AUTHOR(S):

TITLE:

YEAR:

Publisher citation:

OpenAIR citation:

Publisher copyright statement:

This is the _____ version of a work originally published by _____
(ISBN _____; eISBN _____; ISSN _____).

Building a Competitive Public Sector with Knowledge Management Strategy

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BUSINESS SCIENCE
Reference
An Imprint of IGI Global

Chapter 5

Building a Supportive Culture for Sustained Organisational Learning in Public Sectors

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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 require-ment 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 counter-productive. (Kim, 1993, p.37)

Argyris (1995) says learning occurs when-ever 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 organisa-tional learning has certain limitations in public sector due to state interference, formalised rules and procedures, negative attitude of employees towards organisational learning, lack of aware-ness, 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 knowl-edge 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 en-able 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 foster-ing 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 inhibi-tors of organisational learning in public sector organizations.
- Suggesting an approach for building a sup-portive culture for sustained organisational learning in public sectors.

BACKGROUND

Concept of Organisational Learning

Organisations are operating in a more turbulent, fast changing and fluxing environment than ever before (Styhre, Josephson & Knauseder, 2004). Organisational learning has become an effective response to phenomena that are generally difficult to manage like globalisation, environmental change, discontinuity, uncertainty and complexity (Almahamid, 2010; Teare & Pantin, 2002). While, organisational learning is a developing concept in public sectors, organisational learning may happen consciously or unconsciously in all organisations as pronounced by Kim (1993).

Organisational learning is considered as the process through which a knowledge base of permanent or temporary organisations is enhanced (Knausederet al., 2007). The result of this process will be reflected in theories in use, shared mental models, information databases, formalised procedures and routines and formal cultural models that guide behaviour of the organisation (Salter and Narver, 1995). Argyris and Schon (1978) noted that organisational learning occurs when the individual members of the organisation detect the discrepancy between actual and expected results, and try to correct the errors or challenge the underlying assumptions. Hence, learning should be initially encouraged at the individual levels (i.e. employees) of the organization and advanced to team and organisaional levels. Hence, organisational learning is more than the sum of the learning of its individual members which encompasses collective learning including knowledge acquisition, sharing and utilisation of both individually held and commonly shared knowledge (Pham and Swierczek, 2006; Nevis, Dibella, and Gould, 1995). Organisational learning is hence closely related to knowledge management activities. In fact, Huber (1991) puts forward four stages of an organisational learning process as briefed below.

1. **Knowledge Acquisition:** The process by which knowledge is obtained.
2. **Information Distribution:** The process by which information from different sources is shared.
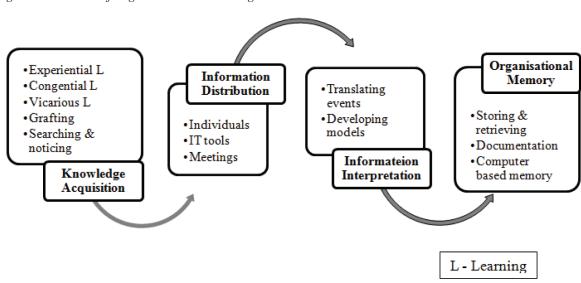3. **Information Interpretation:** The process by which distributed information is

Figure 1. Process of organisational learning

given one or more commonly understood interpretations.

4. **Organisational Memory:** The means by which knowledge is stored for future use.

Figure 1 depicts these four processes and different means that could be used to facilitate each step.

Chang and Lee (2007) and Schein (2010) suppose that while encouraging employees to learn and follow above learning processes, it is necessary for the existence of an organisational culture to support organisational learning, so that it is viable to acquire, improve, transfer and store the required knowledge easily. In fact, the process of learning highly depends on the quality of the culture (Argyris, 1999) and it must ultimately be made part of the culture (Kondalkar, 2009). Precisely, a supporting culture is required to facilitate organizational learning despite other requirements such as organisation structure (Hong, 1999), committed leadership (Ellinger, Watkins &Bostrom, 2000; Pham &Swierczek, 2006) and technology (Almahamid, 2010). Hence, it is inevitable to draw the attention towards the aspects of organisational culture.

Concept of Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is defined in many ways by several scholars as given below:

- A cognitive framework consisting of attitudes, values, behavioural norms and expectations shared by organisational members or a set of basic assumptions shared by members of an organisation (Greenberg & Baron, 2008).
- A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration which has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to per-

ceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2010).

