

FROM THE TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION TO THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

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At present we live in a world of organizations, and human society can be seen as a system of distinct organizational structures within which various human activities take place. Over time, organizations have evolved. From „organization” to „intelligent organization”, „network organization”, „democratic organization”, „knowledge-based organization” and „learning organization”. The success of organizations has begun to be given by the efficient use of talented employees.

Although it is not a perfect organization and in organizations resistance to change prevails, more and more organizations tend to become „learning organizations” because they focus on lifelong learning, on creating, generating and transferring knowledge, as well as changing employee behavior.

Key words: organization, learning organization, lifelong learning, individual learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

We currently live in a world of organizations: most of us spend time and work in organizations. Starting with school and ending with retirement, we have to integrate into various organizations and work with other people to be able to carry out our activity professionally and to get the right results. Therefore, human society can be seen as a system composed of distinct organizational structures within which various human activities take place.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL CONCEPT AND ORGANIZATIONAL PECULIARITIES

Organizations are all around us, shaping our lives in different ways. They differ in their purpose, component, methods, and technologies used to achieve their goals, but also through their dimensions, activities and markets. Being a complex social entity, the organization is hard to define. The difficulty of defining the concept of „organization” is determined both by the many perspectives from which the organization is being analyzed and by the fact that the organizational analysis, thanks to the theoretical and practical research, has devoted new ways of defining it.

Psychologists tend to analyze and define organizations based on the needs of the individual, sociologists and political scientists are interested in adapting the individual to social needs and focus on social and political relationships, and economists approach organizations through the individual’s effort within the organization to grow its capital.

We will further present some of the definitions given to the organization, precisely to highlight the different perspectives of approach.

Eugen Burduș: *„The organization may be made up of two or more people carrying out activities to achieve common goals.”* [1]

Dumitru Iacob and Diana-Maria Cismaru: *„The organization is a social system in which and through which people interact (cooperate) to achieve common goals.”* [2]

Ovidiu Nicolescu and Ion Verboncu: *„[...] the organization can be defined as a system usually composed of several people working on the basis of certain predetermined rules in order to achieve a goal”* [3]

Gheorghe Militaru: *„Organizations are formal social constructions set up to achieve common goals through group efforts.”* [4]

Mihaela Vlăsceanu: *„Organizations are instruments for achieving a goal, they have a set of specific and clear objectives and their*

internal structure is designed to contribute to the achievement of the objectives.” [5]

Viorel Cornescu, Ioan Mihăilescu and Sica Stanciu: „*Any organization is made up of a group of people between whom interpersonal or multi personal structural relations are established, in which individuals are differentiated according to authority, status, role, and which is constituted for the realization of the proposed objectives or goals, aiming to get high efficiency*”. [6]

Gary Johns: “*Organizations are social inventions designed to achieve common goals through common effort*”. [7]

Richard W. Scott: “[*Organizations*] are communities whose participants pursue multiple interests, both different and common, but who recognize the importance of perpetuating the organization as an important resource. The informal structure of relationships that develops between participants provides a more informative guide to understanding organizational behavior than is provided by the formal structure.” [8]

John M. Ivancevich and Michael T. Matteson: “*Organizations. Institutions that allow society to pursue goals that could not be achieved by individuals acting separately*.” [9]

As it can be noted, the above definitions share a number of key elements: *individuals or communities, specific objectives, common interests or goals, achievement of goals*. In my opinion, on the basis of these elements, the organization can be defined as “*a system of at least two people who have established a set of specific and clear objectives that can be achieved through the activities of those individuals*.”

