

A RESEARCH ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CAPACITY IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

The concept of organizational learning is explored by academicians and organizational managers to solve problems related with rapid changes in business environment, innovation needs and qualified human resources necessities. Organizational learning is defined as processes and set of constructs which contribute people to acquire new knowledge, participate in understandings and continuously improve themselves and organizational outputs. In this context, academicians and organizations are increasingly engaged in empowering organizational learning capacity and creating learning organizations.

The objective of this research is to measure and understand organizational learning capacity in public hospitals. The research was carried out in public university hospitals in Diyarbakır Province. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data. Data were analyzed by correlation, t test, F test after reliability analyze. Our findings indicate that there are five factors affecting organizational learning capacity of public hospitals. The results are evaluated and some implications for managers are given to increase learning capacity of public hospitals.

Keywords: Organizational learning, Learning organizations, Organizational learning capability

1. Introduction

Organizational learning, learning capacity and learning organization are management concepts that academicians have long been thinking about (Huysman, 2000). Learning is seen vital for organization's success and sustainability (Dodgson, 1993). Today organizations need to learn more than ever as they need (Garvin et al., 2008). One of the main reasons of this is the fact that organizational learning is accepted as a remedy for problems caused by bureaucratic and hierarchical organization (Huysman, 2000). According to Senge and Sterman especially after 1990s academicians and managers discovered organizational learning as a solution for rapid changes in the world (Senge and Sterman, 1990). Chiva and Alegre stated that rapid changes in the environment, innovation needs and increase in the importance of human resource for organizations are the main causes that make organizational learning more important. For this reasons organizations and academicians increasingly focused on strengthening organizational learning capacity and making learning organizations (Chiva and Alegre, 2008). In this context organizational learning will be evaluated.

2. Learning in organizations

There is no agreement within disciplines as to what learning is and its occurrence (Dodgson, 1993). In the literature discussions about organizational learning focused on who learns (Örtenblad, 2001) or whether organizational learning was an aggregate of individual learning or more than individual learning (Mark et al., 2000).

According to Örtenblad there are three alternative ways of an organization's learning. In an organization, whether an individual learns or organization learns. An organization learns like an individual or in a collective way (Örtenblad, 2001).

Individual approach in learning thinks that learning is an individual phenomenon and learning occurs when an individual learns (Chiva and Alegre, 2008). Learning in an individual level means an individual's access to information, perception, understanding and interpretation of this information, getting experiences with this information and changing his/her behavior toward the results he/she reached (Koçel, 2003). According to Kim individual learning is very important for organizational learning. Because, organizations learn only by means of their members. But organizational learning doesn't depend on any specific individuals. Individuals can learn without organizations and all individual learning doesn't have organizational consequences (Kim, 1993).

Learning at organizational level means transforming understanding and values which is reached at group level into true system, method, procedure and expected behavioral forms for the organization and being open for the participation at relevant levels (Koçel, 2003). Researcher such as Argyris and Schon (1978) and Hedberg (1981) argue that organizations can learn like individuals (Örtenblad, 2001).

According to Hedberg (1981) although learning occurs through individuals it is not true to assert that organizational learning is a cumulative of the organization's members. Because organization's members or leaders come and go, but memory, behaviors, cognitive maps, norms and values of organizations are stored (Mark et al., 2000). According to West if learning is accepted as an individual phenomenon then individuals leave the organization and they will take what they learned with them and organization will not benefit this information (West, 1994).

According to Popper and Lipshitz to evaluate organization as individual make the organizational learning and an organization's learning the same although they are quite different (Popper and Lipshitz, 2004). According to Cook and Yanow organizations is not the same as individuals, as cognitive approach asserted. Organization learns collectively. Learning is not a cognitive process but a cultural process (Cook and Yanow, 1993). Organizational learning is also seen as an institutionalizing process through which an individual's knowledge becomes organizational knowledge (Huysman, 2000).

3. Organizational learning

Although organizational learning is a topic of research for a half century, in the last decade it has developed rapidly and become a topic of discussion (Koç, 2009). There are several reasons behind the popularity of concept of learning. According to Dodgson one of the reasons is the concept of learning organization. Learning organization is considered as a real model for the large organizations which see learning for a core competitive advantage (Dodgson, 1993). Second reason is necessity of organizational learning because of rapid changes in the organization's environment (Chiva et al., 2007). Technological changes, complexities in new products development, shortening of product life circle, transforming into lean productions system, just in time production and computer aided production are some example of changes in the environment. The third reason is analytical value of the concept for academicians (Dodgson, 1993).

Organizational learning is affected by both internal and external factors. General objective of organizational learning is to provide adaptation and develop effectiveness for the organization (Dodgson, 1993). Organizational learning is related to actions and experiences of organization's members (Goh and Ryan, 2002). Individual aims such as self-realization and role of human being affect learning. Structures and strategies, which are built purposefully by the organizations, encourage learning. Coordination of learning activities by the organization has a central role for shaping process and identifying consequences of learning (Dodgson, 1993).