- The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. It is a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the samesocial environment which is where it was learned (G. Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010).

In sum, Hofstede et al. (2010) and Schein (1990) stress that culture is learned, not inherited because it is derived from one's social environment and not from one's genes. Figure 2 depicts a generic framework of organisational culture.

Figure 2 illustrates the basic three levels of culture identified by Schein (2010). In this, hidden values, beliefs, and assumptions are shown in two levels which operate beneath the surface of organisational behaviour while the outer level is referred as artifacts through which culture is visible. Some studies have found that these values, beliefs and assumptions influence organisational learning process, either fostering or inhibiting it (Skerlavaj, Indihar, Skrinjar, & Dimovski, 2007; Valle, Valencia, Jimenez, & Caballero, 2011). Therefore, the analysis of a present culture of an organisation to identify to what extent it has characteristics of a learning culture is vital to promote organisational learning.

Characteristics of Learning Culture

Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) proposed certain characteristics of a learning culture as explained below.

1. **Promote Inquiry and Dialogue:** Reasoning skills of employees to express their views and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others; whether culture support questioning, feedback, and experimentation.

Figure 2. Organisational culture framework
Adopted from Cheung et al. (2010, p. 34)

2. **Empower People Toward a Collective Vision:** People involved in setting and implementing a joint vision; responsibility is given to decision making so that people are motivated to learn toward what they are held accountable to do.

3. **Connect the Organisation to its Environment:** People are helped to see the effect of their work on the entire activity; people scan the environment and use information to adjust work practices; the organisation is linked to its communities.

4. **Create Continuous Learning Opportunities:** Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job; opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth.

5. **Encourage Collaboration and Team Learning:** Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking; groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded.

6. **Create Systems to Capture and Share Learning:** Systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided; systems are maintained.

7. **Provide Strategic Leadership for Learning:** Leaders support learning; leadership uses learning strategically for business results.

Accordingly, all or many of the above discussed characteristics must be in-built into organisations' culture to promote effective organisational learning in organization and identify it as a learning culture. Using above characteristics, Marsick and Watson (2003) proposed an instrument called 'Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire' (DLOQ) to identify to what extent the present culture of an organisation possesses learning characteristics which has been tested over 800 organisations. This chapter extends from their study to propose how such an identified culture could be changed or more directed towards an organisational learning culture by the management

through enabling cultural facilitators and disabling cultural inhibitors of the identified culture.

Cultural Facilitators and Inhibitors of Organisational Learning

Table 1 represents the findings of various studies on cultural attributes that facilitate and inhibit learning. Through the above literature findings, it can be derived that a more flexible, externally focused and employee concerned attributes of culture are likely to facilitate OL while stability and control, internally focused and goal oriented attributes of culture are to be barriers for learning. Next, the methodology used to derive findings is discussed next.

Methodology

Methodology adopted for the study is case study approach due to the appropriateness of it for organisational learning researches. The case (organisations) selected was construction contracting organisation operating in Sri Lankan construction industry. Further the cases were screened by imposing grading criteria as smaller organisations are less likely to follow learning practices as they are in a need to undertake projects in order to survive and not for competing with others. Also larger organisations will have structured work procedures proper documentation which will aid the researcher to explore organisational learning practices and cultural aspects residing in the organisation. Further, the history of the organisation was also considered in the criteria for selection since culture should be well established in the organisation and the respondents should be well aware of the culture of the organisation in order to enhance reliability and validity of data being collected.

Data collection of this study was done in two stages. First, questionnaire survey was conducted with the sample size of 20 respondents to measure the level of organisational learning culture of the selected organisations through Dimensions of the Learning Organisation Questionnaire (DLOQ) instrument developed by Marsick and Watkins (2003). This helped to identify the present culture

