

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION AND MEASURES TO BUILD LEARNING ORGANIZATION AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL IN PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

Nguyen Thi Minh Nguyet

Faculty of Educational Management, Hanoi National University of Education

Abstract. Building a learning organization in the school context can be organized through changing the elements of learning at three different levels: organization, group and individual. There are 2 characteristics of the school as a learning organization at the individual level: firstly, managers and lecturers continuously learn to develop their expertise; secondly, managers and lecturers always innovate effectively to advance their teaching and researching quality. According to the result of the survey, some characteristics of learning organization at the individual level in the pedagogical universities have been assessed with unclear expression, so strengthening those unclear characteristics may help to build a learning organization successfully.

Keywords: Learning organization, pedagogical university, characteristics of learning organization, building learning organization.

1. Introduction

Learning organization is a new concept that was introduced in the late twentieth century by Peter Senge with five disciplines” Shared Vision; System Thinking; Personal Mastery; Mental Models; Team Learning [1]. According the model of Peter Senge, Garvin offered managerial suggestions on how to change an organization in to learning organization through three building blocks: create effective incentives to knowledge-sharing; cultivate the art of open; attentive learning; and avoid the “not invented here” syndrome [2]. Watkins and Marsick proposed Learning organization Action imperatives Model with 3 levels of learning: individual learning; group learning; organization learning [3]. This article aims at analyzing the characteristics of learning organization and suggesting measures to build learning organization at the individual level in the context of pedagogical university in Vietnam.

2. Content

2.1. Background

2.1.1. Conception of learning organization in pedagogical universities

The main ideal organization is characterized as “self-renewing” or as a “learning organization,” the term popularized by Peter Senge (1990) in *The Fifth Discipline* [1]. According to Ron Brandt, “the concept has at least two aspects. Not only are all the members, as individual persons, continually learning, but the organization itself is highly adaptable” [4]. Learning

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Contact: Nguyen Thi Minh Nguyet, e-mail address: nguyetntm@hnue.edu.vn

organization is an organization that is highly adaptable, constantly innovative, and able to thrive in the future through the learning of individuals, groups and all levels of system. Previous research showed “The school as a learning organisation is a potent concept that has informed and continues to inform school improvement practices within and across schools, in many different countries” (Alma Harris and Michelle Jones, 2018) [5]. Learning school, or school as a learning organization, is a school that through the learning of every level in the school is constantly innovating, developing, and meeting the increasing needs of society [6].

Pedagogical universities have the missions to educate high-quality human resources, simultaneously to invent new scientific achievements. Not only are universities a place for education, but they are also a research center to form a new knowledge system, to develop and transfer modern technology, and to crucially contribute to the firm financial and social development.

Pedagogical universities have their specific missions as followed:

- Educate educational managing staff and faculty with high quality;
- Do basic scientific research and educational scientific research to improve teaching activity and education at university and effective innovation of national education system;
- Become a pioneer in renewing education and promote the university role in leading the development of national educational system;
- Provide educational service for social demand (appropriate with law and the development of international educational orientation)

In the context of educational innovation in Vietnam today, pedagogical universities have play leading role in building schools into learning organization. In fact, with a pioneering position in the study of educational science, pedagogical universities have a strong potential to build a learning organization. All staff and faculty must be adult learners who learn continuously for becoming the expertise, contribute to improve national education system following the increasing demand of modern society.

2.1.2. Characteristics of learning organization at individual level in pedagogical universities

There are currently four typical models of organizational learning: the model of Senge (1990); the model of Marquardt (1999) [7]; the model of Garvin (2000) [2]; and the Model of Watkins and Marsick (2003) [3]. According to several researchers (Yang, 2003; Zhang, Zhang, and Yang, 2004; Moilanen, 2005; Kumar and Idris, 2006; Chajacki, 2007; Song, Joo and Chermack, 2009; etc.), the Watkins and Marsick model has many advantages over other models. The Watkins and Marsick model had been used in OECD and UNICEF research to provide guidance to policy makers, school leaders, and teachers in building schools as learning organizations [3], [6]. Hence, the author utilizes the Watkins and Marsick model to verify the characteristics of learning organization for pedagogical universities [3].

In OECD and UNICEF studies, Kools and Stoll (2016) based on Watkins and Marsick model that point out characteristics of learning organization within school including 3 levels of education [3]. These characteristics in pedagogical universities can be concretized as followed:

Table 1. The characteristics of learning organization at three levels in a university

| Levels | The characteristics of learning organization |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Individual level</i> | Managers and lecturers continuously learn to develop their expertise |
| | Managers and lecturers always innovate effectively to advance their teaching and researching quality |
| <i>Group level</i> | Managers and lecturers collaborate effectively in teaching and researching |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| System level | The school coordinates closely with the society and continuously develops to meet with high demand in education and faculty cultivation |
| | The school's view is shared and improved by managers and lectures |
| | The school prioritizes in focusing on researching, transferring and acquiring knowledge, especially in education science |
| | The school authorizes self-control in expertise to staff and faculty, and encourages them to promote their position as well as the positive impacts on colleagues and students. |

At individual level, the learning of all members is considered as the first characteristic of a learning organization, so both managers and lecturers continuously learn to develop their expertise. As a member of learning organization, managers and lecturers:

- study for professional development regularly;
- receive support and guidance for beginning a new task or learning about professional;
- study in order to constantly improve the quality of training as well as implement the common goals of university;
- determine learning goals and identify learning priorities;
- receive support on learning conditions (time, finance, information, learning material...);
- usually apply acquired learning to their work situation;
- learn through their everyday work;
- learn through feedback in order to improve their work;
- promote the spirit of learning and critical thinking.

