Feedback and Feedforward Dynamics:
Nexus of Organizational Learning and Leadership Self-Efficacy

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INTRODUCTION

Learning processes are encouraged and easily accessible when all members in the organization embrace a culture of innovation. This collaborative learning environment urges the organization to improve mental models in order to reach even higher desired learning levels. New competencies are called for in order to create and improve organizational cognitive thinking models that in turn specifically enable HEIs and organizations at large to develop their collective, interactive and participative learning capability. The aim of this chapter is to ascertain whether universities, with traditional and bureaucratic organization structures, processes and procedures, can and are willing to undergo a paradigm shift in order to become ambidextrous organizations.

The ambidextrous construct is related to medical sciences albeit in recent years it has become part of theoretical debates (Raisch, Birkinshaw, Probst, & Tushman, 2009). According to Cao, Gedajlovic, and Zhang (2009) and Gupta, Smith, and Shalley (2006), this construct is generically associated with the capability to follow two distinct paths. Burns and Stalker (1961) put forth a structure for the ambidextrous thinking construct when they postulated two distinct ambidextrous configurations, namely:

1. Refined interpolation
2. Disciplined extrapolation.

The first configuration, i.e. refined interpolation, requires a grouping of different capitals, such as specialized human capital, social capital and organizational capital. The second configuration, i.e. disciplined extrapolation, requires a context with various capitals prevails, thus, general human capital, entrepreneurial social capital and mechanistic organizational capital. Therefore, Kang and Snell (2009) postulate three levels in order to demonstrate how exploitation and exploration are factors inherent in intellectual capital. While generalized human capital is closely linked to exploratory learning, specialized human capital is linked to exploitive learning. These authors also distinguish between social capital and entrepreneurial social capital. Social capital is linked to dense social ties and to strong cohesive groups, which are needed for complex knowledge transfer. Entrepreneurial social capital refers to less dense ties and a vast range of contacts that promote access to new knowledge. Furthermore, the organizational

capital construct embraces these two abovementioned configurations, which in turn foster new ways of creating organizational knowledge, regarded as collaborative in nature.

The collaborative learning environments stimulate knowledge creation and sharing by implementing distributed leadership behaviors that energize individuals to innovate and explore new ideas. Further analysis demonstrates that the social cognitive approach to learning is part and parcel of organizational learning. This study further reflects on the relationship between organizational learning and the constructs of exploration and exploitation inherent in ambidextrous learning.

NEW PATHS TO ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Shrivastava (1983) postulated that organizational learning arises from the ways in which knowledge is developed and shared in the organization. Moreover, according to Hult and Ferrell (1997), organizational learning refers to the manner in which the organization transfers and integrates information. It is for this reason that Schwandt and Gundlach (1992) posit organizational learning as a process that transforms information into knowledge.

There are various viewpoints in organizational learning, ranging from the cognitive to the behavioral perspectives. Huber (1991) maintains that an organization learns when its behavioral patterns are changed resulting from information processing. Levitt and March (1988) as well as Markóczy (1994) corroborate that there may be a link between the codification of organizational routines and information processing. This link occurs when there is a need to reorganize future behaviors and experiences in the actual organization. This codification fosters a tuning in with the environment and attempts to satisfy all stakeholders associated with the organization, as Huysman (1999) and Dixon (1994) postulates. Organizational learning occurs when the organization applies codified, explicit and tacit knowledge to adjust itself to its environment and its competitors (Argyris, & Schön, 1978) as well as by adjusting prevailing mental models.

For almost half a century, Argyris and Schön (1978) have theorized on the organizational learning construct and postulate that learning depends on the capacity that individuals have to observe, perceive and apply changes to the organization in order for it to learn. Thus, because individual learning is at the heart of organizational learning, its reference point lies in the individual's cognitive framework. Therefore, it becomes important to reflect on those organizational defensive routines that may inhibit organizational learning (Senge, 1990).

The Crossan, Lane and White (1999) organizational learning model, also known as the 4I model, identifies four key processes, namely:

1. Intuiting
2. Interpreting
3. Integrating and
4. Institutionalizing.

This model also focuses on the integration of three levels of learning, i.e. individual, group and organizational. The model further includes two paths of learning, which range from the individual to the organization and vice versa; albeit, individual learning alone does not guarantee organizational learning. It is therefore imperative that knowledge transfer prevails among individuals in the organization to facilitate knowledge institutionalization (Senge, 1990; Wang, & Ahmed, 2003; Easterby-Smith, &

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