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Learning organizations: Shifting from teaching to learning

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Abstract

A learning organization is one that seeks to create its own future; that assumes learning is an ongoing and creative process for its members; and one that develops, adapts, and transforms itself in response to the needs and aspirations of people, both inside and outside itself (Navran Associates Newsletter 1993).

Shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning can create a more interactive and engaging learning environment for teachers and learners. This new environment also involves a change in the roles of both teachers and students. The role of the teacher will change from knowledge transmitter to that of learning facilitator, knowledge guide, knowledge navigator and co-learner with the student. The new role does not diminish the importance of the teacher but requires new knowledge and skills. Students will have greater responsibility for their own learning in this environment as they seek out, find, synthesize, and share their knowledge with others. ICTs provide powerful tools to support the shift to student-centred learning and the new roles of teachers and students. For creating such optimistic environment learning organizations could play a key role. The learning organizations are not ready to eatfast.

For coming true this dream this study paper explores into Concept of Learning Organization developed by Peter Senge, its five disciplines, feature of learning organization, a learner centred teaching model along with its dimensions which could effectively assist any teaching institution in transforming as learning organization.

Keywords: Peter Senge's concept of Learning Organization, Shifting from teaching to learning, learner centred teaching model

Introduction

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the best of us walk about well-wadded with stupidity. (George Eliot, Middlemarch)

Our education system is at a stand point of educational innovation. The evolution of innovation strategies and describes the range of challenges currently facing educational reformers. These challenges — the societal paradigm shift, changing local contexts, the expansion of children's learning needs — place great demands on the school improvement strategies employed by educational reformers. Basing such analysis and advice on best contemporary research and practice, this study paper reflects on outlines strategies that will assist educational reformers to more effectively develop the educational institutes in coming years.

There is a strong emphasis on creating 'knowledge for action', not knowledge for its own sake (Argyris 1993). Further, it recognises that organizations are part of complex social systems over which they cannot exert full control. Rather than trying to isolate itself or protect itself from its environment, an organization ought to be closely attuned to it, embrace the opportunities that changing circumstances can offer, and, as more recent theorists have urged, 'ride the wave' (Duesterberg and London 2001; Merron 1997). Another aspect of the pragmatic orientation is that learning organization theorists, unlike many of their academic counterparts, have also developed an array of techniques and tools for doing diagnostics, examining patterns of behavior in organizations, and engaging in 'transformative thinking' (Wycoff *et al.* 1995).

This approach is normative in the sense that there is a strong set of underlying values that inform practice within a learning organization, which include a commitment to:

1. Valuing different kinds of knowledge and learning styles and creating a 'learning environment' so that each organizational member can realize his/her full potential;
2. Encouraging dialogue and the exploration of different perspectives and experiences to generate creative thinking;

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3. Working collectively and breaking down traditional barriers or blinders within organizations so as to release creative potential;
4. Fostering leadership potential throughout the organization and reducing distinctions, such as those between management and staff, between strategists and implementers, between support and professional staff, and so on.

There is also a strong element of 'self-improvement' found in the literature, whereby individuals in a learning organization are not only in an ongoing quest for work-related knowledge, but also for self-knowledge. One aspect of this is the need to understand their own 'mental models'—deeply ingrained assumptions about how the world works, what motivates people, cause-and-effect relationships—and to be open to challenges regarding these assumptions.

Learning is a systems-level phenomenon because it stays within the organization, even if individuals change. One of the assumptions is that organizations learn as they produce. Learning is as much a task as the production and delivery of goods and services. It should not be implied that organizations should sacrifice the speed and quality of production in order to learn, but, rather, that production systems be viewed as learning systems. If learning is a function of learning outcome, then three learning-related factors are important for their success:

1. Well-developed core competencies that serve as launch points for new products and services.
2. An attitude that supports continuous improvement in the business's value-added chain.
3. The ability to fundamentally renew or revitalize.

These factors identify some of the qualities of an effective learning organization that diligently pursues a constantly enhanced knowledge base.

Senge (1990) defines the Learning Organization as the organization "in which you cannot *not* learn because learning is so insinuated into the fabric of life." Also, he defines Learning Organization as "a group of people continually enhancing their capacity to create what they want to create." I would define Learning Organization as an "Organization with an ingrained philosophy for anticipating, reacting and responding to change, complexity and uncertainty." The concept of Learning Organization is increasingly relevant given the increasing complexity and uncertainty of the organizational environment. As Senge (1990) remarks: "The rate at which organizations learn may become the only sustainable source of competitive advantage."

McGill *et al.* (1992) define the Learning Organization as "a company that can respond to new information by altering the very "programming" by which information is processed and evaluated."

