

Learning organization and employee performance: the mediating role of job satisfaction in the Vietnamese context

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aimed to examine the impact of learning organization (LO) on job satisfaction and individual performance in Vietnamese enterprises. The study further explores the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between learning organization and employee performance.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 653 employees from various types of organizations in Vietnam. Structural equation modeling was implemented to test the hypotheses.

Findings – The results revealed that the proposed research model was supported. Results indicated that LOs positively influenced employees' job satisfaction and the broader range of their individual performance. In addition, employees' job satisfaction motivated them to achieve higher performance levels. The study also found a mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between LO and employee performance. The results underscore the importance of implementing an LO culture for individual outcomes such as job satisfaction and employee performance in the Vietnamese cultural context, which is based on socialism and Confucianism.

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Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to examine the relationships among LO, job satisfaction and individual employee performance in the Vietnamese context. The results offer a deeper understanding of the LO concept in the Vietnamese cultural context and highlight the cultural impact on the LO concept and its effects. The results suggest how the LO concept is applied in the Vietnamese context.

Keywords Learning organization, Employee performance, Job satisfaction, Vietnam

Paper type Research paper

The current business environment is changing dramatically with transformations in the nature of work and workforce demographics. As a result, organizations need to be adaptable to survive and thrive. In addition, knowledge has become a key to organizations' success (Jain & Moreno, 2015; Thurow, 1999). Thus, organizations have attempted to establish a learning organization (LO) culture because an LO encourages the process of creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge among organizational members (Sidani & Reese, 2018). An LO also facilitates collaborative learning, making it a prerequisite to build adaptive capacity, nurture innovative thinking and collaboration and drive optimum alignment for shared goals (Marsick, 2013; Watkins & Marsick, 2020). The outcomes of an LO also encourage employees to be satisfied with their work and improve their performance (Ju et al., 2021; Pool & Pool, 2007).

Over the past three decades, scholars around the world have explored and validated the concept of LO and its effect on outcomes, including employee attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction) and performance (see the review studies of Ju et al., 2021 and Kim et al., 2015). Islam et al. (2013) also found a significant effect of an LO on employee attitudes (i.e. organizational commitment) and turnover intention in the Malaysian cultural context. According to Islam & Tariq (2018), the relationship between the perceived learning environment and extra-role behaviors was mediated by employee engagement. While these studies have emphasized the significance of an LO in improving employee behaviors, the research has not explained how job satisfaction mediates the relationship between an LO and job performance. In addition, the LO concept has been popularized and implemented in only a few non-Western cultural contexts including South Korea (Yoon & Park, 2023), Lebanon (Chai & Dirani, 2018) and Malaysia (Lim et al., 2022). However, the LO concept has not been implemented and verified in socialist countries. In addition, although a few exceptional studies have validated the Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) in China (e.g. Wang et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2004) and Vietnam (e.g. Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022), no study has examined the effect of an LO on performance using DLOQ in socialist countries where the social system, structure, policies and organizational culture can significantly influence the nomological network of an LO.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam hereafter) has a socialist-oriented market economy that generally emphasizes public ownership (Nguyen, 2020). Vietnam significantly reformed its economy through its "Đổi mới" policy in 1986 (Tran et al., 2021). Compared to the Chinese socialist market economy, the Vietnamese economy is less centralized and gives a higher level of autonomy to local governments with strong public authority to develop and implement long-term economic plans. With the national reform policy, Vietnam is a developing country with a high growth rate and a fast international integration process. Although organizational culture and individual outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction and employee performance) were not previously emphasized in Vietnam, these concepts have become critical as Vietnamese national and organizational culture has been transformed (e.g. Nguyen et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2021). Vietnam has also invested significantly in human

resources (HR) and adopted various business practices from Western countries (Nguyen et al., 2017). In particular, Vietnamese enterprises have paid attention to the LO concept and its outcomes (Bui, 2021). Learning is also culturally valued in Vietnam as its culture originated from Confucianism (Nguyen, 2020).

