable human resource management (HRM) and workforce within sustainable LOs. In this regard, Subramanian & Suresh (2022) suggested a model of green human resource management. Goi, Hakeem, & Law (2022) showed how LOs could be transformed into LO 2.0 by implementing the multi-stakeholder perspective to improve their social responsibility and sustainability. Sun & Hong (2022) provide even more insight into the development of a sustainability-focused LO through the knowledge transfer of expatriates. Chan, Chan, & Chan (2022) discuss how LOs can become sustainable for their employees by developing a sustainable workplace that prevents burnout and improves job satisfaction. The paper by Mosquera, Soares, & Alvadia (2022) offers a perspective on developing a sustainable

workforce in a LO under conditions of telework dominance. Kuok, Chan, Kou, Kong, & Mac (2022) examined the effects of customer inclivity and surface acting on mental health in terms of emotional exhaustion and other outcomes. Finally, Chen & Cuervo (2022) examined how transformational leadership triggers employee self-motivation, and further stimulates their work engagement.

Green human resource management for greener and sustainable organizations

When organizations adopt greener HRM, they can influence mental models of their employees and develop their sustainability-related behaviours, knowledge and attitudes (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). Green HRM should be reflected in activities such as recruitment, selection, training, performance, compensation management and health and safety management. In this way, a company will attract employees who already have some green experience, background, skills and knowledge, but new opportunities will encourage them to stay green. In this way, the company can also increase its environmental sustainability.

Subramanian & Suresh (2022) proposed a green human resource management model that describes green job analysis and design, green recruitment, green selection, green induction, green training and development, green performance management, green reward and compensation, green employee empowerment and engagement, green disciplinary management, green health and safety management and green separation. Green job analysis and design identifies all duties and responsibilities of organizational tasks required to create job descriptions and specifications. In addition to regular duties, environmentally related duties and responsibilities are identified so that green employees can be hired. Organizations then hire individuals with environmental experience who later provide appropriate environmental training based on green policies and procedures and familiarize employees with the organization's environmental management system. Only those who demonstrate environmental awareness are then selected and hired. Practitioners, of course, should develop specific interview questions and tests to make the best decision.

Selection and hiring are followed by the orientation process, or onboarding, in which newly hired employees are provided with information about the organization's environmental policies, systems and practices to make them aware of their environmental responsibilities. This is followed by green training and development, where employees acquire additional skills to solve environmental problems. In this context, practitioners should select the most appropriate methods for their needs, such as seminars, workshops, online training and job rotation. Through green performance management, an organization integrates environmental performance standards into its performance management system, usually supported by environmental management information systems and environmental audits, followed by green reward and compensation mechanisms. Reward mechanisms can be monetary instruments such as incentives, bonuses and cash prizes or non-monetary instruments such as awards, prizes, recognition and leave. When employees perform well, they can be empowered and given autonomy and authority to solve environmental problems and create new initiatives and goals.

Learning organizations 2.0 – sustainability-focused learning organizations

To become more socially responsible and sustainable, but also to deepen their organizational learning, organizations need to adopt a stakeholder perspective and engage in stakeholder management by collaborating and sharing ideas and knowledge to enhance mutual learning and develop sustainable solutions. In this sense, Mak & Hong (2020) proposed the concept of LO 2.0, which adopts and develops a multi-stakeholder perspective

to balance mutual economic as well as social and cultural interests and transforms a LO into a sustainability-oriented LO.

In this issue, Goi et al. (2022) explore the concept of LO 2.0 through a case study of Ricoh Ena Forest Japan, a Japanese multinational imaging and electronics company. They examined the company's collaboration with its external stakeholders in working on a local forest conservation project. The company and its stakeholders shared their knowledge with their external project partners to form a multi-stakeholder learning team that led the project. This approach helped raise awareness of the company's social context, establish a joint management council and create a shared commitment to achieving project goals. An intensive exchange of ideas and knowledge leads to mutual learning and the reduction of differences, followed by a strengthening of shared commitment to commonly agreed goals. However, it is useful to explore and understand the mechanisms by which organizations can be developed as LOs 2.0 or as LOs characterized by their sustainability goals.