Researchers find the literature of organizational learning as too ambiguous (Goh and Ryan, 2002; Örtenblad, 2004). Organizational learning is generally defined as a process (Senge and Sterman, 1990; Sun, 2003; Huysman, 2000; Chiva and Alegre, 2008). In this process, an organization structure knowledge and restructure existent knowledge (Huysman, 2000). Organizational learning process is a collective learning and development. It aim at making a learning organization (Sun, 2003).

According to Edmondson and Moingeon organizational learning is a process where organization's members use variables to direct actively their behavior in order to adapt to organization. Adaptation is a reaction of organization for change to the external environment in term of both opportunities and problems (Edmondson and Moingeon, 2004). Organizational learning is a set of processes and structures and a management philosophy, not a program or a project, to help people create new knowledge, share their understanding, and continuously develop themselves and the output of the organization (Solomon, 1994). Dibella et al. define organizational learning as capacity or processes in an organization to maintain or develop performance based on experience. This activity involves knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge utilization (Dibella et al., 1996).

Örtenblad categorizes organizational learning into two types: old (traditional) and new. Old organizational learning (Kim, Argyris and Schon, Huber, March, Hedberg) is a quite common view of organizational learning. It implies that an individual learns as an agent for the organization. However, for a valid organizational learning, the knowledge must be stored in the memory of the organization such as routines, rules, procedures, documents and culture. In this

type both the organization as an individual and the individuals learn. The new type of organizational learning (Cook and Yanov, Brown and Duguid, Wanger) rejects both cognitive learning of individuals and organization as an individual. Learning is not an acquisition of information, but participation. Neither individual nor organizations learn as individuals. Therefore, learning is a collective action (Örtenblad, 2001).

Organizational learning is a process where learning takes place and a learning organization is an organizational (generally an ideal) form become at the end of this process (Koç, 2009; Örtenblad, 2001; Sun and Scott, 2003; Huysman, 2000; Garvin et al., 2008).

4. Organizational learning capability and its dimensions

Organizational learning capacity was defined as the organizational and managerial characteristics that facilitate the organizational learning process or allow an organization to learn (Chiva et al., 2007). The concept of organizational learning capability gives importance of the facilitating factors for organizational learning or the organizational propensity to learn (Chiva and Alegre, 2008; Chiva et al., 2007). Organizational learning can be increased by improving current capability or developing new capability. New capability necessitates changes in cultures. However, current capability needs development in current culture. Learning capability can be enforced through both change and development in culture (Dibella et al. 1996).

Organizational learning capability scale developed by Chiva et al. aims at identifying value of organizational learning. This scale categorizes organizational learning into five dimensions. These are experimentation, risk taking, interaction with the external environment, dialogue and participative decision-making (Chiva et al., 2007; Chiva and Alegre, 2008; Aydoğan, et al. 2011). Organizational learning depends on understanding culture. So dialogue is seen very necessary to understand the culture and sub cultures. That is why dialogue is main element of organizational transformation (Schein, 1993). The five conceptual dimensions of organizational learning capability (Figure 1) are defined below.

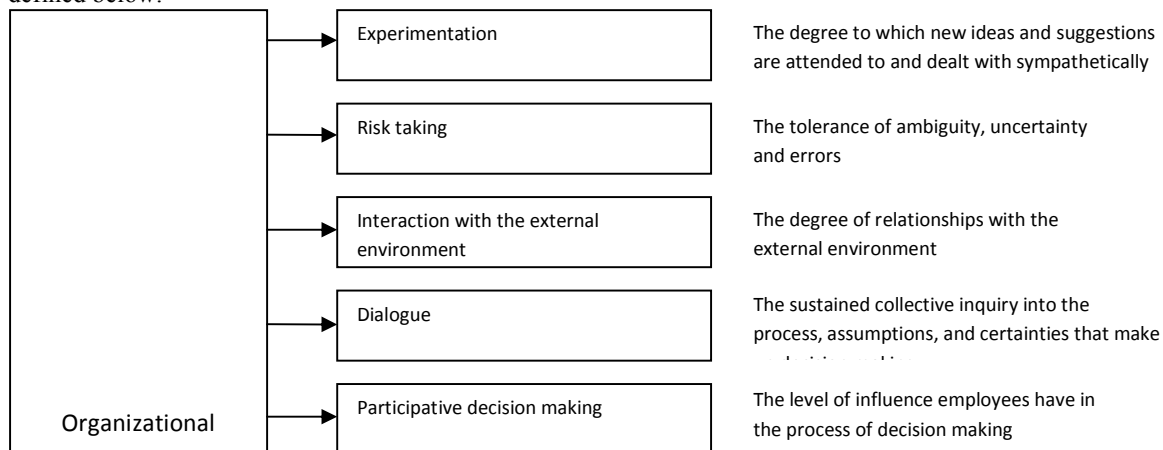


Figure 1. The five conceptual dimensions of organizational learning capability

Ricardo Chiva, Joaquin Alegre and Rafael Lapiedra (2007), "Measuring Organizational Learning Capability among the Workforce", *International Journal of Manpower*, 28(3): 224-242.