Despite the economic growth and cultural transformation in Vietnam, few studies have examined the applicability of the LO concept in the Vietnamese cultural context. With a sample of 341 staff members in multiple Vietnamese higher education institutions, Bui & Baruch (2011) found that the LO concept, which was first described by Senge (1990), is significantly related to several individual outcomes. While the literature has presented several LO models, these models, including Senge's (1990), have been criticized because the models are abstract, which has contributed to a lack of theoretical rigor and validated measurement tools (Yang et al., 2004). The LO model proposed by Watkins & Marsick (1993) with seven dimensions was rigorously designed and has been implemented and validated in various cultural and organizational contexts. However, scholars have called for further examination of the applicability and nomological network of an LO in diverse national and organizational cultural contexts (e.g. Watkins & Marsick, 1997; Watkins et al., 2021). Although Nguyen-Duc et al. (2022) validated the applicability of Watkins & Marsick's (1993) LO model, no study has examined the effect on outcomes in the Vietnamese context. Several literature reviews (e.g. Hoe, 2019; Pedler & Burgoyne, 2017) have also questioned the relationship between LO and performance due to the mixed results on the relationship in extant empirical studies. More importantly, few studies have examined the effect of an LO on nonfinancial outcomes and employee attitudes (Pantouvakis & Bouranta, 2013). In addition, in the Vietnamese context, no research has examined the effects of an LO on employees' individual performance and attitudes.

The current study examined the effects of an LO on job satisfaction and individual performance in Vietnamese enterprises. We also examined the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between an LO and employee performance. The results of the current study offer a deeper understanding of the LO concept in the Vietnamese cultural context with a socialist economy and a history of Confucianism. The results will also show the cultural impact on the LO concept and its effects and suggest how the LO concept is applied in the Vietnamese context. A deeper understanding of these cultural nuances is significant to help organizational leaders and managers improve organizational behavior, which can lead to increased performance. The results can help Vietnamese leaders and enterprises recognize the significance of an LO culture and help leaders establish strategic plans to transform their organizational culture to become an LO culture for better individual outcomes, such as job satisfaction and employee performance. Organizations' strategic plans to create an LO must also incorporate HR interventions for employees.

Vietnamese culture is influenced by a long historical and cultural exposure to foreign invasions and integration from China and Western colonization and innovation (Truong et al., 2021). It is also influenced by government policy on culture in the context of national socioeconomic development (Nguyen, 2020). According to the cultural-historical activity theory, individuals' understanding and interactions with their work settings are influenced by their cultural values, including individualism or collectivism and hierarchy (Foot, 2014). Vietnamese culture has been heavily influenced by Confucianism due to its close geography and extensive relationship with China (Truong et al., 2021). Confucianism in Vietnam has emphasized hierarchy, loyalty, collectivism (Vuong & Tran, 2009), respect for elders, harmony and consensus, face-saving and relationship-keeping (Pham, 2005). Hofstede's cultural dimensions also identify values based on Confucianism in the Vietnamese cultural

context, such as high power distance, low individualism and low uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Historically, the “Đổi mới” policy in Vietnam in 1986 led to rapid changes that integrated international practices in the business environment. While Confucian values have dominated state-owned enterprises (Vuong & Tran, 2009), Western culture has influenced private enterprises and foreign-owned enterprises (Truong et al., 2021). For example, individualism and equality have become popular in the workplace, which are reflected in the higher turnover rate, more equal opportunities for new and junior staff and the alignment between individual competency development and organizational development strategies (Truong et al., 2021). In addition, as a unique socialist-oriented market economy, which follows the principles of a market economy and is guided by the principles of socialism, Vietnam has boosted the production labor force and labor socialization, and improved workers’ living conditions (The Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the United States, 2003). These factors could further promote a mix of Confucian values and Western culture. In addition, Valverde-Moreno et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of national culture in adopting management initiatives, such as employee participation in decision-making. Eskildsen et al. (2010) also argued that national culture impacts employees’ job satisfaction levels.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Learning organization

The concepts and models of an LO (e.g. Pedler et al., 1991; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) have increasingly been explored in the literature and practiced in organizational and cultural contexts. However, most LO models have been criticized for the conceptual overlap of the subconstructs in the models and their abstract nature in offering practical imperatives or validated measurement tools (Garvin, 1993; Yang et al., 2004). Watkins & Marsick (1993) focused on creating a learning culture from a developmental perspective to offer an integrative LO model. They described an LO as an organization “that learns continuously and transforms itself” (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, p. 8) and offered seven action imperatives. First, at the individual level, *continuous learning* describes the degree to which an organization makes an effort to create ongoing learning opportunities for its members. Second, *inquiry and dialogue* refer to the degree to which an organization builds a culture that promotes questioning and offers feedback. Third, at the group level, *team learning* describes the degree to which teams in an organization encourage collaboration and team learning. Fourth, at the system and organization level, *empowerment* represents the degree to which an organization empowers members to create and implement a collective vision. Fifth, *embedded systems* reflect the degree to which an organization creates systems to capture and share learning. Sixth, *system connection* indicates the degree to which an organization connects to its internal and external environments. Finally, seventh, as the most influential action imperative that can develop the LO culture, *strategic leadership* describes the extent to which leaders strategically model and support learning at the individual, group and organization levels (Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Yang et al., 2004). Overall, the LO framework developed by Watkins & Marsick (1993) holistically examines the degree to which an organization integrates its members, groups and systems to create a culture that promotes continuous learning and change.

