Chapter 7

Embracing Innovation and Creativity through the Capacity of Unlearning

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ABSTRACT

The capacity for unlearning is important for organizations to embrace innovation and creativity, due to the urgent need give up obsolete knowledge. A critique of organizational learning models highlights the unlearning capacity in organizational learning processes. We anticipate new paths for organizational learning arising from a critique of the models. Research shows that a lack of the unlearning capacity in the organizational learning models can be regarded as a weakness. We propose the internalization phase be included, an intermediate step that absorbs, reflects upon and internalizes all the previous phases, accommodating this additional phase and integrating it into the organization increasing the value of the organization's heritage. The level of internalization should be backed by a specific leadership and associated with humanizing organizational values. The self-efficacy construct placed at the center of this model indicates its umbrella capacity embracing a range of efforts needed to obtain the best possible results.

INTRODUCTION

The current globalization is characterized by profound changes that impact all spheres of life. Indeed, the scope of globalization has widened beyond the realm of economics to embrace the domains of social, cultural and political norms and practices. In this way, organizations are also influenced in (re)design-

ing their strategy, behavior so as to improve performance and nurture sustainability. These profound changes result mainly from advancements in information technology and have given rise to: (1) economic liberalization and globally open markets, (2) a trend towards greater homogeneity in customers' buying behavior, (3) growth and continuous technological development, (4) dynamic and easier access to transportation facilities, (5) an increase in knowledge and awareness of the role of customers, as well as (6) diffused and simplified economic and geographical barriers.

In fact, due to the constant changes in society, Quinn (1984), Quinn and Spreitzer, (1991) as well as Schein (1993) advocate the need for organizations to learn in order to constantly and rapidly adapt. The seminal works of Hamel and Prahalad, (1993) as well as Prahalad and Hamel (1990) support the strategic value of knowledge for organizational sustainability. In this environment of continuous learning, developing people is a strategically positioned activity and essential to the development and transformation of learning organizations. In this regard, Senge (1990) and Garvin (1993) maintain that knowledge management (KM) should be viewed as a complement to financial management, human resource management, and logistics management, among other fields. KM is vital in the relationship between organizational learning and organizational innovation. Research from the period between1996 and 2006 shows that KM is an important element in organizations and organizational learning is perceived to be an intermediary. Grant (1996), Gorelick and Tantawy-Monsou (2005), Pilar, Cespedes-Lorente and Ramon (2005) as well as Ke and Wei (2006) maintain that KM influence organizational learning. Research during the period between 1998 and 2005 (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Darroch, 2005; Hurley & Hult, 1998; Mavondo, Chimhanzi, & Stewart, 2005; Weerawardena O'Cass & Julian, 2006) explores that KM influences innovation. Therefore, KM inexorably affects organizational innovation. Nonetheless, KM may indeed have more impact on organizational innovation with the assistance of organizational learning. Easterby-Smith and Lyles (2003) acknowledge organizational learning (OL) concentrates on the process, while KM concentrates on the content of the knowledge that an organization obtains, creates, processes and hereafter takes on. OL can be considered as the aim of KM, which is one more path to envisage the connections between these two fields. However, it is only since the 1990s that knowledge and learning acquired a strategic position in organizations (Carter & Scarbrough, 2001). Therefore, it is essential that organizations promote learning and cultivate the idea of the 'learner' (Ponchirolli, 2002). The main challenge is in (re) building a paradigm that values human capital and organizational learning, regarded as structural elements for organizational sustainability.

The constructs of unlearning and forgetting are regarded as creative processes in organizational learning because these bring on new ideas from the external environment into the organization (Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 1997). These processes also redefine training especially aimed at middle managers, the content of which should focus on group dynamics, encourage collaborative learning and implement non-blaming discussions. Unlearning also encourages change in the organizational processes resulting in wellbeing and feelings of security among employees. Thus, promoting unlearning is a vital component in the learning process and can be acquired by: (1) not punishing failure and (2) implementing non-blaming reporting systems. However, it is a difficult task to encourage people to do things differently to the hitherto standard procedures as well as to motivate them towards experimentation (Romme & Dillen, 1997).

It is the aim of this chapter to shed light on new directions for organizational learning arising from the following contextual issues: 1) social change characterized by advancements in information technology, 2) thriving competition and 3) resistance to changing organizational routines. In an attempt to forecast new trends for organizational learning, the authors reflect on issues that encourage unlearning capabilities in organizational learning processes. Moreover, a critique is made on the models of Crossan,

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