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Learning Behavior of Managers Within The Learning Organization

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ABSTRACT

Background: In view of all organizations are learning organizations, this research was pursued in investigating the relationship between learning behavior of managers and the learning organization they work for. **Objective:** The main research objective was to determine empirically the relationship between learning behavior of managers and learning organizations **Results:** Generally, results showed that there is a positive relationship between learning behavior and the learning organization. Based on refined findings and discussions on the various learning behavior components affecting the learning organization, relevant recommendations were made. Instruction oriented learning is the least preferred method, it is advisable for the top management to use increased diplomatic methods to engage managers strongly for positive relationship that can work towards increased productive results. **Conclusion:** Supporting managers in their learning for capacity building for increased individual absorptive, innovative and adaptive ability by the top management or shareholders is extremely important for productivity growth of any organization.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning behavior of managers forms a major part managerial learning, it can be argued that, based on the work of Cohen & Levinthal (1990), as in Beeby & Booth (2000, p.78), a manager's "learning and absorptive capacity" differs from that of others working in the same organization. Generally, this research was approached on the probability that there was certain level of influence between learning by managers and the learning of the organization they work for. All managers exhibit their own learning behavior (intrinsic motivations). The manager's learning behavior in a workplace was always subjected to contextual situations (extrinsic motivations). Hence, the learning process that managers go through requires the existence and dynamics of learning behavior that contributes to building and maintaining a learning organization.

The capacity and ability to learn from "the same kinds of experience" differ amongst individuals or managers (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Spreitzer *et al*., 1997; Morrison & Brantner, 1992; and Burke, 1989, as in Van der Sluis & Poell, 2003) due to various reasons. According to Tallott & Hilliard (2014) successful change requires adaptation (March & Simon, 1958) absorption (Cohen Levinthal, 1990; Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2009) and innovation (Jantunen *et al*., 2012; Schumpeter, 1943), common typologies of dynamic capabilities (Wang & Ahmed, 2007).

The adaptive, absorptive and innovative capabilities are interdependent in nature and may not exist in any individual manager. As these capabilities may well lead to superior performance, not all individuals in the firm have the necessary cognitive and creative skills. Hence, the holistic development of the organization as a learning organization by managers is the most desirable approach that embeds these processes inside the enterprise itself (Tallott & Hilliard, 2014). Otherwise, the firm will be venerable if this is left to a few individuals (Teece, 2010).

Problem Statement:

Although the research by Moilanen (2001c) has indicated that managers were the key driving force to building, maintaining and developing learning organization, she, however, did not explore empirically the relationship between learning behavior of managers and learning organizations. Other researchers such as Antonacopoulou (2002, p.3-7) and Teare & Dealtry (1998, p.47-49), renowned for their studies on the linkage between managerial learning and learning organizations, have also indicated the existence of strong relationship between the two variables, but did not explore this relationship empirically. Hence, the gap in knowledge as to the link between learning behavior

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and, managing and leading the learning organization was tested empirically. By studying the relationship of learning behavior with learning organizations, the effect level in the relationship of various learning behavior factors on the learning organization can be revealed. Awareness of how learning behavior affect the learning organization can help human resource developers to effect appropriate intervention, so that managers can perform better role models as change agents in managing and leading the organization they work for.

According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.22-25), the learning behavior of managers was characterized by "meaning oriented learning", "instruction oriented learning", "planned learning" and "emergent learning" variables. The learning organization, according to Moilanen (2001c) was characterized by five elements consisting of driving forces, finding purpose, questioning, empowering and evaluating that manifest at two levels i.e. organization and individual level. Research by Moilanen (2001c) has strongly indicated that learning behavior was linked to learning organizations.

Research Objective:

The specific objective derived from the problem statement for this research would be to determine the nature of relationship between learning behaviour and the learning organization.

Literature Review:

Even the world acclaimed guru of learning organizations, Peter Senge, was said to have not been able to provide a "short and precise definition of a learning organization in his works. …" (Moilanen, 2001c). However, for the purpose of this research based on definitions given by numerous scholars in this field, a learning organization was defined as a "holistic concept" that was used to address an organization as a "learning environment or as an infrastructure" (Moilanen, 2001c).

The Learning Organization:

This research used the instrument developed by Moilanen (2001a), named as The Learning Organization Diamond (TLOD), to measure the status of an organization as a learning organization (LO). The instrument consists of five major elements, and each has two-sided concept – first the more holistic aspects of a learning organization measured at organization level (OLL) and secondly the more individual-based managerial level (ILL) views. Hence, in total, there are ten elements to diagnose or measure the overall organization level learning as a learning organization. The ten elements of a learning organization is holistically based on the five key elements. The five major elements identified by Moilanen (2001a) are presented in the following paragraphs.