Watkins & Marsick’s (1993) LO model serves as the theoretical framework for the current study for several reasons. First, the definition and framework of their LO model were developed from an organizational culture perspective (Sidani & Reese, 2018). This framework is also integrative as it examines the seven dimensions at three levels in

organizations: individual, group and system (Yang et al., 2004). This rigorous, concrete and comprehensive conceptual framework offers a validated measurement tool with deployable practical implications (Ju et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2015). In addition, numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the relationships between LO and outcomes (Ju et al., 2021). For example, Katebi et al.'s (2022) meta-analysis emphasized that job satisfaction significantly impacts job performance, which indicates a strong relationship between employee attitudes and work outcomes. Understanding the impact of an LO on job satisfaction can provide a link between organizational learning culture and employee attitudes and behavior at work, which ultimately affect employees' performance.

Finally, this LO model has been empirically examined in diverse organizational and cultural contexts (Ju et al., 2021). For example, cultural values (e.g. power distance, masculinity/femininity) can influence how individuals learn and interact (Gorman, 2004). Dirani (2013) found that the continuous learning and leadership dimensions are stronger indicators of LO, while the team learning dimension is a weaker indicator in a hierarchical and collectivistic culture. Ju et al. (2021) also found a moderating role of power distance in the relationship between the LO culture and organizational performance.

Employee performance

While employee performance has been defined in various ways, it generally refers to "scalable actions, behavior and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to organizational goals" (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000, p. 216). Thus, employee performance must include not only employees' task performance (in-role behaviors), but also their contextual performance and behavior (Belogolovsky & Somech, 2010; Koopmans et al., 2014). Combining these core components of employee performance, Koopmans et al. (2014) suggested a concept of individual work performance that includes three subdimensions: task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behavior. Task performance refers to "the proficiency with which individuals perform the core substantive or technical tasks central to his or her job" (Campbell, 1990, pp. 708–709). As an extra-role behavior, contextual performance refers to behaviors that "support the broader organizational, social, and psychological environment" (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994, p. 476) in which employees perform their tasks. Counterproductive work behavior is defined as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization or its members, or both" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556).

Relationship between learning organization and employee performance

The overarching theory of this study is the LO theory by Watkins & Marsick (1993), which posits that LO is significantly related to employee performance. The conceptual development of LO has been described as a living organism that uses learning to improve organizational performance (Kim et al., 2015). When an organization integrates its members, groups and systems to develop and promote a culture for continuous learning and change, employees are motivated to learn and be engaged (Ju et al., 2021; Malik & Garg, 2020), and, as a result, employees perform better (Ju et al., 2021; Watkins & Kim, 2018). However, no study has examined the relationship between LO and employee performance in the Vietnamese context. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H1.* Learning organization is positively related to employee performance in the Vietnamese context.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most commonly used variables regarding employee attitude. It refers to “overall evaluative judgments about jobs, affective experiences at work, and beliefs about jobs” (Weiss, 2002, p. 177). Job satisfaction has been examined using two approaches (Weiss, 2002): global evaluation and facet evaluation. With global evaluation, scholars conceptualize job satisfaction as an overall affective and cognitive reaction to a job. In contrast, scholars using a facet evaluation approach focus on particular aspects of the job context (e.g. supervisor, compensation, promotion), which are related to states of positive (or negative) satisfaction (Alarcon & Edwards, 2010). In the current study, we take a global evaluation approach. Extant research using a facet approach has shown that facet satisfaction is directly related to overall satisfaction (Weiss, 2002), but the facet approach can be misleading. It can lead to overestimating the unique experiences related to antecedents and outcomes of job satisfaction, which is not the scope of the current study (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Weiss, 2002).

Relationship between learning organization and job satisfaction

The relationship between LO and job satisfaction can be expounded through the lens of social exchange theory (SET). SET posits that employees engage in social exchange with their employers, and their perceptions of this exchange can significantly influence their job satisfaction. When an organization commits to being an LO, it invests in employees’ continuous learning and development, which benefits employees. In return, employees may feel obligated to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behavior, including increased job satisfaction. The organization is perceived as valuing and investing in its workforce, which can lead to employees feeling more valued and respected. The reciprocity norm of SET suggests that these positive feelings motivate employees to give back to the organization through their work as an LO integrates its members, groups and systems to develop and promote a culture of continuous learning and transformation (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Specifically, employees in an LO are motivated to learn, engage in various activities, transfer and create knowledge and be committed to their organization (Ju et al., 2021; Watkins & Kim, 2018). Studies on an LO have identified the effects of LO dimensions (Watkins & Marsick, 1993) on employees’ attitudes or behaviors, such as job satisfaction in various cultural contexts including in China (Wang et al., 2007), Greece (Dekoulou & Trivellas, 2015), South Korea (Chang & Lee, 2007), Lebanon (Dirani, 2009), the USA. (Lee-Kelley et al., 2007), Taiwan (Hsu, 2009) and Turkey (Erdem et al., 2014). However, no study has examined the relationship between LO and job satisfaction in the Vietnamese context. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H2. Learning organization is positively related to employee job satisfaction in the Vietnamese context.

Relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance

The relationship between job satisfaction and performance has frequently been examined and explored in the literature. The relationship can be described using several motivation theories such as self-determination theory, expectancy theory, goal-setting theory and attribution theory. However, the results of this relationship are inconsistent in the literature. Judge et al. (2001) reviewed the literature on the relationship between the two constructs and found a significant relationship. Thus, they recommended a reconceptualization of job satisfaction and performance to understand this relationship better. Specifically, scholars

should focus on the importance of examining positive emotions when measuring job satisfaction and the importance of measuring a broader scope of performance (e.g. contextual performance). Therefore, the current study implements a global evaluation rather than a facet evaluation of job satisfaction. We also apply [Koopmans et al. \(2014\)](#) concept of individual work performance, which measures task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behavior. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Employee job satisfaction is positively related to employee performance in the Vietnamese context.

The mediating role of job satisfaction

According to the job demands-resources model ([Bakker et al., 2014](#)), an organization's learning-centric culture, systems and policies are considered job resources that potentially enhance job satisfaction and employee performance. These resources include continuous training opportunities, supportive leadership and a collaborative environment encouraging innovation and knowledge sharing ([Han et al., 2020](#)). The LO framework inherently provides resources that can help buffer the impact of job demands on employees and thereby influence job satisfaction and performance. [Judge et al.'s \(2001\)](#) review of the relationship between job satisfaction and performance also indicates that a positive perception of a job may lead to positive emotions for employees. That is, the affective aspect of job satisfaction is critical. Given that an LO promotes continuous learning and transformation ([Watkins & Marsick, 1993](#)), employees in an LO are motivated to learn and be engaged, which may lead to organizational commitment ([Ju et al., 2021](#); [Watkins & Kim, 2018](#)). With motivation (positive emotions about their jobs and organizations), employees may be satisfied with their jobs and perform better. Thus, we propose the fourth hypothesis:

H4. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between learning organization and employee performance in the Vietnamese context.

Methods

Sample and data collection procedure

The sample data for the current study were collected from various types of organizations in Vietnam (e.g. state-owned, private-sector and foreign-invested) using purposive convenience sampling ([Utts & Heckard, 2006](#)). To collect data, we initially contacted HR directors or employers in several organizations using our social networks to ask for their participation in the current study. Once organizations agreed to participate, we introduced our study, distributed invitation emails to recruit possible samples, and shared the necessary information about participation. Once individual employees agreed to participate voluntarily, we sent either a paper or online survey (via *Survey Monkey*). Participants completed the survey without any incentive and could opt out of the study anytime. Around 1200 Vietnamese employees were invited to participate in the survey, and 910 responses were collected (75.8% response rate). After removing cases with missing data or insincere answers (e.g. same scores for all questions), 694 responses were retained for analysis, which is more than the recommended minimum sample size ([Jackson, 2003](#); [Kline, 2015](#)).

After data screening, which followed the literature on univariate and multivariate outliers, normality and multicollinearity ([Field, 2013](#); [Kline, 2015](#); [Meyers et al., 2013](#)), 653 responses remained for the final analysis, which was large enough for the current study ([Kline, 2015](#)). The gender distribution of the samples was reasonably balanced, but the other

demographic characteristics of the participants varied (see [Table 1](#)). Most participants held a college degree: a two-year college degree (23.1%), bachelor's degree (54.1%) or graduate degree (14.7%). Regarding positions, 40.4% were either senior managers or managers while the rest were assistant managers (10%) or staff (49.6%). The participants primarily worked in large (64.9%) and/or state-owned (61.1%) organizations. Most employees spent less than an hour daily on learning (85.6%).

