

UNIVERSITIES AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS - A CASE STUDY

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Abstract *Universities are considered crucial in dissemination of knowledge and information and play a significant role in generation of human capital. Over the years, universities are forced to develop as centres of excellence while catering to the needs of its employees, students and society at large. A university can become a driving force provided it fulfils the aspirations of its stakeholders by adopting innovative techniques and strategies in its processes, structure and importantly in its academic and administrative functioning. It calls for continuous innovation and development in managing change and in facing complex nature of global academic environment. Keeping this in view, the present paper is an attempt to assess the employee perception towards organizational learning practices prevailing in sample select institution namely, the University of Kashmir. The present study targeted 100 teaching personnel from five faculties/schools of the university. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to gather information from the respondents. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results of the study revealed that employees perceived a favourable attitude towards their organizational learning practices. The findings of the study also revealed that female teaching staff had shown more satisfaction level regarding organizational learning as compared to male teaching staff. On the basis of the research findings, it is stressed that learning organization practices prevailing in sample study institution need to be further enriched and improved, which would help in developing a sound and effective academic institution.*

Keywords: *Learning Organization, Universities, Academic Departments*

INTRODUCTION

Higher educational institutions in this present knowledge-based economy are forced to continuously excel, develop and innovate in order to sustain their survival. They are facing immense pressure to make themselves more competent and dynamic in meeting societal expectations. In this 21st century, their success mostly depends on their ability to manage change and overcome uncertainty. The changing academic scenario around the globe, coupled with advancements in teaching and research, technology transformation, increasing competition and changing aspirations of stakeholders', demands higher educational institutions to become learning organizations that foster change and innovation. A learning organization has the ability to transform and manage change and empower young minds to collectively work towards the attainment of common goals and purpose. Mayo (1994) pointed out that organizational learning is a combination of all the processes, mechanisms and practices undertaken by individuals, or by members of a group with a motive to learn and re-learn. Bowen et al. (2006) focused that organizational learning results in team learning with an emphasis on continuous improvement that leads to achieving strategic advantage. Akhawan and Jafari (2006) shared a similar perspective by highlighting that organizational learning

results in superior performance by involving members of an organization to contribute in attaining organizational objectives. Marquardt (2002) viewed that organizational learning enables institutions to continuously improve their performance with a commitment that leads in developing the capability of thought process for decision-making. Senge (1990) opined that learning organizations focus on creating organizations where people's aspirations are set free, where knowledge is shared, where individuals collectively work together and learn to produce desired results and where new and rational thinking and ideas are nurtured (Mufeed and Mir, 2017). A learning organization enables a learning atmosphere at workplaces by managing knowledge and technology effectively and efficiently. Pedler et al. (1991) pointed out that learning organizations play a crucial role in transforming itself and continuously innovate and facilitates all of its members towards achieving individual as well as organizational goals. Garvin (1993) stressed that the focus of organizational learning is aimed at developing, attaining and sharing knowledge and information with a purpose to modify existing behaviour with new thoughts and reflections. It enables an environment where members of institutions are able to exchange their ideas, thoughts, opinions and are at ease in putting arguments in right perspectives without any fear of criticism.

In this regard, the role of universities is of paramount importance in inculcating a sense of positive thinking and rational decision-making among institutional members. A university provides a platform for its employees to learn, understand and adapt the complexity of academic operations, which overall helps in enabling a productive learning environment in its workplace.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The organizations need to adopt appropriate and adequate measures in order to cope with change. It calls for adopting features of learning organizations, which focus on making organizations and institutions adaptive to changes in the environment. The competitive nature of academic institutions has resulted in preparing practitioners and policy makers to devise strategies and take adequate measures towards enhancing their academic as well as administrative functioning. Kim & Abbas (2010) and Neal (2011) stressed that academic institutions could develop as learning organizations if they focused on coping with change and imbibing innovative thinking so as to survive in this complex academic environment. To develop as a learned academic institution service delivery of academic staff plays a critical role that needs to be improved and enriched. Performance of academic staff is pivotal for nurturing individuals' talent and helps in preparing them to be market ready. It calls for academic leaders, deans of faculties, heads of department and other officers to provide a productive and competitive environment in their institutions where knowledge is disseminated, innovation is promoted, change is facilitated and individual's skills are nurtured. Franklin et al., (1998) concluded that universities are distinctively privileged to explore, apply and advance the concept of learning organizations in their own ways. Hsiao & Chang (2011) highlighted that educational institutions as learning organizations will facilitate a continuous process of learning with a stress on adding new insight to thinking and creating new opportunities for innovation and development.