The Fieldbook explains that anyone who wants to be part of a learning organization must first go through a personal change (Senge, Kleiner *et al.*, 1994). This means that if some members of the group like to tell people what to do and are too busy to listen, they must be willing to change themselves. Senge and his colleagues consult with organizations, where they teach an elaborate set of personal-awareness exercises with names like dialogue, the container, and the ladder of inference.

Five disciplines introducing learning into an organization:

Peter Senge's seminal works, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, and *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a*

Learning Organization, describe five disciplines that must be mastered when introducing learning into an organization:

1. **Systems Thinking** - the ability to see the big picture, and to distinguish patterns instead of conceptualizing change as isolated events. Systems thinking needs the other four disciplines to enable a learning organization to be realized. There must be a paradigm shift - from being unconnected to interconnected to the whole, and from blaming our problems on something external to a realization that how we operate, our actions, can create problems (Senge 1990,10).
2. **Personal Mastery** - begins "by becoming committed to lifelong learning," and is the spiritual cornerstone of a learning organization. Personal Mastery involves being more realistic, focusing on becoming the best person possible, and striving for a sense of commitment and excitement in our careers to facilitate the realization of potential (Senge 1990,11).
3. **Mental Models** - must be managed because they do prevent new powerful insights and organizational practices from becoming implemented. The process begins with self-reflection; unearthing deeply held belief structures and generalizations, and understanding how they dramatically influence the way we operate in our own lives. Until there is realization and a focus on openness, real change can never take place (Senge 1990,12).
4. **Building Shared Visions** - visions cannot be dictated because they always begin with the personal visions of individual employees, who may not agree with the leader's vision. What is needed is a genuine vision that elicits commitment in good times and bad, and has the power to bind an organization together. As Peter Senge contends, "[b]uilding shared vision fosters a commitment to the long term" (Senge 1990,12).
5. **Team Learning** - is important because modern organizations operate on the basis of teamwork, which means that organizations cannot learn if team members do not come together and learn. It is a process of developing the ability to create desired results; to have a goal in mind and work together to attain it (Senge 1990,13).

A learning organization does away with the mindset that it is only senior management who can and do all the thinking for an entire corporation. Learning organizations challenge all employees to tap into their inner resources and potential, in hopes that they can build their own community based on principles of liberty, humanity, and a collective will to learn.

Shifting From Teaching to Learning

Student-centred learning puts more responsibility on the learners for their own learning. It involves students in more decision-making processes, and they learn by doing, rather than just by listening and performing meaningless tasks which are often not in context and therefore 'unreal' to them. Because learning becomes more active (rather than passively listening to the teacher), it becomes more memorable: because it is personalised, and relevant to the students' own lives and experiences, it brings language 'alive', and makes it relevant to the real world.

It is nothing new. Many of our teaching methods are already student-centred.

Features of Learning Organization

When planning more student-centered lessons it is useful to remember the following:

Ask don't tell: always try to elicit information, ideas, and answers from the students. They are not empty vessels waiting to be filled by the all-knowing teacher. They have knowledge and experiences of life, as well as language which can contribute greatly to the learning process. The more they contribute, the more they are likely to remember. We should never underestimate the ability of our students.

Focus on students' experience and interests: if the teacher chooses the topic, or just follows the course book, the students may not be interested. If, however, teachers use the course book as a base for then moving on to practice activities relating to the students' personal lives and areas of interest and experience (personalization), the students are more likely to become involved in the lesson, thereby remembering more.

Communication over accuracy: the main reason for students learning a language is to be able to communicate with other speakers of that language. In reality they will probably speak English with more *non-native* speakers from the region than with native speakers, and the ultimate goal is to be able to understand and respond to each other. Students therefore need opportunities to practice communicating in English without the constant fear of making mistakes hanging over them. If you feel the need to correct their mistakes, don't interrupt their conversations, make notes and give feedback later.

Learning by doing: the more actively involved students are in their own learning, the more they are likely to remember what they learn.

Students have choices and make decisions about learning. Group work requires negotiation and decision making – working together towards a common goal.

Focus on confidence building for real-world skills. By developing communicative competence, language again becomes more 'real' and part of the students' lives.

Encourage interest in English used in the real world. By using authentic materials familiar to the students (magazines, the internet, video, television, letters etc.), students are constantly in touch with the language in an absorbing way.

Tasks are open-ended, i.e. there is more than one possible answer. Traditional grammar based tasks are either right or wrong and test only one skill at a time. They are generally unimaginative, often in the form of multiple choice answers (so the students have a 25% chance of being right without actually knowing the answer at all) and totally divorced from 'real world' situations. Open-ended tasks are wider in their focus and involve a variety of language skills.

High exposure to English through the use of authentic materials again: students may be set homework involving research undertaken using the internet or other English language reference sources.

Students learn more than language. They are also encouraged to think critically and develop problem-solving skills through more creative tasks and group work.