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	310	47.5
Female	343	52.5
<i>Education</i>		
Lower than high school	2	0.3
High school/GED*	51	7.8
Two-year college degree	151	23.1
Bachelor's degree	353	54.1
Graduate-level degree	96	14.7
<i>Work experience</i>		
Less than five years	277	42.4
5–10 years	186	28.5
11–25 years	177	27.1
More than 25 years	13	2.0
<i>Position</i>		
Senior manager	46	7.0
Manager	218	33.4
Assistant manager	65	10.0
Staff	324	49.6
<i>Time spent on learning</i>		
Less than 30 min	185	28.3
<i>Per day</i>		
30–60 min	374	57.3
More than 60 min	94	14.4
<i>Type of organization</i>		
State-owned	399	61.1
Private (Vietnamese)	208	31.9
Private (foreign-invested)	46	7.0
<i>Business</i>		
Agriculture, forestry and fishery	17	2.6
Manufacturing and construction	126	19.3
Trading and services	510	78.1
<i>Size of organization</i>		
Large	424	64.9
Medium	135	20.7
Small	94	14.4

Table 1.
Demographic
characteristics

Notes: GED = General Educational Development Test; Once passed, a high school equivalency credential can be earned
Source: Authors' own work

Measures

Because the measures were originally developed in English, bilingual experts translated the measures from English into Vietnamese and then a forward–backward translation technique (Lee et al., 2018) was used to ensure the accuracy of the translation. First, two bilingual experts translated the instruments from English (E1) to Vietnamese (V1). Next, another two bilingual and cultural experts who spoke both languages and knew both cultures back-translated the Vietnamese version to English (E2). Then, two different bilingual experts translated the instruments again from English (E2) to Vietnamese (V2). The bilingual authors compared the original English version (E1), the back-translated English version (E2) and the second Vietnamese version (V2). When there were any differences in meaning between the two English versions or the second Vietnamese version conflicted with the English versions, the differences were reexamined using the same procedure of forward–backward translation to enhance the accuracy. We created a final Vietnamese version (V3) after the second Vietnamese version (V2) was revised and refined. A pilot test was then conducted with the revised version. We considered the validity and reliability of the instruments to select the specific instrument for each construct. A five-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree) was implemented for all latent variables.

Learning organization. LO was measured using the original 43-item version of the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ, Watkins & Marsick, 1997; Yang et al., 2004) because the construct validity and reliability of the instrument have been verified in diverse cultural and sectoral contexts (Chai & Dirani, 2018; Kim et al., 2015). The 43-item version of DLOQ has also been shown to be applicable to Vietnamese enterprises (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2022). While many scholars have used the shortened versions (i.e. 21 and 7-item versions), several studies have reported a high level of reliability estimates for the seven dimensions of the original 43-item version in diverse cultural contexts: >0.81 (the USA: Ellinger et al., 2002), >0.71 (Taiwan: Lien et al., 2006), >0.75 (China: Wang et al., 2007), >0.74 (South Korea: Song et al., 2009) and >0.77 (Lebanon: Dirani, 2013). A sample item is, “In my organization, leaders ensure that the organization’s actions are consistent with its values (Trong tổ chức của tôi, các lãnh đạo đảm bảo rating các hoạt động của tổ chức luôn nhất quán với hệ thống giá trị của tổ chức).”

Employee performance. While several scholars have suggested various instruments to measure employee performance (e.g. Williams & &erson, 1991; Bennett & Robinson, 2000), Koopmans et al. (2011) identified several limitations of the instruments: lack of a holistic and inclusive approach, questionable content validity of the scales and unsuitable measures for the general population. Koopmans et al. (2012) also developed and validated an Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, which has been validated in various types of organizational and national cultures (Koopmans et al., 2016). The measure has had acceptable Cronbach’s alpha estimates (>0.70) in diverse cultural contexts: >0.74 in Sweden (Dåderman et al., 2020), >0.79 in the USA (Koopmans et al., 2014) and >0.79 in Indonesia (Widyastuti & Hidayat, 2018). This measure was also chosen based on its multidimensional measure of individual work performance (i.e. task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviors) with 18 items rather than a unidimensional measure because the multidimensional measure can better incorporate a range of indicators to capture the complexity of work engagement. A sample item is, “I managed to plan my work so that it was done on time (Tôi đã nỗ lực lập kế hoạch để hoàn thành công việc đúng thời hạn).”

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using the three-item version of Hackman & Oldham’s (1980) instrument. The psychometric property of the instrument has been shown to be acceptable in the USA (0.90) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and

Thailand: 0.86) (Luthans et al., 2006). A sample item is, “Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with my job (Nhìn chung, tôi hài lòng với vị trí công việc hiện tại của mình).”

Data analysis

The data were analyzed with SPSS version 29 and AMOS. Descriptive statistics were used to capture participants’ demographic information, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the research framework and hypotheses. SEM analysis has advantages of simultaneously capturing complex relationships among multiple variables (Hair et al., 1998). First, the measurement model based on the theoretical framework was estimated and evaluated with recommended fit indices (Kline, 2010). The structural model was then assessed to test the hypotheses.

