

RESEARCH REPORT:

## The Paradox of Training and Development

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The efforts to expand capacity within organizations are a constant challenge. Of all of the many opportunities is the ability to extend capacity through the knowledge and abilities of its employees or members. In the past, knowledge within organizations was considered to be what members brought to the organization from previous education and experiences within one's personal history. As time has gone by, it has become evident that it's now necessary to replenish knowledge on an ongoing basis through a system of learning and sharing of lessons that benefit the entire organization. All the while, learning still continues to take place within the individual's mind and therefore difficult to capture at an organizational level.

In the 1990's author Peter Senge suggested the concept of the "Learning Organization" which suggested that organizations grow and expand intellectually through individual learners. In her book titled *Streetwise: Human Resources Management*, Buhler noted: "Learning organizations are created one employee at a time by training and developing the work force. A collection of life-long learners is the first step toward creating a learning organization" (2002, pg. 142). Buhler also stated that learning organizations are created not by implementing an organization-wide initiative around learning, but to present to the individual the benefits and opportunities of continuing to learn independently. When enough individuals see benefit and take sustained initiative; organizational benefits will arrive. But Buhler also warns, "Training and development is a never-ending challenge that every organization must address" (2002, p. 142). She places the condition that this mentality must be nurtured and encouraged with all employees in order for intellectual connections is made among organizational members. Buhler suggests that learning organizations act the way they do not by virtue of an HR program, but as an important aspect of its culture.

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Marquardt observed, “learning organizations are companies that are transforming themselves to better manage knowledge, technology, empower, and expand learning to better adapt and succeed in the changing environment” (1996, p.2). The momentum developed by the single or group of employees to motivate others towards learning creates opportunities for the organization from several perspectives. It would be debatable that momentum is caused by human beings need to herd or through other organizational norms surrounding learning and the perceived value of learning. But the habits of individuals towards learning must be established and reinforced over time. On the opposite side of this issue without effective learning processes around training and development, it would appear that organizations would lose their competitive advantage through employee’s inability to acquire and maintain the skill sets and knowledge needed of a competitive work force (Buhler, 2002, p. 142). The desired outcome set forth in the learning organization is was stated by Senge who revealed, “organizational capacity would result in people expanding their capacity to create the results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and people are learning how to learn together” (2006, p. 129). Senge also believed that development occurs, one employee at a time (2006, p. 5). The method in which employees are motivated towards learning is be complex but a necessary step in realizing the learning organization goal.

Researchers have learned there does exist a direct correlation between employee satisfaction and their willingness to participate in organization. Without using the necessary motivation, learning efforts will be diminished (Tsai, Yen, et al, 2007). It is believed there is a threshold in which the organization benefits from efforts and opportunities are realized, yet can be different for each organization and learner (Morrison, 2008).

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The motivation required of the learner is also to be recognized as an identifiable goal in which to be addressed. Considered to be a form of empowerment, the individual learner sees the opportunity to learn and assist the organization by sharing the acquired knowledge that results in improvement (Grieves, 2000). In the mind of the individual learner, questions arise in the thought of how learning will benefit them. This is done through variable pay systems or progressive internal promotion system where learning is considered a core competency when evaluating performance or fitness for promotion. Adherence to this learning mentality and ongoing support must also be an organizational priority by monitoring momentum even during times where learning is not an organizational priority. The organization must keep in mind the future benefits of keeping learning within the top priorities and must see it as an investment in the future. Opportunities for organizations to project future innovations and organizational improvement through learning should also be sought in order to establish realistic and tangible goals. These measurable advances would become realized through ongoing internal improvements and advances (Newman, 2007). Heckman stated that through an organization focused on learning allow employees to “broaden their roles outside of sheer job classifications. Being skilled in a wide variety of social and technical tasks, it is now much easier to respond adequately, and flexibly to demands placed on the system” (1996).

The leader’s role during this process of learning is an important key to the success of the strategy in organizational learning. This aligns with the duties of motivating, coaching, guiding and managing employees. These elements contain at least one element that supports a learning organization. The leader should identify themselves as an instructor, coach or mentor dependent upon the circumstances and opportunities (Marquardt, 1996, p.106). As knowledge is transferred back and forth among employees, it’s up to the leader to establish what knowledge is important

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and what is shared. This role includes the storage, dissemination, and priorities in which knowledge holds with other information or resources. There are also times in which the leader is the learner who not only encourages others to expand knowledge individually and collectively, but be an active participant. There are motivational opportunities when employees see leaders seek knowledge for organizational and individual benefit and sees this leader as an example in which to emulate (Marquart, 1996, pp.107-108).

As the learning organization grows and becomes more sophisticated from the groupings of individuals to an enterprise-wide philosophy, the need for systems that support learning is the next logical step. Databases that track organizational knowledge as well as processes and procedures that outline the sharing of information become appropriate. A risk that comes with the sharing of knowledge at this level is in the potential loss of knowledge when employees leave an organization. Through these systems will the knowledge be retained for the future benefit of the all.

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