

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The Learning
Organization

Modalities for improving individual and organizational learning

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Nataša Rupčić

Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Rijeka, Croatia, Rijeka, Croatia

Introduction

In Issue 6, we looked at many interesting and useful topics that led to some surprising findings. As always, the authors explored various aspects of the learning organizations with the aim of finding modalities for more effective individual and organizational learning. For example, [Alkhalaf and Badewi \(2024\)](#) investigated whether human resource management (HRM) practices positively influence organizational performance through organizational learning. [Iftikhar and Javed \(2024\)](#) identified challenges and facilitating factors for knowledge acquisition in inter-organizational projects. [Azeez and Aboobaker \(2024\)](#) provide an overview of the new frontiers of experiential learning by conducting a bibliometric analysis. [Khatun, Singh, and Joshi, \(2024\)](#) examined hybrid forms of work with a focus on learning. [Mishra and Kappal \(2024\)](#) attempted to answer the question of whether employee empowerment leads to greater managerial isolation leading to some paradoxical findings. Finally, [Ford, Isaacks, and Anderson, \(2024\)](#) examined how high-risk organizations, such as health-care organizations, can become reliable organizations and determined that that could happen only if they are developed as learning organizations.

Can human resource management practices help organizational learning and performance?

Academics and practitioners are constantly looking for ways to improve organizational performance. Learning at all levels – individual, team and organizational – is a well-known and proven way to improve many aspects of organizational performance, including innovation and effective change. The question, however, is how to stimulate and support learning at all levels to achieve the best results, including an inspired workforce, efficient value creation and effective organizational change. In general, learning helps improve results, avoid mistakes and implement effective changes and innovations. HRM practices are one of the factors that can help at all levels. They include various procedures, policies and activities that can have numerous impacts that directly or indirectly impact the organization, such as hiring the best employees, increasing their motivation and their ability to perform well. In short, HRM practices have a direct impact on employee behavior and therefore need to be well tailored to enable the achievement of organizational goals. Employees learn every day by interacting with others, creating meaning together, engaging in dialogue, thinking



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critically, synthesizing facts and applying knowledge. Recruitment practices, training modalities and approaches, compensation management, performance management and empowerment in terms of job autonomy and participation in the decision-making process are such practices that can have a strong impact on organizational performance. HRM practices such as hiring the right people, training them well, motivating them and involving them in the decision-making process have been shown to promote organizational learning (López, Peón, & Ordás, 2006). Organizational learning can be viewed through the prism of four processes: Knowledge acquisition, interpretation, sharing and storage in organizational memory. The key function of organizational learning is not only to ensure the effective implementation and integration of new and existing knowledge into daily routines, activities, processes and procedures but also to achieve innovation, growth and effective transformation to improve and maintain the legitimacy of the organization. Through their indirect influence, HRM practices can help acquire and accumulate knowledge and promote its assimilation and transformation in the value creation process, which contributes to improving and maintaining the organization's competitive advantage.

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Alkhalaf and Badewi (2024) wanted to find out whether HRM practices positively influence organizational performance through organizational learning. They conducted their study on a sample of the four largest financial services companies in France: Deloitte, KPMG, PwC and EY. Their services are tailor-made and based on the knowledge of the people working in these companies and on the organization's knowledge embedded in organizational memory, such as culture and repositories. They focused on four HRM practices: recruitment, training, motivation through wages and rewards and participation in the decision-making process. Many companies base their selection and hiring decisions on candidates' valued ability to learn and further invest in their skills, knowledge and their behavior, attitude and values. Various incentives to achieve the desired results are also helpful. The combination of such practices could also be difficult to imitate and thus offer competitive advantages. The authors found that the selection and recruitment of qualified and talented employees as well as training, incentives and participation in decision-making processes contribute positively to organizational performance. Appropriate HRM practices have a positive impact on employees' behavior and stimulate their learning. This strengthens organizational learning in terms of knowledge acquisition, transfer, sharing and retention, which in turn has a positive impact on organizational knowledge and financial performance. However, the environment studied revealed many problems, such as excessively long working hours of up to 90 h per week, an overly stressful environment and high physical and psychological pressure leading to high absenteeism and turnover rates. If companies do not provide an adequate work environment and support, they lose as they have to constantly hire and train new employees, which also has a negative impact on organizational learning and thus on company performance.