Because all of the variables were measured based on data from the same respondents, common method bias could be a concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To reduce the possibility of bias, we implemented several strategies for data collection, following Podsakoff et al.’s (2003) recommendations. First, we clearly described the purpose of the study and informed all participants that their responses were anonymous and confidential, there were no right or wrong answers and they should respond as honestly as possible. Second, we inserted page breaks between each measure. More importantly, we performed Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) using exploratory factor analysis. No effect was found because the variance was explained by the first factor, which was around 40%. Recent research has also suggested that common method bias may not be a problem (see Malhotra et al., 2006; Spector, 2006). In addition, although the reliability estimates of the instruments have been verified in previous empirical studies, the reliability estimates were measured using Cronbach’s alpha for this study. The summary statistics for the measures are reported in Table 2.

Results

Measurement model

Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to evaluate the reliability of all three constructs: LO culture, job satisfaction and individual work performance. All factors had alpha values that were greater than the cutoff value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; see Table 2). The measurement model was then specified to form three latent variables with their indicators. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated a good fit of the measurement model: $\chi^2 = 208.09$; $df = 57$; $p < 0.01$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.98; goodness-of-fit index = 0.92; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.97; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06; and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = 0.02. All indicators showed significant loading values on their specified construct, and the standardized loadings ranged from 0.62 to 0.89 (t -values = 7.80–13.03; $p < 0.05$). The composite construct reliabilities (CRs) were

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1 <i>Learning organization</i>	3.95	0.71	(0.97)		
2 <i>Job satisfaction</i>	4.05	0.84	0.61**	(0.89)	
3 <i>Employee performance</i>	3.55	0.47	0.57**	0.47**	(0.90)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; α = Cronbach’s alphas are in parentheses in the diagonal
Source: Authors’ own work

calculated for the theoretical interest in the scale development. All constructs displayed acceptable CRs ranging from 0.72 to 0.95. The average variance extracted (AVE) indicated the amount of variance that was captured by a construct in relation to the variance caused by the random measurement error. The AVE scores of constructs ranged from 0.51 to 0.76, which suggested adequate convergent validity. In general, the AVE should be greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity exists when the proportion of AVE in each construct exceeds the square of the correlation coefficient with other factors. It indicates that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). One pair of constructs with high correlation was learning culture and job satisfaction ($\Phi = 0.64$). Based on these results, we concluded that all constructs had both convergent and discriminant validity.

Structural model

Table 3 illustrates the results of the structural model. The fit statistics indicate an adequate fit for the proposed model: $\chi^2 = 927.21$, $df = 322$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.96; NFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.05; and SRMR = 0.04. A squared multiple correlation (R^2) indicates the percentage of variance in a dependent variable explained by one or more independent variables. The integrated proposed model explained 41.5% of the variance in job satisfaction and 53.8% of the variance in employee performance.

The research hypotheses were tested based on the significance of the structural path coefficients. The path from LO to employee performance ($H1$) and job satisfaction ($H2$) were positive, as expected. LO was positively associated with employee performance and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$), which supports $H1$. This result indicates that Vietnamese employees who work in an LO have a higher level of employee performance. The relationship between LO and job satisfaction was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$), which supports $H2$. Similarly, in testing for $H3$, job satisfaction was strongly related to job performance ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$).

In addition, the path from LO to employee performance through job satisfaction was significantly positive. As a result, $H4$ ($\gamma_{12} = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$) is supported. That is, LO was positively associated with employee performance, which was mediated by job satisfaction. This result indicates that the positive effect of LO was not merely associated with employee performance, but that job satisfaction also mediated the effect of LO to increase employee performance at the individual level. Figure 1 shows the hypothesized relationships of the current study and the estimates.

Discussion

The study results revealed significant relationships among LO, job satisfaction and employee performance in the Vietnamese organizational and cultural context. In a dramatically changing business environment, organizations must transform themselves as

Path	Path estimates (<i>t</i> value)	Hypotheses testing
($H1$) LO → employee performance	0.42 (11.33)	Supported
($H2$) LO → job satisfaction	0.67 (16.66)	Supported
($H3$) Job satisfaction → employee performance	0.19 (5.92)	Supported
($H4$) LO → job satisfaction → employee performance	0.13 (7.68)	Supported

Source: Authors' own work

Table 3.
Structural path
estimates

they motivate their employees to enhance individual performance. The proposed model in the Vietnamese cultural context indicated that LO initiatives positively influenced employees' job satisfaction and the broader range of their individual performance. In addition, employees' job satisfaction motivated them to achieve higher performance levels. The study also found a mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between LO and employee performance. In essence, an LO culture has direct and pivotal effects on job satisfaction and employee performance, which reflects individual and organizational outcomes in Vietnamese organizational and cultural contexts.