Table 1. Cultural attributes that facilitate and inhibit learning

Studies	Cultural Attributes	
	Facilitators of Learning	**Inhibitors of Learning**
Schein (1993 & 1996)	Dialogue and communication, people concern.	some sort of shared assumptions or myths of rugged individualism.
Lopez *et al.* (2004)	A long term vision and advance management of the change, communication and dialogue, trust and respect of all individuals, teamwork, empowerment, ambiguity tolerance, risk assumption and respect, diversity encouragement, competitiveness.	Hierarchy
Park *et al.* (2004)	Sharing information freely, working closely with others, team oriented work, fairness, enthusiasm.	Attention to detail, stability, compliance, being calm.
Lai and Lee (2007)	Flexibility and external focus, innovation.	Tasks-goal-accomplished culture and smooth-running culture.
Al-Alawi *et al.* (2007); Al-Adaileh and Al-Atawi (2010)	Openness to change, innovation, trust, teamwork, morale, information flow, employees' involvement, supervision, customer service and reward orientation.	Some form of supervision structures.
Valle *et al.* (2011)	Employees desire to improve and learn, openness, autonomy or self-direction, creativity, interaction with others and long-term orientation.	Stability, control, strict time targets.

of the selected public sector organisation. Then, interviews were conducted with two managerial personnel of the organisation to identify how the present culture could be changed towards a learning culture by enabling cultural facilitators and disabling the cultural inhibitors. In addition to above data collection methods, observation and document surveys were also used where appropriate. Appropriate data analysis tools for quantitative and qualitative data were used in the analysis stage. In that, "Mean value" was used to analyse questionnaire data and content analysis was used to analyse data collected from interview. Next, the case study details are given.

CASE STUDY

The case is a large public sector construction contracting organisation operating in Sri Lanka which is a state sponsored corporation and functions under the Ministry of Construction & Engineering Services of Sri Lanka.. The organisation was established in 1962 and holds Class 1 grading for building and civil engineering construction. It has been consistently ranked as one of the top Engineering and Construction Organizations in Sri Lanka. Over the years the organisation has developed many innovative construction techniques that became industry standards. Organisation also adheres to ISO quality policy. It is the only local engineering organisation in Sri Lanka, which offers the widest variety of architectural and engineering services under one roof with unmatched experience and capability. The sub groups in the organisation include: Building and Civil Engineering Construction Group, Building and Civil Engineering Consultancy Group, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Group, Construction Components Group and Information Management Group. Each group is geared to undertake projects falling within their spheres or to work together with any other or all other groups to provide a complete package. Organisa-

tion maintains a strong culture which is inherited from the day of establishment.

Following are the research findings obtained from data collected through questionnaire and interviews.

Process of Learning in Selected Public Sector Organisation

As per case study, all four identified steps of learning process (Huber, 1991) are in practice of the selected organisation. However, these steps are not deliberately advanced and formalised.

- **Knowledge Acquisition:** Findings revealed that experiential learning being the most common mean of acquiring knowledge which implies direct experience is the first hand mean.Further, founder's knowledge (congential learning) has a strong base in case of government organisation and such knowledge is preserved for years. Organisation members seek advice of specialists from other organisations (vicarious learning) whenever involved in specialised works. Further, there are opportunities for newly recruited employees to change organisation's practices to a limited extent which implies there is limitation in adopting the knowledge of new members (grafting) as management does not accept everything what employees suggest. In searching and noticing, Internet is being the major source of exploring new trends in market.

- **Information Distribution:** Acquired knowledge is mainly distributed through individuals, IT tools, meetings and seminars. In addition to those, circulars and workshops are also used as means of information distribution. Among all distribution means, meetings and workshops are identified as effective means of information sharing. Other than that, internal seminars are conducted for staff as well as employees

are encouraged to participate in external seminars at the cost of the organisation.

- **Information Interpretation:** Normally any work is being explained to subordinates in an understandable language. Further, checklists have been developed; various types of formats have been developed; and instructions are given.
- **Organisation Memory:** Manual filing system is in place and everything is being documented. On the other hand, soft copies are maintained in computer memory to some extent. Backups are mainly maintained by department heads and IT division. However, use of stored information for learning purposes was not evident.

On the whole, knowledge is acquired through several means, though all acquired knowledge is not disseminated. Similarly, all disseminated knowledge is not interpreted. Then, in terms of memory, it is the major lacking part compared to other steps. Organisations fail in recording acquired new knowledge which prevents the knowledge flow thereby preventing continual organisational learning. Next, the characteristics of the selected organisational culture was analysed by adopting Watkins and Marsick's (2003) DLOQ instrument, to explore to what extent the present culture of the organisation promotes organisation learning in the selected organisation.

Characteristics of Present Culture of Selected Public Sector Organisation

This was identified based on Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) seven dimensions of a learning culture through Dimensions of Learning Organisation Questionnaire instrument (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Findings of case study are presented in Figure 3:

Key findings presented in Figure 3 are discussed next.