In this context, Goi et al. (2022) have identified how organizations can implement complex sustainability projects by pooling the resources and knowledge of different stakeholders (MacDonald, Clarke, & Huang, 2019). For example, it is useful to establish a learning community that stimulates the exchange of ideas, information and knowledge; facilitates shared sense-making and critical thinking; promotes design thinking; and develops new sustainable thinking models about the environment and the role of all stakeholders in it. These communities should be led by transformational leaders who should focus on strengthening the learning culture that encourages experimentation, shared learning from mistakes, shared reflection and the development of a shared vision and shared mental models. As key internal stakeholders, employees may miss an opportunity or misinterpret information or situations, so help from external stakeholders is valuable not only for greater organizational learning but also for balancing mutual interests and creating a more sustainable shared platform. In practice, a platform should be established, both physical and virtual, to enable meetings, the exchange of ideas and the discussion of disagreements. These platforms could have a wider reach and welcome any external stakeholders or outsiders from the local community who believe they can contribute in some way. All of this helps create a shared sense of commitment that strengthens collective efforts to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals.

Developing a sustainability-driven learning organization

Many multi-national enterprises, once considered exploitative and polluting to their local environments, are trying to improve their reputations by pursuing sustainability goals and participating in humanitarian projects. More recently, many companies are attempting to pursue more sustainable or environmentally friendly production and product design (Christmann, 2004). In these cases, the assistance of expatriates is invaluable and has been specifically addressed by Sun & Hong (2022). Edström & Galbraith (1977) have pointed out the importance of transfer managers in developing a control process based on socialization. During socialization with transfer managers, verbal information networks are established. This is particularly useful in facilitating knowledge transfer to subsidiaries. Sun & Hong (2022) have contributed to shedding more light on this process in the context of achieving sustainability goals and developing a sustainability-focused LO. Although knowledge transfer from expatriates is useful in achieving corporate sustainability goals, it is even more important to help subsidiaries develop sustainable mental models so that they continue to find ways to achieve sustainable goals.

To answer the question of the role of expatriates in sustainability knowledge transfer in subsidiaries, Sun & Hong (2022) conducted a case study on Haier, a Chinese multi-national

company known for its sustainable products and innovations. By disseminating knowledge and reinforcing desired behaviours and actions, expatriate managers enable the development of more sustainable mental models and mindsets through socialization to strengthen the green or sustainable capabilities of their subsidiaries. However, it should be noted that while mental models or cognitive similarities may be shared and similar, they are not always accurate because community members may have a distorted view of reality and ways to solve problems. Therefore, it is important to help subsidiaries develop mental models that encourage critical discourse, dialogue and questioning of established assumptions. In this way, subsidiaries improve their ability to interpret their complex environment and innovate to develop new, sustainable solutions. It is important to note that in the socialization process, subsidiary employees learn vicariously with expatriate managers by observing and imitating their behaviour and actions. The status and power of expatriates increase their credibility in the socialization process, which increases their attractiveness.

Here are some methods and approaches expatriates can use to develop a sustainable mindset in subsidiaries (Table 1).

Sustainable learning organizations with sustainable workforce
According to Senge (1990), LOs 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 (reality) together.