The results of this study have several theoretical implications that contribute to the existing literature related to organizational behavior and HR management. The results also have practical implications that can help organizations and managers improve employee performance by fostering a learning culture.

Theoretical implications

The empirical evidence from this study contributes to the theoretical discussion on organizational learning and performance by substantiating the role of job satisfaction as a crucial mediating process. It extends the theoretical frameworks that link learning cultures to performance, emphasizing that the pathway is not only direct but also significantly mediated by how satisfied employees feel in their roles. This insight can enrich theoretical models that explore organizational behavior, particularly those examining the mechanisms through which learning environments affect organizational outcomes.

The results of this study affirm the hypothesized positive relationship between an LO culture and employee performance. Specifically, organizations that foster continuous learning, encourage knowledge sharing and support professional development tend to have employees who perform at higher levels. This finding aligns with the extant literature, which posits that a learning-centric environment enhances employees' competencies and their ability to adapt to dynamic work conditions, thereby improving performance outcomes (Malik & Garg, 2020; Watkins & Kim, 2018). More importantly, our results reveal that job satisfaction plays a significant mediating role in this relationship. The mediation analysis indicates that the positive effects of an LO culture on employee performance are substantially channeled through increased job satisfaction. In other words, a robust learning culture contributes to greater job satisfaction, which in turn enhances employee performance. This mediation effect underscores the importance of addressing job satisfaction as a critical pathway through which learning cultures translate into performance gains (Ju et al., 2021; Watkins & Kim, 2018). In previous literature, job

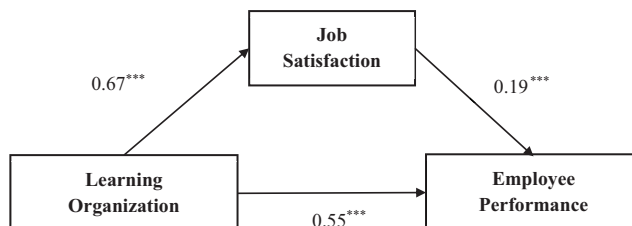


Figure 1.
Mediation model
with estimates
and p -values

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Authors' own work

satisfaction itself emerges as a multifaceted construct influenced by various elements of the organizational learning culture (Egan et al., 2004). These findings suggest that when employees feel valued and see clear pathways for their development, their job satisfaction increases, which motivates them to perform better.

The results of the significant effects of LO on job satisfaction and employee performance also confirmed that SET contributes to understanding LO theory by explaining the relational dynamics in this Vietnamese cultural context. According to SET, interactions that are perceived as equitable and beneficial foster trust and encourage continuous learning and development. This is particularly relevant in an LO where employees may feel obligated to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behavior (e.g. an increase in job satisfaction and performance) in return. This relationship is aligned with the LO theory by Watkins & Marsick (1993); as an organization develops and promotes a culture of continuous learning and transformation through its members, groups and systems, employees perform better with job satisfaction. In addition, our results align with previous research emphasizing that job satisfaction significantly predicts employee performance (e.g. Dekoulou & Trivellas, 2015). As Judge et al. (2001) recommended, the current study implemented a global evaluation of employees' job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and a broader scope of employee performance (Koopmans et al., 2014), which may clarify the relationship between the two outcomes. The results of this study confirmed that an employee's attitude (i.e. job satisfaction) and motivation toward work positively affect employee performance. That is, satisfied employees are likely to feel more positive, engaged and committed to their organization (Judge et al., 2001). In sum, this study significantly contributes to the understanding of LOs by elucidating the social dynamics that facilitate the process of organizational learning. It underscores the importance of fostering social exchanges to build a robust learning environment, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and effectiveness of organizations (Chang & Lee, 2007). This integration of SET into LO theory not only broadens the theoretical underpinnings of organizational learning but also offers practical guidance for enhancing organizational practices.

The current study implies that Vietnamese employees who work in an LO are satisfied with their jobs, enhancing their broader range of performance. When employees continuously learn individually and with their team in an embedded system, interact with others through questioning and feedback, and are empowered under strategic leadership in an organization that is connected to internal and external environments, they may experience positive cognitive and affective states in relation to their job, which likely enhances their performance. This connection is predicated on the premise that employees who exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction are more likely to demonstrate superior job performance, which confirms existing literature (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Guest, 2017; Rich et al., 2010). In addition, employees' job satisfaction mediated LO and employee performance in the current study. Notably, the mediating role of job satisfaction between LO and employee performance is consistent with the limited research that has explored this relationship.