Inquiry and Dialogue

Findings revealed that many people are not motivated and they compete with each other within same division. Thus, some are reluctant in giving feedbacks and sharing opinions. Since it is a government organisation, employees do not want to comment on decision taken by top management due to political issues. Further, difference in levels viewed to be highly affecting inquiry and dialogue.

Empower People

Since it is a government organisation political influence is high. Thus, even though superiors have power, some do not want to exercise their power and act in favour of state. Further, less importance is given to employees' views and even employees are reluctant to take initiatives.

Connect the Organisation

Findings show that organisation normally is not concerned about employees' personal matters. However, it can be said that people are given time to balance family and work because of reduced working hours (five days 7 hours working time). Thinking from global perspective is much less as most of the projects handled are government projects. Bringing clients view in decision making is very prominent in this case as government is being the major client in most of the projects and being influencing party. Organisation allows solving problem across organisation. However, everyone does not utilise the opportunity.

Continuous Learning

Research findings disclosed that organisation helps employees those who are interested to learn. For example, scholarships are granted to follow higher studies; people can get money and other resources to support their learning; as well as people are given time to support learning. However, everyone does
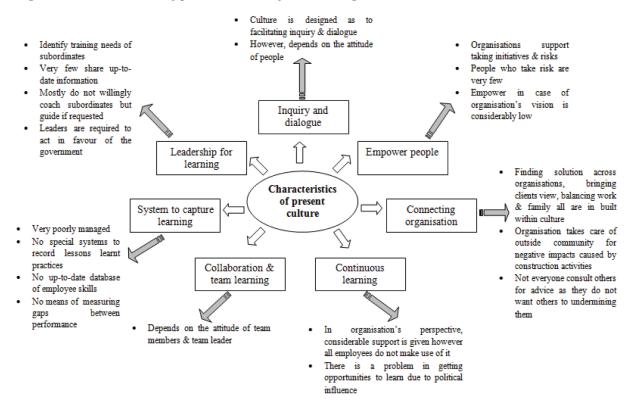
Figure 3. Characteristics of present culture of selected organisation

- Identify training needs of subordinates
- Very few share up-to-date information
- Mostly do not willingly coach subordinates but guide if requested
- Leaders are required to act in favour of the government

- Culture is designed as to facilitating inquiry & dialogue
- However, depends on the attitude of people

- Organisations support taking initiatives & risks
- People who take risk are very few
- Empower in case of organisation's vision is considerably low

Inquiry and dialogue

Leadership for learning

Empower people

System to capture learning

Characteristics of present culture

Connecting organisation

- Very poorly managed
- No special systems to record lessons learnt practices
- No up-to-date database of employee skills
- No means of measuring gaps between performance

Collaboration & team learning

Continuous learning

- Finding solution across organisations, bringing clients view, balancing work & family all are in built within culture
- Organisation takes care of outside community for negative impacts caused by construction activities
- Not everyone consult others for advice as they do not want others to undermining them

- Depends on the attitude of team members & team leader

- In organisation's perspective, considerable support is given however all employees do not make use of it
- There is a problem in getting opportunities to learn due to political influence

not willingly learn new things. Further, people do not discuss their mistakes openly thinking that they will be penalised. Hence, from organisation's perspective support is given for learning while very few people exploit it.

Collaboration and Team Learning

As per findings, people work in teams share knowledge. However, everyone does not share their knowledge and it depends on attitude of team members. Revising thinking as a result of new information obtained or group discussions rarely happens as there is less likelihood of having group discussions. Members of team are treated as equals, regardless of any differences most of the time while there are exceptional situations also.

Systems to Capture Learning

Findings indicate that system to capture learning is lower than all other dimensions. There is no any lesson learnt practice documented in this organisation. Further, most of newly recruited employees gain experience from the organisation in a shorter period and leave organisation very soon and there is no any mechanism to document their knowledge. Further, there are no special systems to measure gaps or achievements and organisation does not maintain an up-to-date database of employee skills. This has been identified by interviewees as a real short fall in terms of learning.