Characteristics of Schools As Learning Organizations

- Encourages cooperative learning atmosphere.
- Have vision and goals that could meet with challenges within learning environment.
- Leads the school towards development at every phase as learning organization.
- Collect, analyse, and synthesize the data appropriately for the purpose.
- Aware of institutional information and processes for generating new thinking.
- Share ideas and information at possible times with relevant people..
- Receive feedback about learning and its outcome.
- Keep concentrating on practice carried out.
- Develop cooperative organizational culture.
- Work as "open systems" belonging to the outside environment, including positive dimensions.

"In organizing the learning process, educational institutions shall:

- (1) provide substance and arrange activities in line with the learners' interests and aptitudes, bearing in mind individual differences;
- (2) provide training in thinking process, management, how to face various situations and application of knowledge for obviating and solving problems;
- (3) organize activities for learners to draw from authentic experience... enable learners to think critically and acquire the reading habit and continuous thirst for knowledge;
- (5) ... both learners and teachers may learn together from different types of teaching-learning media and other sources of knowledge;
- (6) enable individuals to learn at all times and in all places."

(Section 24, National Education Act of 1999)

However, this change is not simply something we have to make because the Government says so. It has major pedagogical benefits, which are particularly relevant to language learning. In this paper I shall attempt to define student-centred learning, specifically features that differentiate it from a more traditional approach to language teaching. We shall also touch on the changing roles of teachers and students, and identify some ways of creating suitable materials for the new approach. Finally, we shall examine some of the anticipated problems previously expressed by our teaching colleagues and attempt to offer some solutions to those problems.

A Learner-centered teaching model.

When the focus becomes student learning, colleges attain higher rates of student retention and have better prepared graduates than those students who were more traditionally trained (Matlin, 2002; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002).

Weimer (2002) described five learner-centered practice areas that need to change to achieve learner-centered teaching: the Function of Content, the Role of the Instructor, the Responsibility for Learning, the Processes and Purposes of Assessment, and the Balance of Power.

- The functions of the content in learner-centered teaching include building a strong knowledge foundation and to develop learning skills and learner self-awareness.
- The roles of the instructor should focus on student learning. The roles are facilitative rather than didactic.
- The responsibility for learning shifts from the instructor to the students. The instructor creates learning

environments that motivate students to accept responsibility for learning.

- The processes and purposes of assessment shift from only assigning grades to include constructive feedback and to assist with improvement. Learner-centered teaching uses assessment as a part of the learning process.
- The balance of power shifts so that the instructor shares some decisions about the course with the students such that the instructor and the students collaborate on course policies and procedures.

While Weimer's model appeals to faculty, they find that is less pragmatic in describing ways to implement change (Wright, 2006). Since these five practices are broad abstract categories, they do not identify specific learner-centered behaviors for many instructors. To assist faculty, I defined each practice into specific components and incremental steps between instructor-centered and learner-centered teaching. Incremental steps allow instructors to make changes gradually over time. These incremental steps define a manageable transition process from instructor-centered to learner-centered teaching.

Interactive presentations and workshops on one or more specific aspects of learner-centered teaching.

- Students taking responsibility for learning
- How you assess your students will impact how and what they learn
- Aligning courses in terms of their objectives, teaching learning methods and assessments
- Organizing content to be taught through organizing schemes
- Implementing Learner-centered approaches in your teaching

Conclusion

Emergent concept of Learning Organisation (LO) appears as a promising alternative. It contains potential to provide transforming changes in firms even to reconceptualize a business organisation (Leitão & Martins, 1998). While representing a hope for innovation in organisational theory it also represents a risk, if its development is limited to the uncritical modernist functional assumptions, that are unable to discover existing internal contradictions between a substantive rationality – originated from Senge's Buddhist influence – and the instrumental rationality hypertrophy which has been provoking increasing moral and ethical problems in business world. Without a paradigmatically shift in cosmovision and thinking, this LO concept might be lost as a praxis and might return to the utopia field so, it's important to investigate its origins.

Senge assumes that his conceptual pre-system - the "five disciplines" - will be apprehended during the action itself, during the pilot projects practice. From an academic point of view, here defended, this involves considerable risk in the measure that this proposal gets to be considered theoretically premature. We are convinced that LO conception as it is available in literature, has no conditions for immediate application by consultants, especially by the ones that were not their authors, because this matter require more empirical research and analysis.

It seems promising for organisational research -considering this stagnation environment where organisational research and particularly the organisational change theories are immersed in. Moreover, for recuperating the ethics sense -inherent to a substantive rationality which business world is close to forget. As teachers we should always remember the 'Wise Old Owl':

The wise old owl lived in an oak
The more he saw, the less he spoke
The less he spoke, the more he heard
Why can't we all be like that bird?

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