I. Driving forces:

From the organization viewpoint, the driving force was named by Moilanen (2001c; 1999b) as "managing the whole … best defined by stating that a manager is taking care of, or at least being conscious of, all organization-wide systems, processes and structures which could enable or hinder learning." At individual or managerial level driving forces, "managers lead learners and their learning [by] taking care of individuals and groups for as long as they need assistance in becoming better learners or masters of the learning processes" (Moilanen, 2001c).

II. Finding purpose:

refers to intended direction that an organization wants to take based on or guided by the vision and strategy built by a learning organization, as Moilanen (1999a) puts it: "Strategy and vision direct companies in their operations, and should also direct learning" at managerial level. It was the "motivation" to learn new things at personal level, which ultimately links to learning for organization-wide purpose, "concentrating on the most crucial needs of the company [organization]" (Moilanen, 1999a).

III. Questioning:

was the reflective element in the manager that involves "inquiring, doubting and asking for the value of the present state [of learning in the organization]" (Moilanen, 2001a). The need for "… questioning organization-wide routines" constitutes the learning taking place at organization level and at the managers' personal level, it was his/her own routines, "mental models and patterns" that were questioned on a continuous basis reflectively (Moilanen, 2001c; Senge, 1990a).

IV. Empowering:

was referred by Moilanen (1999a; 2001c) to describe the combinations of various "organization-wide arrangements and support systems" that can help in effecting "learning climate and providing self-development opportunities for all (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell, 1997)". At personal level, empowerment is exercised by organizing, for example, "social learning, training, listening, reading, … and job rotation" that can enhance or develop learning in an organization (Moilanen, 1999a).

V. Evaluating:

helps the management of the learning organization to gain accurate information on the progress of the organization in relation to organization-wide learning taking place. At the organization level, evaluation was meant to assess the results achieved "in the field of learning and development" of the whole organization (Moilanen, 2001c). At the managerial level, "this might best be

characterized by self-assessment and group-based evaluating systems" (Moilanen, 2001a).

Learning Behaviour:

According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.23-24), Hoeksema, Van de Vliert & Williams (1997) highlighted two types of learning behaviours: (i) "meaning" oriented learning, which was looking for the "deeper meaning of experiences" on the job, and (ii) "instruction" oriented learning, which was looking for instruction to meet one's obligations and answer "expectations".

Van der Sluis (2000, p.23-24) has also pointed out two other managerial learning behaviours developed by Megginson (1996): (i) "planned learning", and (ii) "emergent learning". Planned learning behaviour was said to be a "learning approach that is characterized by a careful deliberation prior to action" whereas emergent learning behaviour was described as a learning approach that was "unpremeditated characterized by retrospective exploration of experience" (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.24-25). Managers can use any one learning approach as the dominant approach to the exclusion of the other approaches (Megginson, 1996; Hoeksema *et al.*, 1997) as in Van der Sluis (2000, p.23).

All four kinds of learning behaviour as identified by Megginson and Hoeksema were "related to each other, based on two dimensions": (i) the two extremes of "learning" and "performance" on one dimension, and (ii) the other dimension consisting of two extremes "retrospective learning" and "prospective learning" (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.24). Figuratively a two-by-two matrix with the dimensions and extremes mentioned is shown in Figure 1 (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.25). The retrospective approach "involves learning from experience by looking back over what happened and reaching conclusions about it" (Mumford, 1995, p.14). According to Mumford (1995, p.14), this approach was used by those who: (i) do not have "difficulty reflecting on their experience and analyzing it to identify the learning points" and (ii) possess the tendency to "draw conclusions from routine events" regardless of positive or negative experiences. On the other hand, the prospective approach includes "planning to learn before an experience takes place" in addition to all the retrospective elements, which emphasizes on review of "what happened after an experience" (Mumford, 1995, p.15).

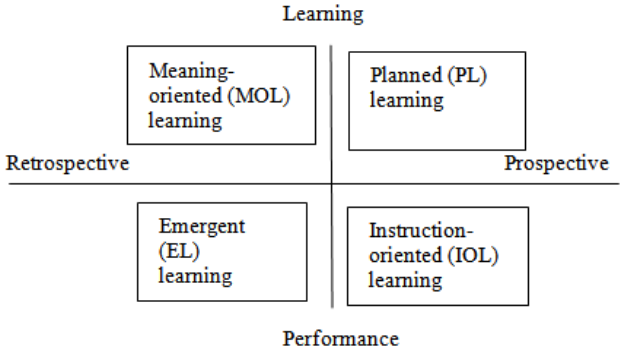

Fig. 1: Four Learning Behaviours
Source: Van der Sluis (2000)

Hence, the hypotheses supported by literature reviewed and investigated is:

H_{1A}: There is a positive linear relationship between learning behavior and the learning organization

Previous research by Maniam & Jegak Uli (2011b) indicted that that the learning behavior of managers in terms of MOL, PL, EL and IOL can be treated as separate scales, except for MOL and EL, in that managers see minimal difference between searching for deeper meaning of what they experience in their job (MOL) and that of gaining information and knowledge via unplanned means whilst at work (EL). The results also indicated that managers use lesser IOL behavior at their workplace and this mean score differs significantly from other learning behaviors.