Provide Strategic Leadership for Learning

Empirical evidence revealed that leaders do not give opportunity for all people to learn. Some selected people are benefited due to political influence. Here, most of technical people (QS, architect, engineers, technical officers, etc.) get opportunity to follow courses while non technical persons (clerks, data entry operators, accountants, etc.) do not get opportunities to learn. Hence, even though leaders support, there are political issues controlling leaders which are inevitable in a government organisation. Moreover, sharing up-to-date information with employees about competitors, industry trends, and organisational directions is almost does not happen.

According to findings it can be suggested that present culture of selected public sector construction organisation is likely to have restrictions on empower people, lack in systems to capture learning and highly affected by attitude of employees and leaders. Therefore, research findings revealed that there is more scope for improving the present culture towards a learning culture under seven identified dimensions and advance effective learning deliberately in order to face future challenges.

Cultural Facilitators and Inhibitors for Organisational Learning in Selected Public Sector Organisations

The interviews with managers revealed organisation specific cultural attributes that facilitate and inhibit organisational learning in selected public sector organisations (see Table 2).

Accordingly, following aspects were identified from the interview analysis in the selected public sector organisation.

Dominant Characteristics of the Organisation

- **Production Related Strategies:** Where there is production target people tend to achieve that target through alternative means by exploring new ways. However, to make that happen organisations must have adequate recourses. When it has inadequate recourses strategies for production cannot be developed. Thus, strategy must consider resources base of the firm. Further, to improve production different strategies need to be adopted that will generate new knowledge. Hence, interviewees think this to be facilitating organisation learning.
- **Diversity Encouragement:** Different exposure gives different knowledge from different specialised persons. When diversifying organisations must learn the new field to survive. It enhances motivation and

Table 2. Cultural attributes for organisational learning in public sectors

Facilitators	Inhibitors
Production related strategies	Formalised & structured characteristics
Diversity encouragement	Traditions
Loyalty	Competitive organisational environment
Goal accomplishment	
Innovation	
Mentoring	
Risk taking	
Openness to change	
People concern	
Market penetration	
Team work & Participation	
Reward orientation	
Autonomy	
Strict time targets	
Stability	

learning opportunities. Thus, it facilitates learning.

- **Formalised and Structured Characteristics:** When people used to follow the formalised procedures their thinking ability will be restricted. If it is rigid then it is difficult to accommodate changes or to learn. When continually doing the same thing learning cannot happen. All these support inhibiting nature.
- **Loyalty and Traditions:** When people are loyal they tend to learn and develop the organisation. Loyalty creates mutual trust and leads to learning. Traditional knowledge base from seniors is a valuable resource to the organisation. However, organisations have to think about the modern technology in parallel. If organisation always follows traditions then it will not help a learning organisation. Traditions may inhibit new knowledge flow. Therefore, findings reveal that loyalty facilitates while heavy reliance on tradition inhibit learning.
- **Goal Accomplishment:** To accomplish goals new technologies have to be adopted which leads to learning. If the goal is challenging then people will look at different options to achieve it. That gives a learning process to organisation. Hence, it facilitates.

Style of Organisation Leader

- **Mentors/Teacher:** Employees can learn from leaders when they teach. Employees also learn by observing leaders. Depending on the background of the leader outcome can be positive or negative. If leaders teach subordinates then the knowledge of employees will be enhanced. However learning becomes meaningful if the employees take considerable effort to experiment what they have learnt.

- **Competitors:** It facilitates because leaders try to match up with their competitors. Thus, leaders will learn and educate subordinates in order to compete with others. However, leaders must be correctly focused and should not step into new field solely to match their competitors. It has to be a gradual process. Leaders must have a vision to work towards it. If the competition is not properly focused then it may inhibit learning due to too many errors because of unnecessary rush.
- **Entrepreneur/Innovators:** This requires knowledge to be updated. If leaders are doing the same thing repeatedly then there is no improvement in organisation's behaviour. When implementing innovative ideas learning must take place to make sure that it works. For innovation to take place exploration of new knowledge is essential. Therefore, this facilitates.
- **Risk Takers:** Without risk there is no improvement. However, there should be strong financial base to take risks. If leaders are to be conservative then no new solutions can be derived. Leaders have to take risks to learn things. Thus, risk taking leads to learning. When risk is taken there is tendency to learn more to minimize the risk.

Nature of Organisation's Environment

- **Participative and Comfortable:** Participation facilitates learning. When employees participate in discussion knowledge can be shared. Pros and cons can be discussed and effective decision can be made. Further, when people are comfortable they can work happily and can concentrate on learning as well. Thus, findings suggests this to be facilitating as well as inhibiting when people are uncomfortable they try

to become comfortable by learning and improving.