Interorganizational knowledge acquisition

Individuals, teams and organizations learn by using different sources of learning. Knowledge is acquired internally through formal education and training programs and informally through employees' personal networks. Sometimes, however, knowledge is not readily available and can be acquired through collaboration with other organizations or, in other words, through inter-organizational learning. Sometimes external sources or other organizations can provide complementary knowledge. This complementary knowledge can be provided not only by customers, suppliers, policy makers and regulators but also by engaging external experts and professionals to support certain processes. One such type of inter-organizational learning is participation in inter-organizational projects. Inter-

organizational projects are usually set up to jointly create a certain value (product, service) by sharing knowledge and other resources. However, knowledge acquisition in this process is not easy, as the organizations may be heterogeneous and have different interests and also different obligations under the project agreement. Organizations can also be temporary partners and otherwise competitors (coopetition), which makes knowledge sharing even more difficult. Some knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, could be a key to the organization's competitive advantage, so organizations are very reluctant to share it. Differences in culture, style, communication and infrastructure can also hinder the process of knowledge sharing. Assimilation of knowledge can also be difficult, so that acquired knowledge can be lost along the way. However, collaborative organizations and their employees can also support this process by creating an enabling environment for dialogue, knowledge sharing and knowledge assimilation.

In this issue, [Iftikhar and Javed \(2024\)](#) identified challenges and facilitating factors for knowledge acquisition in interorganizational projects. Several challenges have been identified. As frequently reported by practitioners, there is almost always a heavy workload and not enough time for other activities, including knowledge sharing with their partners. Time pressure is particularly pronounced when working on projects, as these are time-limited activities with a predetermined timetable, where not all possible problems were foreseen or not enough time and other resources were available. In this way, people could be available for learning and knowledge sharing when needed, leading to an asynchronous situation when activities are not well coordinated. Sometimes extra effort is required after working hours and people simply cannot put in as much effort. Lack of time could be the reason, but hiding knowledge could also be behind such behavior. People often believe that they could be replaced if they reveal all their knowledge. Therefore, they hesitate when asked to share their knowledge, give false information or simply do not provide any information at all. Finding credible sources of information is also a major problem, as people have different backgrounds, approaches, goals, etc., which could make knowledge sharing and joint learning a problem. However, there is also an objective factor that can significantly hinder joint learning and knowledge sharing, namely, organizational bureaucracy. There are often lines of communication that must be followed, otherwise information and knowledge will not be made available. This often means that written statements have to be made, often by people of the same or similar rank. Sometimes, however, there is no protocol, so the sharing of information and knowledge is very slow or impossible until protocols are established and responsible persons are appointed.

[Iftikhar and Javed \(2024\)](#) have also identified some facilitating factors. One of these is setting clear goals in terms of what is to be done, what knowledge is to be shared and for what purpose. Setting clear goals can significantly speed up the process of knowledge sharing. This also removes some of the previously mentioned barriers to knowledge sharing, as people have enough time to prepare and determine what knowledge should be shared and how, speeding up the process considerably. Personal commitment is another important factor that facilitates the process of knowledge sharing. However, this factor is related to the fact that clear objectives should be set. When there are clear goals, people are more likely to engage and participate in meaningful and timely knowledge sharing. Having the right culture and values that promote dialogue and knowledge sharing can also give a big boost to knowledge sharing in inter-organizational projects.

Practitioners should try to identify what challenges exist in their practice and take action to mitigate them and create a favorable environment to get the most out of their knowledge sharing activities. It is well known that the environment of a learning organization is best suited to get the most out of inter-organizational knowledge sharing processes, as it has a

culture that values dialog, knowledge sharing, experimentation, shared sense-making and the synergistic effects of collective activities.

Experiential learning – who can benefit?

Individuals and organizations are constantly looking for ways to improve learning. Although traditional education and training is still very important, there are new modalities that offer promising results. One of these is experiential learning, i.e. practical learning, learning by doing, learning in action and learning from experience. Companies are increasingly supporting their training programs with experiential learning, where individuals learn by doing and receive continuous feedback. This leads to better learning outcomes as participants learn with more enthusiasm, motivation and emotion and can make corrections thanks to the continuous feedback. It is believed that people learn best when they are actively involved in an activity and participate in its execution while being guided and supported. Individuals can learn through role-play, which helps them to grasp different perspectives and improve their critical thinking and systems approach. It is also believed that the knowledge imparted in this way is better remembered and allows more effective application of the learning in the future. Active participation in the whole process also allows for deeper reflection and also introspection.