However, it seems that this state of working and being in organizations is not natural and that many workers suffer from overwork, stress and burnout. In a complex and competitive environment, the development of socially responsible human resource management does not seem to be a priority or is very difficult to achieve. However, according to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from UN, Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to "ensure

What	How
Change in goals	Pressure to increase sales revenue and profitability replaced by incentives to consider, include and implement sustainability goals
Promote local sustainability	Start and stimulate sustainable projects by collaborating with local communities
Promote sustainable products and services	Improve technical expertise to support the development of more sustainable value creation
Promote learning about sustainable practices	Organize workshops and platforms to share best practices
Promote individual sustainability performance	Evaluate sustainability-driven outcomes
Provide collaborative learning platforms	Establish a visualized platform that enables employees and local stakeholders, especially customers, to participate in the sustainable value creation process by identifying local needs such as a different design or energy-saving devices
Provide mentor support	Organize on-the-job training, engage consultants, ensure support for unexpected situations
Reinforce sustainable behavior	Offer incentives, such as bonuses for sustainability performance or promotions for developing more sustainable products and services

Table 1.

health and well-being for all." This goal may sound utopian, but LOs are known for promoting the integrity and empowerment of their employees. Their learning culture encourages dialog, shared critical reflection and sense-making and permission to experiment together and learn from mistakes. Employees in the ideal LO feel psychologically safe and respected, while any negative practices, such as unproductive conflict, are resolved constructively by leaders actively asking questions and listening to their employees' problems (Spears, Ellemers, Doosje, & Branscombe, 2006). Overload is avoided through teamwork and team learning, in which employees take on the roles in which they feel most comfortable and can best perform. In organizations that foster the self-esteem of all organizational members and reward their commitment to the shared vision, respect for each individual and his or her needs is paramount.

In their paper, Chan et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of respect in preventing burnout and other negative effects of employee overwork. Respect is not only important from the individual's perspective. It is also important for employees to feel that others are treated with appreciation, dignity and caring (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Job burnout is a result of chronic work-related stress and overwork. Burnout includes three phases: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduction in personal accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). It has been found that in organizations with higher levels of respect for employees, emotional exhaustion is lower (Ramarajan, Barsade, & Burack, 2008). Respect contributes to higher self-esteem, energy, sense of belonging and identification with organizational goals, as well as higher levels of creativity (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015).

Job insecurity as a threat of unemployment (Mohr, 2000) is another well-known stressor. It leads to lower engagement, lower personal performance, emotional exhaustion and higher turnover rates. It should be noted that job security has been shown to be related to the intention to share knowledge (Yang & Xu, 2021) and is, therefore, very important for LOs. Job insecurity under conditions of existing emotional exhaustion could cause employees to depersonalize even more and reduce their commitment to saving their resources for future employment opportunities (Chan et al., 2022). On the other hand, job satisfaction is related to the perceived level of tangible and intangible rewards employees receive and the quality of treatment in terms of respect and fairness (Hirschfeld, 2000; Spector, 1997). In this way, an organizational culture that promotes the value of respect for others contributes significantly to job satisfaction (Burchell & Robin, 2011). Similarly, organizational respect can contribute to lower levels of burnout even when individuals are not fully satisfied with other elements of work (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2011).

Chan et al. (2022) studied burnout and its manifestations in the film post-production industry, which is known for high levels of dynamism, pressure and "blame culture," as well as high employee turnover and availability. In such an environment, employees feel disrespected, suffer from exhaustion and burnout and are also affected by job insecurity. They often lack support and suffer from the need to constantly improve their digital skills. Chan et al. (2022) found that organizational respect helps reduce depersonalization and emotional exhaustion and increases job satisfaction, which in turn helps improve personal performance. However, this effect depends on how secure employees feel about their work. They also found that highly satisfied employees who faced high levels of job insecurity were more depersonalized than employees who were moderately satisfied with their jobs. Highly satisfied employees, therefore, if they are highly competent, should have a greater sense of job security because they are more invested in their work. LOs that foster a culture of respect and fairness could therefore serve as organizational role models for other organizations, especially those that hire professional and highly engaged employees if they

want to reduce their levels of exhaustion and burnout. As always with social interactions, *respect* is the key that opens many doors!

Sustainable workforce in teleworking

But the new question is *how* to show respect when employees work remotely? This problem was addressed by Mosquera et al. (2022). Managing remote workers is currently a very important issue for managers and HR departments. Teleworking has been made mandatory in many countries for the period 2020–2022, but it is still widely used and encouraged due to its many benefits, such as flexibility, better work-life balance, but also lower costs for employers. However, the well-being of teleworkers could also be affected, and employers could also face some negative impacts of telework. It is important to consider these issues and take steps to prevent them or minimize their negative effects.