- **Competitive:** When people try to compete with each other at peer level information sharing does not happen. So there will be no knowledge distribution creating lag in learning process. That will have a negative impact on learning. Hence, this inhibits learning.

- **Readiness/Openness to Change:** This facilitates learning as this enables to accommodate updated techniques, rules and procedure. Organisation is ready to accommodate change means organisation is ready to acquire new knowledge. A change is accommodated when a loop hole is identified. Thus, to fill that gap organisations have to learn. When there is openness to change there is flow of new knowledge. People have to move for new arenas from traditional myths to compete in developing world.

- **Stable:** This can be viewed in two ways. First, it is important to learn to sustain the stability. Business stability request learning. Also if organisation is stable then there is possibility to take initiative which leads to learning. Second, if the environment is stable then there is no way of improving. Hence, no opportunity to learn.

Success Criteria of the Organisation

- **People Concern:** As per findings this facilitates learning. Without people there is no business. Based on the relationship with people it is possible to develop knowledge by sharing. When people are recognized they tend to learn. It is beneficial to organisation as well as people tend to be loyal. When people are happy with their organisation they work hard and learn more.

However, findings also revealed that this also depends on the attitude of the people.

- **Market Penetration:** To penetrate markets organisations need to explore information about other markets. Therefore, worldwide standards can be explored. This leads to learning.

- **Strict Time Targets:** Findings suggest when time targets are imposed on people they will learn to finish it within the stipulated time. However, the time target must be practical. Then, it will help people to learn. If the time target is impossible to achieve it leads to forego the quality. Achieving target at the expense of quality is not wise. However, attitude of employees plays a major role.

Management Style toward Employees

- **Teamwork and Participation:** Knowledge sharing happens in teamwork. Thus, everybody can learn from the others. Through team work employees can achieve time and quality targets by sharing knowledge.

- **Reward Orientation:** When incentives and increments are rewarded for extreme performance there is scope for learning. Reward may be monetary or non-monetary. Findings pointed out an issue regarding reward is, if reward is promised prior to committing to a work then that promise should be fulfilled by the organisation. If deserving people are not rewarded as promised then it will have completely a negative impact. This again depends on attitude of the people.

- **Freedom/Autonomy of Employees:** Findings revealed when freedom is given there will be generation of new ideas which leads to learning. On the other hand, there is a limitation since organisations have the company policy and if people do not ad-

here to the company policy and commit mistake, it affects the company. Therefore, leaders must be critics when giving freedom to employee.

- **Sharing Information Freely:** Sharing information freely leads to acquire more knowledge if there are no limitations in sharing. However, knowledge sharing should be between peer levels because if the information is not understood by people it becomes meaningless and in some cases confidential information about organisation or project cannot be revealed to everyone.

As above case study findings reveal, most of the identified attributes are to be clearly facilitating learning except formalised and structured organisation characteristics, heavy reliance on traditions and less competitive organisation environment. All these facilitating attributes reflects flexibility, external orientation as well as people concern. However, literature identified goal accomplishment (Lai & Lee, 2007), strict time targets (Valle et al. 2011) and stability (Park, Ribree & Schutle 2004; Valle et al. 2011) as inhibiting learning while case study findings suppose that those attributes may also facilitate learning. This is because traditional solutions may not be appropriate to accomplish certain project goals in future. If goal is challenging then there is a need to explore different options to achieve it. That gives a learning opportunity to organisation. Further, findings suggest when time targets are imposed people will learn to accomplish tasks within the stipulated time. Nevertheless, it has also been realised that the set time target must be practical for learning to occur. Then, stable organisations can take risks which also lead to learning. Therefore, certain findings contradict to what has been established in literature and could be regarded as specific to the selected public sector organisation.

Solutions and Recommendations

Based on literature and case study findings it was realised that public sector organisations have more scope for building a supportive culture to promote sustained organisational learning practices in their organisation which could be discussed under four areas such as strategy, system, leaders and people related issues.

Under strategy it was found that public sector organisations lack in global perspective thinking, innovation and risk taking. Consequently, these aspects of culture must be paid attention and built into the organisation's culture. Further, it was also found that public sector organisations to be highly affected by political influences which may hinder some aspects of learning. Therefore, eliminating these influences will elevate the level of learning. In addition to that recruitment policies to allow younger generation into public sectors will also be an added value to culture in terms of learning.