Mufeed and Mir (2017) opined that "learning organizations play a pivotal role in transforming itself and to continuously innovate and facilitate all of its members towards achieving individual as well as organizational goals". Allameh and Moghaddami (2010) viewed that organizational learning is a vital factor for institutions to attain competitive advantage. Ferguson and Metz (2003) pointed that it is very vital for academic institutions to transform and develop as a centre of excellence by continuously enriching its services and functions. Higher academic institutions are expected to perform those functions and operations that yield better results and have wider applicability and acceptance among all its stakeholders. In this regard, universities are considered an important pillar for nation building; thus, the individual roles of students and academicians need to inculcate

positive thinking and continuous innovation.

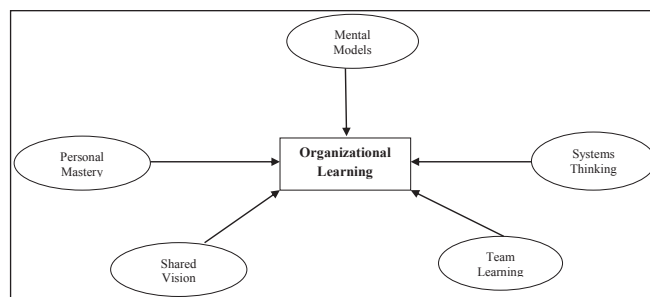


Fig. 1: Learning Organization Variables

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

On the basis of review of literature, the following objectives have been laid down for the present study:

- to examine the perception of teaching staff regarding organizational learning practices prevailing in sample select institution,
- to compare the perception of male and female teaching staff towards organizational learning,
- to analyze the perception of employees regarding organizational learning across age and
- to draw conclusions and suggest measures for enhancing organization learning in sample select institution.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Keeping in view the previously mentioned objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated for the present study:

- The perceptions of employees regarding organizational learning differ across gender.
- The perceptions of employees towards organizational learning differ across age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is aimed to gather responses of teaching staff working in the University of Kashmir regarding organizational learning practices. The questionnaires were distributed among 100 teaching staff from five faculties/schools of the university. Out of the total 100 questionnaires distributed, responses were gathered from only 79 teaching staff with a usable response rate of 79%. Simple random sampling technique was employed to gather information from the respondents. Questions from Senge (1991) theory, comprising five elements on organizational learning, were adapted and adopted in the present study. The present study

includes 32 female and 47 male teaching staff. The reliability of constructs of organizational learning varied from .72 to .81. The data whatsoever collected were analysed using SPSS 20.0. Version. Descriptive statistics such as mean score, % mean score, Std. deviation, and frequency were used to study the employee’s perception with respect to organizational learning. Inferential statistics such as Pearson’s correlation was employed for hypotheses testing purposes.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Perceptions of Teaching Personnel Towards Organizational Learning

Constructs	Teaching Staff (N= 79)
Personal Mastery	3.19
Mental Models	3.22
Shared Vision	3.27
Team Learning	3.32
Systems Thinking	3.25
Organization Learning	3.25

Source: Data compiled by the author for the present study.

Table 1 presents the teaching staff’s perception regarding organizational learning prevailing in sample study institution. The results of the study reveal that teaching staff of sample select institution showed favourable attitude towards

organizational learning with overall mean score of (3.25). The highest mean score perceived by teaching personnel regarding organizational learning constructs was depicted towards team learning (3.32). It was followed by shared vision (3.27), systems thinking (3.25), and mental models (3.22) while as least mean score was found with respect to personal mastery (3.19).