Research Methodology:

This study was a one-shot study design incorporating a cross-sectional survey using quantitative techniques. The descriptive research approach was used to explore the current status of the subjects' perceptions on quantitative variables in this study without manipulating or influencing any variables viz. learning behavior and learning organizations. For this research the selection of study population was based on top two industries in manufacturing and services sectors each in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, as per reports by Malaysia Productivity Corporation, Malaysia Industrial Development Authority and Bank Negara Malaysia. A target sample of 600 managers, involving a total of 120 organizations selected to seek these respondents for questionnaire survey participation. From the stratified random selection of 120 out of 403

organizations, with a sample size of 600 people, and 95% confidence in the results, the margin of error would be ± 1.96%.

The content validity of the instrument with the 75 statements was ascertained by five specialists in the field of human resource development prior to testing for reliability. The results of reliability tests indicate a Cronbach α = .9001 (quite similar to previous research), exceeding 0.7, which is the convention for reliability of instruments acceptable for behavioural science research, recommended by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994). The statements in the instrument used ten-point Likert scale on a continuum of 1=strongly disagree to 10=strongly agree.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Objective: To Determine the Nature of Relationship between Learning Behaviour and the Learning Organization:

To explore the relationship between the LBV (exogenous variable) and the LO (endogenous variable), a factor analysis of the LBV was carried out and results reported above (see Table 1). The factor analysis showed that most items load strongly (above 0.50) on all four variables and each being loaded as a separate component.

Table 1: Varimax Rotation of Four Factor Solution for LBV Items

Comp1(Mng Oriented L)	Load	Comp 2 (Planned L)	Load
A2: work consequence	.73	A27: prepare learning plans	.84
A1: decisions with others in mind	.67	A29: use learning contract	.81
A3: questioning on work progress	.64	A28: set development targets	.76
A4: compare work performance	.63	A26: set goals for own learning	.71
A6: putting across view	.62	A25: lrng, a planned process	.46
A11: summarizing information	.57	A24: self performance appr'sal	.50
A5: und'stand underlying meaning	.55	A12, A13 (loadings <.50)	
A8: discuss work with others	.53		
A9: linking problem aspects	.51		
A10: listening & forwarding view	.50		
A15, A14 (loadings below 0.50)			
No of items loading on Comp 1	10 itm	No of items loading on Comp 2	6 itm
% of variance explained	15.4%	% of variance explained	12.5%
Comp 3 (Emergent L)	Load	Comp 4 (Instruction)	Load
A33: open to experience for learning	.69	A17: like to be told what to do	.78
A19: remember work experiences	.65	A16: like to be told info source	.69
A34: learning emerges unexpectedly	.62	A20: do tasks responsible for	.55
A23: try recall things done fully	.62	A35: can't plan sig'cant learning	.51
A32: freq reflection of work	.54	A21,A7,A18 (loadings < 0.50)	
A30: emergence via conversations	.54		
A31, A22 (loadings below 0.50)			
No of items loading on Comp 3	6 itm	No of items loading on Comp 4	4 itm
% of variance explained	12.2%	% of variance explained	8.2%

Note: Only loadings above .50 are displayed.

Findings:

The relationship between building and sustaining learning organization (LO) and LBV, comprising meaning oriented learning (MOL), planned learning (PL), emergent learning (EL) and instruction oriented learning (IOL), was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation in the assumptions of normality and linearity. Since there were three (3) bivariate pairs, the Bonferroni adjusted or corrected alpha of 0.017 (0.05/3) was used to test null hypothesis of the non-linear relationships between the bivariate pairs.

In order to have a general picture of the relationship between the LBV and LO variables were investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. As shown in Table 2, a positive linear relationship was found to exist between LBV and LO (r = .44, p = .0001). The positive correlation coefficient of .44 indicates a moderate correlation implying that as the score for LO increases so do the rating for the LBV

approaches. On the whole the LBV generally has a moderate positive linear relationship to LO. Hence, the need for further investigation of the correlation between LBV variables, (i.e. meaning oriented learning, instruction oriented learning, planned learning and emergent learning) and the LO variable.

