The study of the effect of organizational culture on organizational learning

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ABSTRACT: With the development of science and technology and expansion of business environments, the business environment has become competitive and challenging. And new paradigms have emerged that have made survival difficult for many firms. In such an environment, the transformation of competitive advantages is natural. Learning is the greatest competitive advantage in the new business paradigms. Therefore those organizations that learn sooner faster and better than their competitors are more successful. Meanwhile, organizational culture has an impact on all activities of the organization. Since the organizational culture includes a complex part of the values and beliefs of the staff, any changes will lead to the change of learning in the organization. If all the factors of organizational learning are provided but there is no appropriate culture, the organizational learning will not be successful. Hence it is necessary for organizations to understand their organizational culture and use the learning as a tool to create competitive advantage. In this paper, the concepts of organizational culture, organizational learning and the effect of organizational culture on organizational learning are discussed.

Keywords: organizational culture, learning, organizational learning.

INTRODUCTION

With the increased environmental dynamism and complexity, organizations need changes for protection, survival and growth. In this context, the development of organizational culture will be inevitable. With the study conducted by scholars of management science, the organizational culture has been known as the one of the most influential factors in the development of countries. Organizational culture, as a set of values and beliefs of the organizations' members help them to explain their behavior and also can be used to achieve specific goals. One of the characteristics of organizational culture is shaping the people's behavior and since the change of people's behavior is called "learning", then the key values of the organizations can be more acceptable to the people (zali,1999). Learning is the most important way to improve the long-term performance and in the near future the only organization that can exploit the capabilities and commitments in the best way will be able to claim being the best organization. Today the developed countries believe that learning is not an act of choice on the part of managers, but is a necessity. Learning is crucial as the key to conversion (the ability to adapt to changing circumstances) and the reformation of the organization. For this reason, managers should try to develop the learning process in organizations using a dynamic and flexible organizational culture. Hence, the organizational culture must change to a learner culture which supports the learners for making changes, the trust of employees on each other by creating flexible environment (beyk zad, 2010).

Definition of Organizational Culture
Stohi states: culture is a set of concepts that are transmitted from one generation to another and distinguishes social groups from each other. Hotsfede believes that culture is the intellectual collective programming that

distinguishes the members of a group or a class from each other.   Organizational culture is the unique pattern of shared assumptions, values and norms that form the socialization activities, language, symbols and organizations' operations (johns, 1980). People who work together in an organization have shared beliefs, values and norms that form the organization's culture (hoseini, 2011). Organizational culture is one of the most interesting and important topics of the organizational behavior management. One of the most comprehensive definitions of the organizational culture is related to the definition of Huczynski and Buchanan. They state that the organizational culture is a relatively uniform set of values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices that are transferred by members of the organization. This definition is useful because it considers the collective nature of the culture and states that there is a culture in both beliefs and behaviors. Also the organizational culture is a framework that defines the organizational values, the behavior of people and the trends specific to the organization. Cameron and Quinn also believe that the organizational culture is a set of postulated values, basic beliefs, collective memory, expectations and definitions of success that are in an organization. Studies show that culture affects on the formulation of objectives, strategies, individual behavior, organizational performance, job satisfaction and motivation, creativity, innovation, the extent of employee participation and decision making in affairs, the extent of commitment and dedication, and hard working (zarei, 1994). Ribiere believes that the organizational culture is critical to the productivity of the organization; and determines the effective and ineffective performance. It also determines the patterns of interconnections between individuals and provides the coherence and coordination for the organization and its members (ribiere, 2001).

The Concept of Organizational Learning

Organizations consider learning as a tool to enhance the performance and adapt to environmental changes. But the learning rate of organizations must be greater than the degree of environmental changes in order to keep their survival and this issue further reveals the importance of organizational learning. Organizational learning becomes increasingly popular among organizations that are interested in gaining the competitive advantage, innovation and effectiveness (fathi,2010). Argyris and Schon define the organizational learning as "the discovery and correction of errors". Learning is a dynamic concept that gradually changes from individual learning to organizational learning and it is because of the organizations' needs to adapt to environmental changes. As learning is crucial for people's growth, it is also important for organizations. Organizational learning is more than the people's ability to learn, it means that the organization does not lose its learning ability when people leave the organization (behnami, 2005).

The Objectives of Organizational Learning

Dogson believes that the organizations learn to reform and improve their power of adaptation and performance against the environmental changes. Grantham argues that learning enables the organizations to respond faster and more effective against the complex and dynamic environments. Thus we can say that learning is a conscious effort on behalf of the organization to keep and reform its competitiveness, productivity and innovation in uncertain environments. Learning can also improve the quality of decisions in the organization (fathi, 2010).

Types of Organizational Learning

Argeris and Schein have described three types of organizational learning or in other words, three learning levels as follows: 1.Single-Loop-Learning: it occurs when errors are detected and corrected in the context of the organizations' objectives and policies. It is called Adaptive Learning by Senge, Low Level Learning by Fiol and Lyles, Non-Strategic Learning by Mumison. 2.Double- Loop-Learning: it occurs when the organizations discover and reform the errors and question the norms, procedures, policies and goals and modify them. It is called Generative Learning by Senge, High Level Learning by Fiol and Lyles and Strategic Learning by Mumison. 3.Triple Loop Learning: it occurs when the organizations are able to run the single-loop and double-loop learning. In other words, triple loop learning has the ability to learn about learning. If the organizations are not aware that learning should occur, the two basic forms of learning will not occur. This means that the knowledge of learning styles, processes and structures is the prerequisite for the promotion of learning (fathi, 2010).

