Chapter 5

Building a Supportive Culture for Sustained Organisational Learning in Public Sectors

Sepani Senaratne
University of Western Sydney, Australia

Michele Florencia Victoria
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an approach to build a supportive organisational culture for sustained organisational learning in public sectors. Changing culture is not an easy task. It involves an in-depth understanding about culture and its relationship with organisational learning. First, this chapter provides a brief introduction to organisational learning, organisational culture, and their relationship. Then, characteristics and attributes of a learning culture are identified. Finally, using case study research findings of a public sector construction organisation operating in Sri Lanka, an approach is presented in this chapter on how to identify present culture of the organisation and change it to a learning culture.

INTRODUCTION

The organisational learning research has been developed in parallel to knowledge management research. 'Knowledge management' and 'organisational learning' often overlap and there are many research studies that have aimed to explore the similarities between these two concepts (for example, see Loermans, 2002; Wang and Ahmad, 2003). Learning occurs through different knowledge management processes such as knowledge creation and knowledge transfer, either in individual, group or organisation level. Hence, it is important to focus on organisational learning when implementing knowledge management strategies in any organisation. While organisational challenges call for learning and creativity, there is no consensus around what organisational learning is or how to best facilitate it (Scott, 2011). Even though,

All organisations learn, whether they consciously choose to or not, it is a fundamental requirement for their sustained existence. Some firms deliberately advance organisational learning, developing capabilities that are consistent with their objectives; others make no focused effort and, therefore, acquire habits that are counterproductive. (Kim, 1993, p.37)

Argyris (1995) says learning occurs whenever errors are detected and corrected and there are at least two ways to correct errors. One is to change the behaviour known as single-loop learning and the second way is to change the underlying assumptions known as double-loop learning (Argyris, 2002). Double-loop learning is the one which requires change in cultural model of the organisation. Further, specific studies into public sector organisations reveal that organisational learning has certain limitations in public sector due to state interference, formalised rules and procedures, negative attitude of employees towards organisational learning, lack of awareness, less challenges and minimum competition. To overcome these limitations, organisational culture plays a key role.

Organisational learning could be affected by organisational culture in several ways as stated by De Long and Fahey (2000). At first, culture shapes employees' assumptions about whether knowledge is important or not and what knowledge is worth managing. Next, culture allows individual knowledge to become organisational knowledge. Then, culture shapes the processes by which new knowledge is created, legitimated and disseminated. Finally, culture creates the context for social interaction that ultimately determines how effective an organisation can be at creating, sharing and applying knowledge. Consequently, different organisational cultures will have different influences on organisational learning (Lee and Chen, 2005). Further, it was found that proper leadership together with learning culture would foster organisational learning (Argyris, 1999; Chang & Lee, 2007; Kondalkar, 2009) and enable to overcome above identified limitations in the public sector organisations.

This calls for a step change in the present culture of public sector organisations. However, changing culture is not an easy task. It requires an in-depth understanding about culture and its relationship with organisational learning as some studies have found that culture to be either fostering or inhibiting learning (Graham and Nafukho, 2007; Huemer and Ostergren, 2000; Valle et al., 2011). Hence, cultural attributes that inhibit and facilitate learning should be identified in order to change the present culture of an organisation to a learning culture that promotes knowledge management strategies. Even though, there are some past studies that explored organisational learning and its relationship with organisation culture, there seems to be a gap in exploring how the culture could be shaped in order to promote sustained organisational learning, in particular, in public sector organisations. Thus, this chapter aims at filling this knowledge gap by providing an approach to identify present culture of a public organisation and change it to a learning culture.

To achieve the above aim following objectives were formulated:

- Identifying organisational learning process.
- Explore what composes a learning culture with facilitating attributes and inhibiting attributes.
- Identifying cultural facilitators and inhibitors of organisational learning in public sector organizations.
- Suggesting an approach for building a supportive culture for sustained organisational learning in public sectors.

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/building-a-supportive-culture-for-sustained-organisational-learning-in-public-sectors/80111

Related Content

Operational Challenges in Hybrid Organizations: Insights for Future Research

Liliana Ávilaand Marlene Amorim (2017). *Handbook of Research on Emerging Business Models and Managerial Strategies in the Nonprofit Sector (pp. 352-370).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/operational-challenges-in-hybrid-organizations/180803

Performance Measurement and E-Reporting: Exploring Trailblazing Programs

Kathryn Kloby (2012). *E-Governance and Civic Engagement: Factors and Determinants of E-Democracy (pp. 544-560).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/performance-measurement-reporting/60096

An Overview of Internet Developments and their Impact on E-Government in South Africa

Goonasagree Naidoo, S. Singhand Niall Levine (2011). *Handbook of Research on E-Services in the Public Sector: E-Government Strategies and Advancements (pp. 63-77).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/overview-internet-developments-their-impact/46255

Management Aspects of e-Government Projects: Contextual and Empirical Findings

Evika Karamagioliand Dimitris Gouscos (2014). *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 22-47).*

www.irma-international.org/article/management-aspects-of-e-government-projects/117753

Towards a Model for Engaging Citizens via Gov2.0 to Meet Evolving Public Value

Mohammed Aladalah, Yen Cheungand Vincent CS Lee (2018). *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 1-17).*

www.irma-international.org/article/towards-a-model-for-engaging-citizens-via-gov20-to-meet-evolving-public-value/190611