Practical implications

The present investigation has practical implications for Vietnamese leaders and enterprises, particularly through an HR lens. As an initial inquiry into the applicability and the nomological network of Watkins & Marsick's (1993) LO construct within the Vietnamese context, this study offers a validated LO concept and measurement, which is corroborated by Nguyen-Duc et al.'s (2022) recent research. The salience of an LO culture, as revealed by the results, suggests that it is imperative for leaders to devise and implement strategies that

focus on transitioning their organizational culture toward an LO framework to enhance individual outcomes, such as job satisfaction and employee performance.

Vietnamese organizations are advised to implement leadership development initiatives that place a strong emphasis on cultivating an LO culture. Such initiatives are essential to equip leaders with the requisite knowledge and skills to promote an ethos of perpetual learning and knowledge dissemination among their staff. This strategic orientation should be complemented by HR interventions that are tailored to the employees and incorporate training, mentorship and coaching, which are congruent with the LO tenets to foster skill development.

Due to the cultural diversity of Vietnamese organizations, it is paramount to formulate and enact diversity and inclusion strategies that honor cultural narratives. An inclusive ethos can enhance both the LO culture and overall organizational performance. Furthermore, the decentralized Vietnamese economic framework in which local governments wield considerable autonomy offers an opportunity for governments to support a broader spectrum of organizations to nurture an LO culture that aligns with extensive, central government-led national development strategies.

While the concept of LO originated in the USA, people from Confucian (e.g. collectivistic cultures) tend to value learning more and have more positive attitudes toward their organizations compared to people in individualistic cultures (Ju et al., 2021). In contrast, people from individualistic cultures tend to focus more on tasks, which may lead to better performance. This diversity can benefit organizations, but leaders and practitioners must recognize these differences and develop strategies and tactics to meet the needs of people in all cultures. For example, organizations may benefit from adopting cross-cultural leadership approaches by considering the diverse cultural backgrounds of employees. It would be wise to form top management teams that reflect diverse cultural backgrounds. Leaders who represent diverse cultural perspectives can also help bridge cultural gaps and facilitate the development of the type of LO culture that resonates with employees.

To cultivate an LO culture, organizations should provide formal learning and training, but this type of learning is insufficient. It is equally critical to offer informal and incidental learning opportunities that empower employees to share, manage and create knowledge. This recommendation aligns with insights from Froehlich et al. (2014) and Watkins & Kim (2018). Furthermore, a commitment to develop an LO culture must transcend top management and permeate all organizational levels, with employees fully cognizant of and actively participating in the LO culture. Using the seven LO imperatives can significantly contribute to the development and enhancement of an LO culture. In addition, it is advisable for organizations to implement continuous evaluation systems to gauge the efficacy of their LO culture initiatives. Organizations can make adjustments that are based on regular feedback, surveys and performance metrics.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. The current study implemented LO outcomes at the individual level (i.e. job satisfaction and employee performance). The LO concept was originally established to impact organizational outcomes (Ju et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2015). Therefore, future research should examine the impact of an LO on organizational outcomes (e.g. financial performance). In addition, the current study only examined the relationships among LO, job satisfaction and performance in the Vietnamese organizational and cultural context. Watkins & Kim (2018) and Ju et al. (2021) suggested cultural comparative studies of the LO concept and nomological network, as they found clear cultural differences in the significance of the seven dimensions and relationships among the related constructs. In particular, further studies are needed that investigate the validity and applicability of an LO

culture and nomological network in countries that have similar or different economic and political systems (e.g. capitalism, socialism). The convenient sampling strategy in the current study also has limitations. Thus, the use of random sampling is suggested for future research. Another limitation is that the current study did not consider demographic differences (e.g. age, gender and educational levels) in the data analysis. Future research should incorporate demographic differences of the samples to better reflect the influence of contextual factors on the relationships. Finally, future research may collect samples from employees in Vietnamese public sector organizations. The organizational cultures of private sector and public sector organizations differ, which can significantly influence the effect of LO. In addition, a comparative study between private sector and public sector organizations can offer academic and practical insights and implications.

Conclusion

This study investigates the influence of LO on job satisfaction and individual performance within Vietnamese enterprises. It specifically examines the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between an LO and employee performance, contextualized within the Vietnamese cultural milieu. The results elucidate the unique cultural dimensions that shape the assimilation and impact of the LO concept. This study contributes to the literature by offering insights into how a learning culture, tailored to fit the Vietnamese context, can serve as a catalyst for organization development and agility. Consequently, this research substantiates the mechanisms through which LO fosters job satisfaction and delineates the intermediary function that job satisfaction plays in enhancing employee performance.

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