These five facilitating factors or organizational learning capabilities are evaluated as necessary for being a learning organization. The higher dimension scores means the more capability to learn (Chiva and Alegre, 2008).

5. The purpose, scope and method of the research

5.1. The purpose and scope

The objective of this research is to measure and understand organizational learning capability in public hospitals. The research was carried out in public university hospitals in Diyarbakir Province. Organizational learning capability was measured by a scale developed by Ricardo Chiva. 600 people works in public university hospitals in Diyarbakir city center. 400 of them were randomly selected and questionnaires were distributed. We received a total of 319 completed questionnaires. 63 questionnaires were excluded because of incompleteness. 256 questionnaires were included for analyses. The valid response rate was 64 percent.

5.2. The Method

A structured questionnaire was used to gather data. Organizational learning capability scale was developed Ricardo Chiva and used by Aydoğan, (2011) in public hospitals. The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, there were 7 questions about demographic characteristics of participants. In the second part of the questionnaire, there were 14 questions about organizational learning capability. The scale was first subjected to reliability analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability. The Cronbach's alpha value (0.91) was satisfactory. The data were processed using SPSS 18.

6. The Findings and Analysis

In this part, we analyzed our findings by correlation analyses, t test and one way anova.

6.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

256 individuals participated in the research. 57% of them are female and 43% of them are male. 57 % of them are married and 43% of them are unmarried. More than half of the participants (53%) have bachelor degree. Most of the participants are young adults. 83 percent of participants are individuals between 20 and 40 ages. 60 % of the participants have less than 11 year's experiences. 47% of participants are nurses and health personnel. 14 % of participants are administrative staff, 9% of them are technicians, and 10% of them are support staff.

6.2. Responses to Organizational Learning Capability Scale

- About receiving support and encouragement when presenting new ideas: the findings shows that most of the participants think that they do not receive support and encouragement when presenting new ideas
- About receiving a favorable response for initiatives. The findings indicates that most of the participants think that they do not receive feed back for their initiative and they do not feel encouraged to generate new ideas.
- About risks in the organization: the findings show that more than half of the participant do not agree that their organization encourage them to take risks.
- About encouraging new approach development for the job: The findings show that more than half of the participants do not agree that they are encouraged to develop new approaches in the work palace.
- About informing employees about development in the organization: The findings indicate that most of the participants agree that their organization inform them about organizational development.
- About systems and procedures for receiving, collating and sharing information: the findings shows that most of the participant think there are no systems and procedures for receiving, collating and sharing information from outside the company.
- About encouraging to interact with the environment: competitors, customers, technological institutes, universities, suppliers etc.: The findings show that most of the participants do not agree that people are encouraged to interact with the environment: competitors, customers, technological institutes, universities, suppliers etc.
- About encouraging to communicate: the findings indicate that most of the employees think that organization encourage them to communicate.
- About free and open communication within work group: the findings indicate that most of the participants agree that there is a free and open communication within work group (clinics, laboratories, services etc.).
- About managers who facilitate communication: the findings show that most of the employees think that their managers do not facilitate communication.
- About cross-functional teamwork: the findings indicate that most of the participants think that cross-functional teamwork is a common practice in their organizations.
- About employees' involvement in decision-making: the findings indicate that most of the participants think that their managers frequently involve employees in important decisions.
- About policy making: the findings show that most of the participants agree that policies are significantly influenced by their view.
- About involving in main company decisions: the findings show that most of the employees feel involved in main company decisions.

6.3. Relationship analysis

6.3.1. Correlation analysis among five factors of organizational learning capability

The five factors or dimensions which affect organizational learning capability are analyzed statistically and results are given below in the Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship among the dimensions of organizational learning capability

Variables		Experimentation	Risk taking	Interaction with the external environment	Dialogue	Participative decision making
Experimentation	Pearson Correlation	1	0,560**	0,592**	0,585**	0,627**
Risk taking	Pearson Correlation	0,560**	1	0,600**	0,533**	0,552**
Interaction with the external environment	Pearson Correlation	0,592**	0,600**	1	0,614**	0,598**
Dialogue	Pearson Correlation	0,585**	0,533**	0,614**	1	0,618**
Participative decision making	Pearson Correlation	0,627**	0,552**	0,598**	0,618**	1
	N	256	256	256	256	256

** Significant at 0.01.

Table 1 indicates that there are positive and statistically significant relationships among the five dimensions of organizational learning capability. The most powerful relationships is between experimentation and participative decision-making ($r=0.627$) the relationship among the dimensions differs between 0.533 and 0.627.