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients of LO and Overall LBV

	Variables	Y_1	X_1
Y_1	The Learning Organization		
X_1	Learning behavior	.44	

Notes: Zero-order coefficients p < 0.01. Benforroni adjusted alpha = 0.017 (0.05/3).

As shown in Table 3, the strongest linear relationship was found to exist between LO and planned learning effects (r = .44, p = .0001). The positive correlation coefficient of .44 indicates a moderate correlation implying that as the score for LO increases so do the rating for planned learning approaches. The second highest was found between LO and meaning oriented learning (r = .39, p = .0001) and the correlation coefficient indicates that there was also a moderate positive linear relationship between LO and meaning oriented learning. Likewise, the third highest correlation was between LO and emergent learning (r = .34, p = 0.0001) indicating a moderate positive linear relationship. Lastly, the relationship between LO and instruction oriented learning was very small as the correlation coefficient of .01 (r = .01, p > .0001) was almost 0, indicating a very weak positive linear relationship.

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Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients of LO and Components LBV variables

	Variables	Y_1	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4
Y_1	The Learning Organization					
X_1	Meaning oriented learning	.39*				
X_2	Planned learning	.44*	.33			
X_3	Emergent learning	.34*	.49	.42		
X_4	Instruction oriented learning	.01	.16	.06	.17	

Notes: Zero-order coefficients p < 0.01. Benforroni adjusted alpha = 0.013 (0.05/4). * significant at .01 and .05 level.

From the above analysis it can be said that the level of LO was more likely to increase moderately when LBV actions increase, viz with planned learning, followed by meaning oriented and emergent learning.

Discussions:

Overall, the above findings showed that there was a positive linear relationship between the LBV and LO. This supports the first hypothesis given as H_{1A}: There was a positive linear relationship between learning behavior and, the learning organization. This conforms to the literature reviewed that LBV effects and affects the learning of the organization as a whole. As Moilanen (2001c) has mentioned that managers play key role in the formation and evolvement of learning organizations; hence, their contribution in the form of managerial learning was ever crucial. This implication of managers doing the bulk of learning in the organization they work for was affirmed by the identification of a moderate, positive linear relationship between the learning behavior of managers and the learning organization. This finding also supports the notion that the LBV of managers involve a high level of individual effort or initiative in terms of "internal mental processes" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.256) due to vast amount of "experiential learning" (Kolb, 1984, as in Van der Sluis, 2000, p.10).

From the above analysis on the relationship of specific LBV variables affecting LO, it can be said that the level of LO was more likely to increase at moderate level when planned learning, emergent learning and meaning oriented learning occurs; and in the case of instruction oriented learning it will have a negligible effect on the LO level. The results also showed that three out of four LBV variables, i.e. PL, MOL and EL, were having moderate positive linear relationships (in order of declining strength) with LO whereas the correlation between IOL and LO was a very small positive linear relationship.

The weak correlation between IOL and LO could be due to the negative perception held by higher management on managers asking for instructions whereby "this learning behavior was perceived by higher management as a lack of initiative and independence" (Van der Sluis &

Hoeksema, 2001, p.171). On the other hand, planned learning (PL), which represents the ability of managers to give deep and well-thought considerations on their learning approach to devise the best action plan for execution on their own, was the strongest LBV variable influencing LO. As such, it can be said that managers, as learners, naturally possess "the motivation to learn" and they "can control their own destiny" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.256-257) in terms of doing the necessary learning to take appropriate managerial actions.

From the analysis above, it can be seen that PL in combination with MOL (characterized by learning to obtain deeper meaning of experiences) forming the first two variables in the relationship between LBV and LO. Both PL and MOL were inclined to learning orientation rather than performance in the learning-performance LBV continuum (see Figure 1). This orientation gives a strong notion that "internal mental process" was strongly in place when managers learn. In other words, deep thinking process was also prevalent in their on-the-job learning that ultimately influences the learning infrastructure of the organization they work for. The findings correlate with the mother theory of this research in that, managers, as individual learners, have influence in the learning of the organization as a whole.

Conclusion And Recommendation:

Supporting managers in their learning for capacity building for increased individual absorptive, innovative and adaptive ability by the top management or shareholders is extremely important for productivity growth of any organization. More so, as the findings showed that managers feel strongly that it is their internal mental processes that evolved from their very own experiential learning as the primary cause of their intense learning for the growth of organization they work for. As instruction oriented learning is the least preferred method, it is advisable for the top management to use increased diplomatic methods to engage managers strongly for positive relationship that can work towards increased productive results. In other words trustworthiness, without compromising transparency, in engaging managers to get things done should be the call. Since managers' strong inclination to PL and MOL showed stronger tendency to learning rather than performance orientation, the top management must create platforms to communicate and facilitate continuous learning on latest information and knowledge that are highly relevant for career and organization performance and productivity.

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