When considering systems, there seems to be problems in developed systems to capture learning. For example, very few organisations record lessons-learned practices. This is a major drawback in promoting learning in public sector organisations. As organisational learning process has a distinct step called organisation memory, it is important to record learnt practices in such ways that enable future access. Hence, organisations must concentrate on systems to capture learning. For lack of systems to capture learning, it is recommended to maintain lessons-learned practices, database of past records, maintain skills of employees, measure gaps and cater proper training to employees to cover deficiencies in skills. Further, formalised and structured characteristics must be reduced and flexibility in thinking must be promoted. Rewarding systems for team achievements and effective information sharing systems would also lead to effective learning.

Leaders of public sector organisations are sometimes perceived to be acting in favour of the government. This may be an inhibitor for learning

in organisations. Therefore, it is recommended that leaders must be given authority to empower their subordinates, work independently and take independent decisions. Leaders are also expected to be a mentor, competitor, innovator as well as risk taker to promote learning. As well, leaders must encourage team discussions and revise team goals according to circumstances. Further, leaders must take special attention in organising meetings to share up-to-date information with their subordinates which addresses information distribution need of organisational learning.

People are the heart of any organisation. Attitude of people plays a major role in determining any issues. Similarly, organisational learning is also affected by attitude of people. First and foremost, people must be given awareness on organisational learning and its benefits to them and to organisations since without people's positive attitudes organisational learning process cannot happen. Similarly, people must willingly share information with each other for organisational learning process to be effective. In most of the public sector organisations, there are restrictions in interfering with management's decision. This may restrict emergence of new views which leads to learning. Therefore, allowing employees to comment on management's decision and revising based on good comments may lead toward organisational learning. Providing employees control over the resources and recognising people who take initiatives are also signs of promoting learning.

Similarly, present culture of any public sector organisation can be analysed through Marsick and Watkins, (2003) Dimensions of Learning Organisation Questionnaire instrument as well as attributes that facilitate learning can also be identified in the given context. Then, dimensions of culture that need development will be identified and required change can be accommodated as well as culture can be build up with facilitating attributes. Therefore, any public sector organisation can adopt this approach in changing their present

culture with the intention of promoting sustained organisational learning in their organisation.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study figured out that changing culture of public sector organisation is not an easy task. Hence, a detailed study may be carried out to explore how and the ways in which change efforts can be facilitated to accommodate changes to culture of government organisation. Also, further case studies could be expanded into different types of public sector organisations in different contexts. In addition to that, a detailed investigation on government's role and how government can promote learning in public sector organisation could also be explored.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to propose an approach to public sector organisations to identify and change present culture to a culture that promotes effective learning in organisation. This was aided through a case study conducted with a large public sector construction contracting organisation operating in Sri Lanka. Findings revealed that organisational learning process is not deliberately advanced in organisations due to the present culture. Therefore, several issues on characteristics of present culture were figured out. It was identified that problems exist in terms of empowering people, systems to capture learning and attitudes of employees and leaders. Further, cultural attributes that facilitate learning in selected organisation were identified where flexible, externally oriented as well as people concern attributes of culture are found to be promoting organisational learning. These findings led to propose changes under strategy, system, leaders and people related issues of culture. Accordingly, organisations can significantly enhance organisational learning by

paying attention on culture. Managers may use different strategies to shape different people to fit into culture and get best out of them. By this proposed approach it is hoped that the present culture of public sector organisations could be changed effectively to an organisational learning culture.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Congenital Learning: Knowledge of organisation's founders.

Experiential Learning: Knowledge acquired through direct experience.

Grafting: Knowledge acquired from new members of the organisation who possess knowledge not previously available within the organization.

Information Distribution: The process by which information from different sources is shared.

Information Interpretation: The process by which distributed information is given one or more commonly understood interpretations.

Knowledge Acquisition: The process by which knowledge is obtained.

Organisational Culture: Cognitive structure consisting of attitudes, values, behavioural norms and expectations shared by organisational members.

Organisational Learning: A process which enhances the firm's knowledge base resulting in changed organisational behaviour and increased efficiency.

Organisational Memory: The means by which knowledge is stored for future use.

Vicarious Learning: Knowledge of other organisational members.