6.3.2. Relationship between dimensions of organizational learning capability and demographic variables

According to results of t test there is no statistically significant relationship between gender groups of participants and dimensions of OLC.

According to results of t test analysis there is a statistically significant relationship between marital status of participants and experimentation dimensions of OLC ($t = 2.058$; $p < 0.05$). In addition, there is a statistically significant relationship between marital status of participants and dialogue dimension of OLC ($t = 2.029$; $p < 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Relationship between marital status and dimensions of OLC (t test)

Dimensions of OLC	Marital status	Mean	sd	t	p
Experimentation	Married	2,699	1,121	2,058	0,041
	Unmarried	2,423	0,977		
Dialogue	Married	2,991	0,947	2,029	0,043
	Unmarried	2,761	0,830		

There is no statistically significant relationship between marital status of participants and other dimensions of OLC. In order to research relationship between age groups and dimensions of OLC F test is carried out. Results of F test are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Relationship between dimensions of OLC and age groups

Age groups		Sum of the squares	sd	Mean Square	F	P
Experimentation	Between groups	11,789	4	2,947	2,649	0,034
	Within groups	279,319	251	1,113		
	Total	291,108	255			

According to F test results there is a statistically significant relationship only between experimentation dimension of OLC and age groups ($F = 2.649$; $p < 0.05$) (Table 3).

Table 4 indicates the relationships between professions of participants and dimensions of OLC.

Table 4. Relationship between professions of participants and dimensions of OLC

Professions of participants \ Dimensions of OLC		Sum of the squares	Mean Square	F	p
Experimentation	Between groups	17,129	4,282	3,923	0,004
	Within groups	273,980	1,092		
	Total	291,108			
Interaction with the external environment	Between groups	10,499	2,625	3,153	0,015
	Within groups	208,974	0,833		
	Total	219,472			

Dialogue	Between groups	11,920	2,980 0,783	3,808	0,005
	Within groups	196,425			
	Total	208,344			

The findings of F test shows that there is statistically significant relationship between professions of participants and experimentations dimension of OLC ($F= 3.923$; $p< 0.05$). There is a statistically significant relationship between professions of participants and interaction with the external environment dimensions of OLC ($F= 3.153$; $p< 0.05$). There is also statistically significant relations between professions of participants and dialogue dimension of OLC ($F = 3.808$; $p< 0.05$). Nevertheless, there are no statistically significant relations between professions of participants and other dimension of OLC.

Table 5 shows the relationships between income level of participants and dimensions of OLC.

Table 5. Relationships between income levels of participants and dimensions of OLC

Income level \ Dimensions of OLC		Sum of the squares	Mean Square	F	P
Interaction with the external environment	Between groups	8,793	2,198	2,619	0,036
	Within groups	210,680	0,839		
	Total	219,472			
Dialogue	Between groups	12,277	3,069	3,929	0,004
	Within groups	196,068	0,781		
	Total	208,344			

F test results indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between income levels of participants and interaction with the external environment dimension of OLC ($F = 2.619$; $p< 0.05$). There is also relationship between income levels of participants and dialogue dimension of OLC ($F = 3.929$; $p< 0.05$). However, there is no relationship between income levels of participants and other dimensions of OLC. Moreover, there are no statistically significant relationships between job tenure and education profile and dimensions of OLC.

7. Conclusion

Our research results show that all dimensions of OLC have a positive and significant relationship each other. The results show that the most powerful relationship is between experimentations and dialogue (63%). We can say that if management support new ideas that can increase the communication level among the incumbents in the organization. Our finding indicates that some demographic variables have significant relationship with some dimensions of OLC. There is a positive and significant relationship between marital status and dialogue dimension of OLC. One can say that communication in the family can affect the dialogue in the organization. There is also a positive and statistically significant relationship between age groups of incumbents and experimentations dimension of OLC.

There is a positive relationship between professions of incumbents and experimentations dimension of OLC. One can say that level of experimentations changes according to professions of incumbents. There are positive relationships between professions of incumbents and interaction with the external environment and dialogue dimensions of OLC. There are also positive relationships between income levels of incumbents and interaction with the external environment and dialogue dimensions of OLC.

Our findings indicate that education profile and job tenure of incumbents do not have any effects on dimensions of OLC.

As a conclusion, we can say that organizational learning capability is related with top managements support to encourage incumbents to develop new ideas, take risk, participate in decision-making, and have relationship both inside and outside of company. It is more than individual initiative, because individual initiative should also be supported in order to facilitate learning.

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