In this issue, [Azeez and Aboobaker \(2024\)](#) provide an overview of the new frontiers of experiential learning by conducting a bibliometric analysis of studies published between 1976 and 2022, noting that the number of publications on the subject has skyrocketed. The analysis shows the importance of using experiential learning in management education, especially in the field of project management. Technological development is helping to enable experiential learning with the help of computer simulations, AI, etc. The use of experiential learning in management education helps develop and promote management and leadership skills by linking theory and practice. However, practitioners should be careful to adapt their pedagogical approach to the particular field and level of study. Collaboration with industry experts is also very useful in this regard to ensure that the learning situation is as accurate and realistic as possible. Practitioners should also ensure that they allow sufficient time for reflection and critical thinking to evaluate together what has been done, how and with what results. This will contribute to learners' understanding and improve their future decision-making skills. Even though the situations are not real but simulated, they appear real and put some constraints and time pressure so that they practice their decision-making skills based on continuous evaluation and cost-benefit analysis. The fact that the process can be modified over time allows learners to repeat certain steps and improve their creativity in solving the problems presented to them. In this way, educators encourage an entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurial skills.

Learning in the hybrid workplace

Many types of work can be done remotely these days, and so can learning. Companies need to pay close attention to learning because it is the modern core competency and the key to business growth, survival and sustainability. Many companies were forced to quickly introduce remote working during the imposed lockdowns. However, many have adapted remarkably well and decided to offer both office and remote working or a hybrid workplace. This has also had an impact on workplace learning, which has also moved to cyberspace and is being conducted in both environments. Furthermore, it is better for companies to invest in the development of their employees rather than constantly hiring new employees, which has a negative impact on productivity. Therefore, workplace learning deserves special attention as a process that leads to new individual and then organizational skills, knowledge and

attitudes and has a significant impact on productivity. It should also be noted that workplace learning can be both formal and informal and leads to the acquisition of new information and knowledge, which is then interpreted, assimilated and transformed into new systems of knowledge values and behaviors. In this way, different learning modalities can be identified: formal learning in a classroom, participation in training and mentoring, learning by doing, learning by experimenting, learning by problem solving, learning by interacting with colleagues and learning by interacting with other stakeholders. It is clear that many of these learning activities can also be carried out remotely.

Hybrid forms of work that involve remote working, usually from home, can have many benefits for both employees and managers or companies. Both can benefit from increased productivity and creativity as well as cost and time savings. For employers, telecommuting allows for a better work–life balance, a quieter work environment with fewer distractions and the flexibility to adapt work to personal needs. Both employees and companies benefit from reduced absenteeism, a lower turnover rate, talent attraction and retention. It should be noted that learning should be supported by unlearning what is unnecessary or superfluous. However, there are many different tools available to both employees and companies today, such as information and communication technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI). AI can easily recognize behavioral patterns, provide continuous feedback and provide many more learning resources by providing hyperlinks. Remote access to library services and databases is crucial for effective and productive learning.

Practitioners should keep in mind that the learning process should be managed, directed and aligned with organizational goals. Management support is essential in this process. When employees feel that their work and learning is supported, they work and learn more eagerly and are more willing to apply what they have learned. It is particularly important that management provides continuous feedback on work and learning, which encourages motivation to work and learn. Even if they are learning informally and learning from colleagues, having management available to discuss what they have learned is invaluable. If the learning requires some unlearning, for example in relation to the system to be changed, support and guidance from management is also vital, particularly when it comes to communicating what needs to be changed and why. Management also plays an important role in shaping a corporate culture that values learning, knowledge sharing, dialogue, change and diversity.

Management has a direct influence on how employees organize their work. When they enable greater empowerment and autonomy, employees are more likely to adapt their learning processes to their needs and requirements. Empowered employees who enjoy the trust of management are also more willing to share their knowledge and insights with others and participate in collaborative problem solving and decision-making. Such employees are also more willing to seek out learning opportunities and take initiatives to learn.

In their study, [Khatun et al. \(2024\)](#) found that the majority of respondents prefer hybrid forms of work. They see this working environment as an opportunity to improve their learning and advance their careers. They also noted that distance learning offers them the opportunity to access global learning resources and to flexibly tailor the learning process to their needs. Interestingly, they found that public university employees favored hybrid work arrangements more than private university employees. The public university employees also saw more opportunities for advancement in the hybrid work environment than the private university employees. It was also found that the private university offered better learning programs in the hybrid environment. It was also found that female employees were more satisfied with working and learning in the hybrid work environment and saw more opportunities for career advancement than their male counterparts.

Empowered employees – isolated managers?