Table 2 (A): Perception of Teaching Personnel Towards Organizational Learning Across Gender

Construct	Gender	(N)	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Organizational Learning	Male	47	3.28	0.83
	Female	32	3.22	0.75

Source: Data compiled by the author for the present study

As is evident from Table 2 (A), the male staff showed higher satisfaction with mean score of (3.28) towards organizational learning as compared to female staff with mean score of (3.22) in sample select institution. To know whether the difference in respondent group ‘gender’ is statistically significant or not, an independent samples test was employed. The results showed that the difference in the perception of female and male staff towards organizational learning is statistically significant as the *p* value is less than .05 (Table 2 (B)). Therefore, hypotheses 1 is empirically supported and hence accepted.

Table 2 (B): Independent Samples Test (Gender)

Construct	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference
Organizational Learning	.544	.591	1.355	77	.042	0.60167

Source: Data compiled by the author for the present study

Table 3: Perception of Teaching Personnel Towards Organizational Learning Across Age

Factor	Dependent Variable	Group	(N)	Mean Score	ANOVA	Sig*
Designation	Organizational Learning	30-40	36	3.20	3.455	.022*
		40-50	18	3.26		
		50 above	25	3.29		

Note: **p* < .05

Source: Data compiled by the author for the present study.

Table 3 examines the difference in the perception of employees regarding organizational learning on the basis of variable age. It is revealed from Table 3 that employees who are above 50 years’ age are having highest perception towards organizational learning with mean score of (3.29) while as employees in between 30 and 40 years’ age group showed least satisfaction towards organizational learning with mean score of (3.20).

The perceptual differences of respondent employees regarding organizational learning is statistically significant when the differences were examined on the basis of age factor (ANNOVA = 3.455; *p* < .05). Hence, hypothesis 2 is accepted, indicating that there exists a significant difference among academic staff across age.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Mastery	3.19	0.73	(.74) ^a				
Mental Models	3.22	0.64	.482**	(.72) ^a			
Shared Vision	3.27	0.79	.507**	.366**	(.77) ^a		
Team Learning	3.32	0.70	.400**	.656**	.449**	(.80) ^a	
Systems Thinking	3.25	0.65	.471**	.429**	.422**	.488**	(.81) ^a

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson's correlation analysis is used to examine the inter correlation between variables of organizational learning (Table 4). It is revealed that there exist moderate to high-level positive correlations between variables of present study at 0.01 significance level. The highest correlation among the variables exists between team learning and mental models at .656. The lowest correlation was recorded between shared vision and mental models at .366. Overall, the table depicts that there prevails a positive correlation among organizational learning practices under study.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Organizational learning is continuously being debated in organizations irrespective of their nature of work and size. The success factor in today's competitive work environment demands institution to be proactive and effective in managing change and uncertainty. The institutions are in race to outperform their competitors by creating a strategic advantage through continuously learning and innovating. Education institutions are also undergoing a massive transformation from being a disseminator of knowledge to developing human resources who would become leaders for the 21st century. In this regard, the role of university becomes all the more critical as it acts as a catalyst in nurturing the talent to higher levels where they can learn, grow and develop as an institution of excellence.

Keeping the above in view, the present paper aimed at to examine the perception of teaching personnel regarding organizational learning prevailing in sample select institution. On the basis of research findings, it can be concluded that teaching personnel of sample select institution have shown favourable attitude towards organizational learning practices. Moreover, the present study also attempted to analyse and compare the perception of teaching staff regarding organizational learning across age and gender. The findings of the study revealed that male teaching personnel have shown slightly higher satisfaction level towards their institution's organizational learning practices as compared to female teaching personnel. Further, results of the study also highlighted that older teaching personnel viewed organizational learning practices more favourably

as compared to younger teaching personnel indicating that age and gender has an effect on organizational learning in sample select institution in the perceptions of teaching staff regarding transformational leadership and organizational learning. Though results of the study have shown positive perception of teaching personnel regarding organizational learning, it is suggested that organizational learning practices need to be further enriched and improved in order to enhance institutions delivery and overall performance.

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