For example, teleworkers might suffer from social isolation and work overload, which reduces their engagement and motivation. Social isolation is the lack of social relationships with other people, which are not only quantitatively but also qualitatively deficient (Zavaleta, Samuel, & Mills, 2017). In other words, the frequency of interactions with other people decreases, but the quality of these communications may also be inadequate, leading to frustration. Social isolation negatively affects work engagement (Schaufeli, 2017), i.e. vigour, dedication and absorption or concentration and immersion in work (Schaufeli et al., 2020), and thus job satisfaction.

Social isolation also means lower levels of social support from peers and supervisors (Schaufeli, 2017), which is considered an important work resource. Feedback on work performance may also be absent or significantly delayed, which could confuse teleworkers on how to proceed. Managers try to avoid constant monitoring and supervision to allow for greater work autonomy and empowerment but may then be overwhelmed with employee reports, leading to delays in their feedback. It is important to note that workers who perceive their workload to be high are more likely to withhold and conceal information from their supervisors (Kmieciak, 2021).

Teleworking can also lead to higher workload because the worker cannot be observed at work. It refers to the degree to which the individual finds the work demanding in terms of scope, complexity or pace (Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg, & Hartman, 2015). Increased workload has a negative impact on employees' work-life balance and contributes to lower life satisfaction. However, increased workload also negatively impacts organizational learning, as there is less time for individual learning and knowledge sharing. However, knowledge sharing has been found to contribute to life satisfaction (Jiang & Hu, 2016), which is a subjective perception of one's well-being. On the other hand, high workload also increases the likelihood of absenteeism and turnover intentions.

Spontaneous and informal interactions are absent or significantly reduced during telework, so opportunities to share information and knowledge are also limited (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). Critical inquiry, dialog and deeper conversations, important components of the LO (Marsick & Watkins, 2003), are absent or significantly reduced when employees work remotely. Even though meetings can be organized online, face-to-face communication and spontaneity are missing. In this way, the knowledge base of the entire organization could be compromised because it does not develop at the desired rate. Organizational learning could be significantly impaired as a result because organizational learning is essentially a social process, which could translate into lower competitiveness. All of this could lead to lower professional and social fulfilment (Mele, Bellé, & Cucciniello, 2021) and, thus, lower well-being and life satisfaction.

Mosquera et al. (2022) studied teleworking in extreme situations (COVID-19), where social isolation, workload and job demands were extremely high because workers had to adapt quickly not only in terms of job performance but also in terms of using technological tools, all under conditions in which they were confined to their homes, which contributed to their frustration. These employees' workloads were higher than normal and increased in all three dimensions – scope, complexity and pace – as they had to absorb a lot of new information about how to transition their work to digital and familiarize themselves with the technology they were expected to use. It also meant that they had to work especially quickly, as the transition was to take place alongside their regular duties. In addition, they were expected to be always available and attentive to updates and new information.

Mosquera et al. (2022) found that social isolation was particularly difficult for younger teleworkers, as it particularly affected their engagement as a component of work engagement. On the other hand, older teleworkers found work overload particularly difficult because it affected their engagement. Practitioners should therefore be very careful when designing telework options and provide adequate social support to employees. Despite technological advances, face-to-face meetings are invaluable for fostering informal communication, sharing ideas and making serendipitous discoveries.

Can customers pose a threat to a sustainable workforce?

Employees may also suffer from emotional exhaustion and burnout for other reasons, such as interactions with external stakeholders, especially customers. In this issue, Kuok et al. (2022) address the problem of customer inclivity and the resulting surface acting behaviour of employees. Workplace inclivity has been known to cause a toxic work environment in the workplace. It can be defined as "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms and mutual respect" (Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Discourteous behaviour can include the active or passive expression of disrespect, such as ignoring or interrupting a colleague and publicly issuing a reprimand (Kuok et al., 2022). Such behaviour may be inconspicuous for a time but has the potential to escalate into more aggressive behaviour in the workplace (Kim & Qu, 2019).