The complexity of tasks, the immense dynamics of work and the need to constantly solve problems have prompted practitioners and academics to look for solutions. The previously used technique of management by exception has therefore evolved to a stage where employees are given more freedom and autonomy due to their intensive training and acquired knowledge. In this way, employees were empowered and given the freedom to carry out their tasks as they saw fit and solve more problems than before. However, this led to management isolation as employees were reluctant to approach them as this could be interpreted as a sign of weakness by empowered employees. Thus, the culture of autonomy and empowerment that managers tried to implement to reduce their own burden led to their isolation and loneliness, as [Mishra and Kappal \(2024\)](#) discuss in this issue in an attempt to raise awareness of this problem.

As employees tend to work and problem-solve independently, and the greater the distance between them and management becomes, the more likely they are to perceive managers as cold, distant and overly ambitious. They may even perceive managers as unapproachable and be even more reluctant to work with them. It seems that managers do not have much choice either. They may have confidants with whom they can discuss issues, but if they try to work with those one level below them in the hierarchy, this could be construed as interference in their work and an attempt to micromanage, which could sabotage employees' empowerment efforts and lead to cynicism. This not only exacerbates power distance, but also reduces the flow of information from the bottom up. Managers might try to solve the problem by hiring their acquaintances as employees. However, if this backfires and the person is dismissed, this could be interpreted as an act of hostility, leading to further distancing on the part of employees. Any further interaction will then be with force and hesitation rather than of their own volition. If managers attempt to mitigate cold distancing through social activities with employees, this could be perceived as a lack of seriousness and credibility in performing their important role.

Interestingly, as [Mishra and Kappal \(2024\)](#) noted, the majority of employees they surveyed did not believe that CEOs go through managerial isolation, so the problem may only exist in the eyes of managers and be factually exaggerated and even unfounded. Employees perceive managers as important people who deal with goals and strategies, attend important meetings and discuss matters within the management team. They are aware that they need to share information and results with their superiors and believe that this is done through established communication channels such as regular meetings, the submission of reports and via emails with subsequent feedback, which contributes to their sense of connectedness with management. Digital tools and communication platforms contribute to an even stronger sense of connectedness, even if they are not used. However, when they are encouraged to use them and share their insights, they do not feel that managers are distant and isolated. In addition, employees, and especially empowered employees, are more likely to ask their colleagues for help first and report back to managers on the results of their work, so they do not perceive management's isolation and believe that such an approach is desirable because managers are too busy with issues that are important to the organization.

Even if the two sides have different perceptions, it is not beneficial for each party to assume and develop beliefs. It would be better to hold occasional meetings where managers discuss their views with employees and encourage them to communicate more, provide insight, ask for advice and engage in dialogue. This could help develop a culture

of trust, understanding, support and connection and ultimately bridge the potential gap between managers and employees.

How to develop a reliable learning organization?

Many organizations are trying to transform themselves into a learning organization to increase their knowledge and implement it into the value creation process to be more effective and viable. However, some organizations also operate in a high-risk environment and need to become reliable at an organizational level as well, which means having systems, processes and procedures in place that minimize risk. Becoming a reliable organization also involves the goal of becoming a learning organization, because only with continuous learning and collective sense-making can organizational members implement such continuous risk mitigation measures and make their organization a dependable organization by reducing risks and opportunities for failure and improving the psychological safety of its members.

Ford et al. (2024) analyzed health-care organizations as high-risk organizations with many fragmented policies and practices that can cause numerous sources of failure that can lead to harm. However, this problem could be significantly reduced if employees are empowered to recognize potential errors and harmful points and actions and become problem solvers who anticipate problems and solve them along the way. Continuous learning and self-reflection are key to this process. Ford et al. (2024) have identified five principles that can lead to a reliable and learning healthcare organization: Sensitivity to operations, reluctance to simplification, preoccupation with failure, deference to expertise and commitment to resilience. Employees therefore constantly identify and solve problems by eliminating contributing factors, demonstrating their commitment to continuous improvement of processes and procedures. Employees are also reluctant to oversimplify situations as problems are everywhere and can potentially contribute to failures. They are also masters in their field and continually deepen their expertise, which leads to respect for expertise. The commitment to resilience means that the responsible system of reliable processes and activities must form a strong foundation. In such a high-risk environment, any deviation could create confusion and disorder, potentially contributing to errors and failures, while the goal is to ensure predictability, stability and trust.

These goals can be achieved when there is a high level of psychological safety so that employees feel confident to identify problem areas and share their learning experiences so that the optimal solution is found. In this way, employees feel empowered to intervene when they notice a problem, regardless of their position or rank. This helps contribute to identify with the processes and develop a greater sense of belonging.

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