The second characteristic, “Leaders and lecturers always innovate effectively to advance their teaching and researching quality” can be identified by the following expressions:

- Managers and lecturers like to work creatively and be willing to innovate;
- Managers and lecturers receive the support for the initiative in research and teaching;
- Managers and lecturers are encouraged to experiment, innovate in their work;
- Managers and lecturers are required to improve their professional knowledge and innovation in teaching and research;
- Managers and lecturers feel comfortable to do new tasks or participation in new activities;
- Managers and lecturers consider mistakes and failures to be opportunities for learning;
- Managers and lecturers participate in scientific research regularly.

2.2. Methodology

The population of this study were managers and lecturers from 3 pedagogical universities (Hanoi National University of Education, Hue University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City Pedagogical University). The sample for this study was selected by using a simple random sampling method. A total of 200 academicians were selected to participate in the study and the return rate of the completed questionnaire was 200 respondents.

The instrument used to achieve the purpose of this study was built base on 2 characteristics of a learning organization at individual level, including 16 items. Likert scales was used for this survey with 5 points: always; usually; sometime; rarely; never.

2.3. Results and Discussion

2.3.1. General status of university as a learning organization at individual level

a) Cadres and lecturers in school constantly learn to develop their professional skills, and strive to become experts in their field of study and teaching

Table 2. The fact of learning to develop professional development

| | Items | Mean |
|---|--|-------------|
| 1 | Managers and lecturers study for professional development regularly; | 3.75 |
| 2 | Managers and lecturers receive support and guidance for beginning a new task or learning about professional; | 3.75 |
| 3 | Managers and lecturers study in order to constantly improve the quality of training as well as implement the common goals of university; | 3.92 |
| 4 | Managers and lecturers determine learning goals and identify learning priorities; | 4.04 |
| 5 | Managers and lecturers receive support on learning conditions (time, finance, information, learning material...); | 3.46 |
| 6 | Managers and lecturers usually apply acquired learning to their work situation; | 3.33 |
| 7 | Managers and lecturers learn through their everyday work; | 3.48 |
| 8 | Managers and lecturers learn through feedback in order to improve their work; | 3.43 |
| 9 | Managers and lecturers study for professional development regularly; | 3.66 |

The survey results show that most of the characteristics of *Cadres and lecturers in the school continuously learn to develop professional knowledge and apply knowledge learned in real life* are at level 4 (*the average score ranges from 3.33 to 4.04*). Thus, the characteristics of this learning organization in pedagogical universities are demonstrated regularly. In particular, the criteria showed the most obvious is that staff and faculty themselves determine the learning objectives and priorities for their learning (average score: 4.04); that the criterion is unclear as staff and lecturers put what was learned in practice (average score: 3.33). These data show that there is a gap between the learning of lecturers and the application of knowledge and skills learned in their work. It is useful that the directions in defining learning goals and the support of appropriate learning conditions for teachers are necessary to make their learning more practical. Besides, the mechanisms to encourage innovation and continuous improvement are essential to bridge this gap and promote the learning of all members of the university.

b) Lecturers actively innovate and creative in order to continuously improve the quality of teaching and research activities

Table 3. The fact of innovation and creativity to improve the quality of teaching and research

| | Items | Mean |
|---|--|-------------|
| 1 | Managers and lecturers like to work in innovative and willing to innovate; | 3.49 |
| 2 | Managers and lecturers receive the support for the initiative in research and teaching; | 3.41 |
| 3 | Managers and lecturers are encouraged to experiment, innovate in their work; | 3.26 |
| 4 | Managers and lecturers are required to improve their professional knowledge and innovation in teaching and research; | 3.97 |

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|---|---|------|
| 5 | Managers and lecturers feel comfortable to do new tasks or participation in new activities; | 3.45 |
| 6 | Managers and lecturers consider mistakes and failures to be opportunities for learning; | 3.52 |
| 7 | Managers and lecturers participate in scientific research regularly. | 3.48 |

Most criteria in the work achieves level 4 (*the average score ranges from 3.26 to 3.97*). Thus, the characteristics of this learning organization in the pedagogical universities are now quite clear. In particular, the criterion that is the most obvious is that the school requires staff to learn to improve professional qualifications and innovation in the work (average score: 3.97); however, it is unclear whether the school supports staff and faculty members to experiment and innovate in teaching and research, even if the experiment has a certain probability (average score: 3.26).

2.3.2. Discussion

The results of this survey show that some characteristics of learning organization at the individual level are unclear, so pedagogical universities need specific and appropriate measures for each school to be able to build the school into a learning organization. Specific measures to enhance the learning of staff and faculty include:

- Leaders at all levels exemplify learning so that staff and faculty members can follow.
- Leaders at all levels are available to provide advice and guidance on learning and professional development for staff and lecturers.
- Leaders at all levels create conditions and support for staff and lecturers to continuously study.
- Leaders at all levels share a common vision, make staff and faculty to understand and try to study for the future development of the university.
- Encourage and support new ideas of staff and lecturers
- Facilitate staff and faculty with experiments to apply their knowledge to teaching and research.
- Review differences and conflicting views so that staff and lecturers can express their opinions freely.

The learning efforts of managements and lecturers, at all levels, will be essential to secure and sustain the cultural shifts that characterize an active, genuine learning organization. Consequently, these measures are important to achieve core purpose, building pedagogical universities become a learning organization.

3. Conclusion

As mentioned above, building learning organization plays an important role in improving the quality of training and researching in pedagogical universities. The result of this survey showed that the manifestations of learning organization at the individual level in pedagogical universities are uneven with some not clear. This study contributes to the pedagogical universities by emphasizing the importance of learning organization at the individual level and indicating the lack of characteristics of learning at the individual level through the survey result. Strengthening those unclear characteristics may help to build learning organization successfully in pedagogical universities.

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