Each type of organization has specific features, but there are features that we encounter in all organizations [10]:

- organizations are always specialized in the sense that they have a mission to which certain specific objectives are associated;
- organizations, as social institutions, reflect a number of culturally accepted needs and values, meet certain goals of society;
- organizations are the place where people can make a particular career;

- organizations are made up of groups of people who carry out processes to achieve common and specific objectives, which would be individually very difficult and / or impossible to achieve;
- organizations keep, protect, store and transmit the knowledge to future generations, but they also add knowledge to what has already been accumulated;
- organizations cannot exist without an appropriate management to set goals, ensure both the process and structural-organizational conditions necessary to achieve the goals, as well as the coordination of the efforts of the people in the organization and their dedication-motivation;
- organizations have a formal organizational structure, focused on well-defined principles, rules and relationships and unanimously assumed and respected by the group members.

3. LEARNING ORGANIZATION - ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Over time, organizations have evolved. From “*organization*” to “*intelligent organization*”, “*network organization*”, “*democratic organization*”, “*knowledge-based organization*” and “*learning organization*”. The common element of all these types of organizations was the recognition of the value of knowledge, talent, motivation, and the innovative spirit of the employees. The success of organizations has begun to be given by the efficient use of talented employees.

The one who put forth the phrase “learning organization” was Peter M. Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, first published in the year 1990. According to the author, organizations that will achieve remarkable results in the future are organizations where each employee shares his knowledge and learns from others. These organizations “will find out how to capture people’s commitment and how to foster the ability to learn at all levels of the organization.” [11]

Since the emergence of the “learning organization” syntax, specialists have developed different definitions of this type of organization. We will further give a review of these definitions.

Business Dictionary: “The organization that acquires knowledge and innovates quickly enough to survive and develop into a rapidly changing environment. Learning organizations (1) create a culture that encourages and supports employees’ lifelong learning, critical thinking and risk-taking from new ideas; (2) allows employee mistakes and appreciates their contributions; (3) learns from experience and experiment; (4) spreads/disseminates new knowledge throughout the organization so that they are integrated into everyday activities.” [12]

N. Mathieu: “Learning organization is an ideal type of organization where values, mental models, organizational structures, strategy and management anticipate and adapt continuously through collective learning, to the reality well identified, creating the best environment for the organization and its members, to achieve the goals and results that they really want.” [13]

D. Garvin: “Learning organization is able to create, acquire, understand, transfer and retain knowledge and intended to change behavior to reflect new knowledge and understanding.” [14]

Kenneth W. Johnson: “Learning organization is an organization that aims to create its own future; this presupposes that learning is a continuous and creative process for its members, and the organization develops, adapts and transforms in response to the needs and aspirations of people both within and outside of it”. [15]

Peter M. Senge: “Learning organizations are organizations where people continuously extend the capacity to create the results they really want, the new and prolific ways of thinking are encouraged, where collective aspiration is free and people learn continuously how to learn together.” [16]

The above definitions, although developed by different authors and in different periods, share common key terms: organization, collective aspirations, personal and/or professional skills, lifelong learning and/or together, achievement of objectives, development of the organization. Based on these terms, in our opinion, “the learning organization is the organization in which employees are encouraged to develop their personal and professional skills through continuous learning and the use of new knowledge to achieve the goals and development of the organization.”

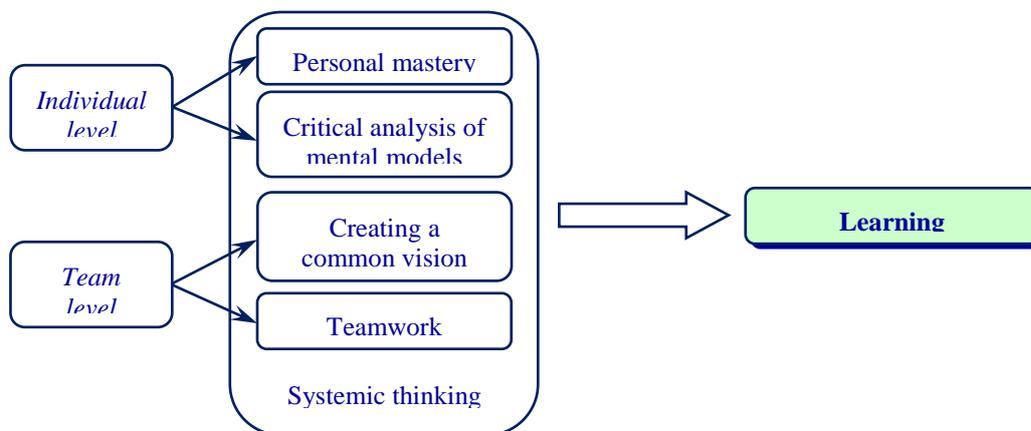


Figure 1: Learning organization (personal contribution)