The Importance of Organizational Learning

Organizations cannot effectively deal with the rapid changes of environmental factors without learning from their own experiences. Nowadays, organizations always try to learn instead of using their traditional behavior which encompasses education at its best. In other words, they attempt to use their efforts to learn as a competitive advantage (behnami, 2005). The goal of organizational learning is to develop and improve the competitiveness in products and services and compliance to environmental conditions. But from another perspective, organizations

learn to achieve two main goals: 1.Discovering new possibilities and opportunities, so that the organization uses the technological leadership or differentiation strategy. 2.Using the current opportunities, so that the organization uses the leadership strategy. Organizational learning benefits include: Increased commitment to knowledge and learning, embracing new ideas and increased insight into the organization's performance, promoting the learning of knowledge through new learning and the ability to respond to events and developments in the external environment (beyk zad, 2010).

The Role of Organizational Culture in Organizational Learning

Organizational cultures determine the nature of learning and its realization methods. Therefore, organizational learning may be limited in the kind of defensive and unproductive practices. These cultures and practices will be created in all organizations over time. Basically, human may resort to defensive measures against the threats and opportunities that cause hurrying. According to Argeris each person uses a theory in his/her life to justify his/her actions in responding the threats and opportunities that cause hurrying. Most people try to make defensive excuses and since people create organizations they follow the defensive strategies to escape the threat and opportunities that cause hurrying (amin bidokhti, 2011). According to Edgar Schein, culture has three levels: basic assumptions, values, and culture's expressions. The layer of culture's expressions is most visible level of culture. This layer consists of man-made artifacts, technology, art, behavioral patterns, visible organizational structures and processes, methods, and so on. This level reflects all the phenomena that the observer sees, hears or feels in the face of a new group or an unfamiliar culture (brandt, 2009). Organizational culture has an effect on organizational learning. For this reason Edgar Schein considers the management and organizational culture as a key role in the organizational learning of the twenty-first century. Learning will occur when there is a change in the deeper levels or the mental layer of the culture. Peter Senge calls this type of learning as generative Learning. According to Schein, communities, groups and organizations are always faced with two problems: Adaptation with the external environment and internal integration. Indeed, these two issues represent two dimensions of organizational culture. Each of these two problems could be indicated as a continuum from low to high. At one end of the continuum, organizational culture is the inhibitor of learning and at the opposite end of the continuum; it is the facilitator of the organizational learning. For example, the organization can withstand the environment or show a high flexibility. It is also possible that the organization has more or less unity and harmony (johns,1980). Depending on to what extent, each organization has adaptability and internal integration, a variety of organizational culture will be created. When the internal integration and adaptability to the external environment is low in the organization, a kind of bureaucratic culture will appear. Since the structure of bureaucratic indicates the inflexibility against the strict environment and culture, and the staff sonly think about their own duties. In such organizations that represent the traditional organizations, the organizational learning is at the minimum level.

When an organization has a lot of flexibility to its environment and does not pay attention to the integrity, a competitive culture will be formed in the organization. In such a culture, the relationships between individuals and organizations are conventional. Organizational loyalty and cultural identification in such an organization would be at a low level. Competitive organizational culture can be equal to the market culture. When the internal integration and the spirit of unity is high within the organization, some characteristics such as loyalty, commitment, team work, extensive socialization and so on will dominate. In this case, a collaborative culture is formed in the organization. Finally, when the organization is flexible to its external environment and has a high internal integrity, a learner culture will be formed. In such a culture, the staff is willing and eager for change, yet also has a lot of commitment and integrity. Characteristics of each of the four cultures show that each of them has a different learning rate. Learning is minimized in the bureaucratic culture. Given the role of organizational culture it can be shown that the bureaucratic culture inhibits the organizational learning while the learner culture as its name implies, is the facilitator of the organizational learning (zali, 1999).

CONCULSION

Today, because of environmental changes it is a necessity to consider all the aspects of the organization such as the organizational culture. Any change in the organizational culture can be done at different levels. Changes in routines or cultural symbols, practices and manifestations will only lead to the single-loop-learning. However, changes in the level of values and basic assumptions indicate the double-loop-learning. When the organizational culture is formed, it can play a facilitating or inhibiting role in the organizational learning. Based on the two major dimensions of culture, namely the external environment and internal integration, four types of culture can be formed in an organization. These cultures include bureaucratic, collaborative, competitive and learner. Bureaucratic culture usually plays the role of inhibitor and the learner culture usually plays the role of facilitator in the organizational

learning. Learner organizational culture represents the pinnacle of organizational learning in the organization. Hence it is essential that managers attempt to lead the dominant culture in the organization toward the learner culture, so that the organizational learning reaches the highest possible level and become a tool to create competitive advantage in the organization.

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