The problem of customer inclivity is particularly pronounced among frontline employees (Bunk & Magley, 2013), which can have many negative effects, including employee emotional exhaustion, reduction in employee well-being and retaliation against customers (Madupalli & Poddar, 2014). Faced with workplace inclivity, especially inclivity from customers, employees seek coping mechanisms and often resort to surface acting and deep acting, which they use to withdraw themselves to cope with stress (Grandey, 2000, 2003). This seems to be the only acceptable strategy, as companies also require their employees to suppress their emotions when dealing with customers, even when they behave disrespectfully (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005). The reason for this, of course, is the fact that customers associate employees' behaviour with the quality of service they provide and, thus, with their level of satisfaction (Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1996). This has contributed to slogans such as "The customer is always right" and "Service with a smile" as golden rules for service employees. However, both customer inclivity and surface and deep acting do not contribute to a positive, productive and sustainable work environment.

Using a sample of civil servants in Macau, Kuok et al. (2022) examined the effects of customer inclivity and surface acting on mental health in terms of emotional exhaustion and other outcomes. Customer inclivity and surface acting consume many resources of frontline employees, leading to stress and emotional exhaustion. Employees incur high "psychological costs" (Humphrey, Ashforth, & Diefendorff, 2015) by suppressing their emotions and putting on a false face. This significantly affects their motivation.

Stress-related health problems can lead to higher absenteeism and turnover rates (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016). This makes it difficult for them to take care of their families and achieve a healthy work-life balance.

Practitioners should be aware, however, that customer inclivity and emotional suppression also reduce employees' organizational commitment as a sense of belonging and loyalty to the organization's goals and values (O'Reilly, 1989). As a result, employee productivity and overall accountability decrease, which in turn leads to a decline in the quality of customer service. For this reason, practitioners must pay close attention to this problem of their employees and protect them from the negative effects of customer inclivity. This problem must be talked about in the work environment, and solutions should be found together with the employees.

Transformational leadership and its contribution to sustainable workforce

One of the solutions to reducing employee stress, strain and emotional exhaustion is to hire leaders who can exercise transformational leadership. Transformational leadership refers to a leadership style in which the leader influences followers to change and transform their assumptions and mental models, skills and values (Avolio, 2005). Transformational leadership is also known to promote and improve employee self-motivation (Bass, 1985), which encourages employees to take on more responsibility. This is particularly important to practitioners in the LO field because higher levels of work engagement also increase the sharing of knowledge by employees (Islam, 2019), which is critical to organizational learning. For this reason, transformational leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on organizational learning (Imran, Ilyas, Aslam, & Ubaid-Ur-Rahman, 2016).

Under transformational leadership, employees are more inspired and empowered to realize and work towards a shared vision, which is a characteristic of LOs and further improves their work engagement. This also happens because their intrinsic motivation is likely to increase, leading to greater self-determined motivation and higher levels of meaningfulness in work. In this way, they are more likely to overcome their short-term focus and orientation and embrace systems thinking, which could contribute to greater organizational synergy.

The effects of transformational leadership on work engagement, mediated by motivation, were examined by Chen & Cuervo (2022). They examined whether and to what extent employees' perceptions of transformational leadership triggered their intrinsic motivation for work engagement. Work engagement was described as vitality, dedication and focus. They found that employee perceptions of transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on work engagement and levels of employee commitment. Interestingly, they also found that younger employees and employees with less work experience were more likely to perceive their supervisors as transformational leaders. Given the importance of employees gaining higher levels of accountability and autonomy, it is suggested that practitioners develop their leadership skills in the spirit of transformational leadership so that they themselves, as well as the employees and organization they lead, achieve better results.

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