According to Peter M. Senge, building a learning organization involves focusing on the

following elements: personal mastery, mental models, creating a common vision, team

building, and systemic thinking. These elements are seen as “disciplines”, as a “body of theories and techniques that must be studied and assumed in order to be put into practice”. [17] The first two disciplines (personal mastery and mental models) have a pronounced individual application, and the next two (creating a common vision and team learning) have application especially at the group level.

The level and value of an organization from the perspective of the “learning” process is determined by the way in which the mix of these elements highlighted above is achieved.

Table 1 gives a summary of the characteristics of the learning organization’s elements.

Table 1. Characteristics of the learning organization’s elements (personal contribution)

Element	Characteristics
Personal mastery	– considered to be the cornerstone of the learning organization;
	– the in-depth knowledge of all the members of the organization of the tasks they have to accomplish helps the organization to cope with the challenges it faces.
Critical analysis of mental models	– the members of the organization periodically analyze critically both the way in which the activity in the organization is carried out and the way of thinking used to solve the problems of the organization.
Common vision	– when there is real vision in the organization, people have great results and

Element	Characteristics
Teamwork	learn because they want it;
	– all members of the organization have a common perception of the purpose of the organization and work together to achieve this goal.
	– has outstanding results;
Systemic thinking	– makes every member in the team, in part, develop much faster than they could by learning by themselves;
	– the members of the organization work together, find solutions together to the new problems, solutions that they apply together;
	– helps the organization achieve its goals.
Systemic thinking	– integrates the previous elements and unites them into a coherent set of theories and practices;
	– each member of the organization is aware of the tasks and the way in which these tasks interpenetrate with those of the other members of the organization.

Key features of learning organizations are [18]:

- constantly creating opportunities for each employee to learn;
- learning from one’s own experiences and from others;
- promoting investigation and dialogue;
- systematically solving problems;
- establishing a link between individual and organizational performance;

- using training to reach goals;
- an organizational climate that encourages each employee to learn and develop their full potential;
- encouraging dialogue, collaboration and team learning;
- where possible, extending the learning to other people outside the organization but coming into contact with it;
- the transfer of information and knowledge from outside the organization;
- building systems for learning and distributing learning;
- experimenting new ideas;
- supporting the development of the group vision;
- centering the development of the organization on the human resources development strategy of the organization;
- valuing the link between the organization and the environment.

The learning organization is not based on a passive or ad hoc process, hoping learning will be a byproduct of everyday activities. This type of organization promotes, facilitates and rewards individual and collective learning.

Although it is not a perfect organization and in organizations resilience to change prevails, more and more organizations tend to become “learning organizations”. Encouraging and stimulating employees to learn alone or in groups, using the theoretical and practical knowledge of employees as well as learning from past mistakes helps the organization achieve its goals.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Changing organizations into “learning organizations” means more than “redesigning” existing structures. There is a need for a completely new vision of what organizations can become, because when an organization is transformed into a “learning organization”, it creates a learning environment, both by supporting and stimulating learning, and by exchanging knowledge among employees. In the case of the learning organization, the way the team thinks matters very much. This is because, even if people have the ability to

learn, it does not mean that the group has this capacity, too.

Nowadays, more and more organizations are evolving towards “learning organizations” because they focus on lifelong learning, creating, generating and transferring knowledge, and changing employee behavior. At the same time, addressing new directions used in the management - long-term planning; giving more importance to people and leadership; focusing on teamwork, cooperation, diversity; delegation of authority; decentralized control - leads to the creation of the learning organization.

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