

# Context dependent approaches to learning organization

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## Introduction

Issue 5 consists of a special section and other regular contributions. The special section, guest edited by Robert J. McClelland, Seng K. Kok and Anh-Duc Hoang, contains contributions on contemporary approaches to learning organization in the Asia-Pacific region, with special emphasis on Vietnam and India. In this issue, [Han, Nguyen, Hua, and Pham \(2022\)](#) used a study of the Vietnamese hospitality industry to explain what facilitates effective training. [Nyuyem et al. \(2023\)](#) explained the challenges in ensuring economic progress in Vietnam and suggested that organizations use the Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) as a tool for transforming into a learning organization, which they also validated in this country. [Rai and Maheshwari \(2023\)](#) showed us how an organization can respond to a crisis such as a declared COVID-19 pandemic and emphasized the dimension of learning during lockdowns. [Duey et al. \(2023\)](#) discussed internationalization as a strategy to enhance higher education quality in Vietnam.

Three regular contributions are also related to the topics covered in the special section. For example, [Annan-Prah, Baffoe, & Andoh \(2023\)](#) examined the human aspect of the learning organization and the performance of administrative staff in a public university, [Muzam, Bendkowski, Mah, & Mudoh \(2023\)](#) examined modern workplace learning, and finally [Rahul Paul and Khalid Perwez \(2023\)](#) explained the impact of quality of work life on the psychological capital of organizational leaders using artificial neural networks in a hybrid workplace.

## How to achieve effective training?

Every organization must foster individual, team and organizational learning to adapt, change and transform. Organizational resilience, as the organization's ability to absorb disruption and bring about change, is therefore based on an effective learning process. However, in a modern complex environment, individual learning is highly dependent on effective training and development. Effective training and development has been the focus of research of [Han et al. \(2022\)](#) in Vietnam as an emerging economy and in their understudied hospitality industry.

It is important to provide rich, balanced and stimulating training opportunities that are optimally tailored to individual needs. This includes on-site and remote training opportunities, as well as supporting resources such as video presentations and lectures. The



effectiveness of employee training and development depends on their motivation. Motivation can be extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is based on financial (salary and benefits) and other external incentives (promotion opportunities) that encourage employees to improve their skills to perform their tasks more effectively and efficiently (Lee, 2021; Qui, et al., 2014). Han et al. (2022) confirmed that extrinsic motivators have a positive impact on the effectiveness of training in the hospitality industry in Vietnam. This result was expected in this setting because the country is developing economically, which contributes to the importance of economic and financial factors.

However, economic development also contributed to the increase in the cost of living, which increased the extrinsic motivation of employees to obtain better compensation by participating in training and development activities. Intrinsic motivation was secondary in this data set. However, practitioners in other, more developed countries should pay more attention to their employees' intrinsic motivation for training, development and knowledge sharing. Intrinsic motivation is particularly important for knowledge sharing (Zhao, Detlor, & Connelly, 2016). Together with extrinsic motivation, it can create a synergistic effect. This is logical because intrinsic motivation refers to a person's desire to engage in an activity out of pleasure, interest and personal satisfaction. The level of engagement and interest of individuals driven by intrinsic motivation is greater and leads to more profound results in terms of the end result as well as personal growth and development (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Job quality is also related to the effectiveness of training and development. Job quality can be viewed by examining elements such as workload, job content, pay, job security opportunities for advancement and development, job autonomy and relationships with supervisors (Clarke, 2015). In this regard, "good jobs" would be those that provide good working conditions, job security and adequate compensation, including benefits, as well as opportunities for development and advancement. "Bad jobs" have high workloads, tend to be monotonous, offer poorer working conditions, lower pay and no benefits and do not offer development and promotion opportunities. Workers in a modern complex environment are aware of the need to ensure their long-term employability, which leads them to seek training and development opportunities, which is a very important element on the basis of which they classify the job as "good," even if the current compensation is inadequate. Han et al. (2022) confirmed that the quality of the workplace has a positive impact on the effectiveness of hospitality training in Vietnam.

More specifically, the work environment is very important for employees' work, but also for learning, knowledge sharing, training and development. A favorable work environment can promote employees' learning and willingness to learn, knowledge sharing and a positive attitude toward learning and others. Work environment support includes supervisor support, peer support and encouragement to learn as an organizational culture value (Chung, Zhan, Noe, & Jiang, 2022). Team support in the form of supervisor and peer support is particularly valuable for learning and training transfer (Hughes, Zajac, Woods, & Salas, 2020). A peer support network can be particularly beneficial in this regard, as it allows employees to share information even after training is completed, further enhancing sense-making and learning. Han et al. (2022) found that knowledge transfer during on-the-job training was more difficult when the quality of peer-supervisor relationships was not good. However, clear organizational policies and processes can be useful guiding mechanisms to enable effective engagement, learning and knowledge transfer and compensate for other missing elements.

Han et al. (2022) also noted that supervisor support is a very important element for effective employee training and development in a country characterized by greater power

distance. In such an environment, employees expect their supervisors to act as role models and recognize their efforts to learn and transfer knowledge. However, training is also important for managers/supervisors to improve their skills and organizational commitment, including in the area of employee training and development. In this context, senior managers have been shown to prefer informal development programs, particularly problem-solving coaching (Brown, 2006), especially after a thorough formal or college education.

Length of employment or tenure is another important predictor of employee training and development. Longer tenure has been shown to positively impact employees' behaviors toward the organization (Yu, Asaad, Yen, & Gupta, 2018), as well as their motivation and commitment. As employees increase their tenure, they also receive more and higher quality training and development opportunities. Companies are particularly interested in training their full-time employees. This also affects their willingness to stay with the company and helps them become more engaged, committed and identified with company goals (Bell & Grushecky, 2006). Employees who have a stronger sense of belonging are also more motivated to continue their training and learning (Bashir & Long, 2015). However, Han et al. (2022) could not confirm that length of service predicts the effectiveness of training in the Vietnamese hospitality industry. The reason could be that the majority of respondents were young and part-time, but also not particularly interested in developing their careers in the companies they worked for, which is often the case in the hospitality industry. However, they confirmed that training has a positive impact on job satisfaction by helping employees better understand the meaning of their current job and its challenges.

### **Dimensions of the learning organization questionnaire**

Vietnam has recently made efforts to ensure rapid and sustainable economic and social development. However, there are many obstacles to this process. The most important obstacle relates to the quality of the labor force capable of supporting industrialization and working in the digital economy to effectively absorb knowledge and translate it into new value creation (Cameron & Green, 2019). The shortage of skilled labor is very pronounced, making Vietnam the lowest productivity country in Asia (World Bank, 2020). For this reason, emphasis should be placed on workplace learning and the development of companies as learning organizations. One element that has contributed to the current situation is the Confucian influence in Vietnam, which values lifelong learning, but also a top-down approach that has led to an unequal distribution of learning opportunities by favoring managers over workers (Nguyen & Hoang, 2021; Truong, Pham, & Doan, 2021).

However, things are changing with the idea that business development is impossible without strong employee or workplace learning. This also means that the organizational environment should be conducive to learning, and the concept of learning organization provides the best framework for this. For this reason, a good instrument to measure organizational progress toward a learning organization or change in this regard is useful. The DLOQ instrument, developed by Watkins & Marsick (1997) and validated in various contexts, is best suited for this purpose. Nguyen-Duc et al. (2023) validated it in the Vietnamese context and present their findings in this issue. This tool is based on an integrative approach that includes individual, team and organizational dimensions, and focuses on learning by focusing on two key components: people and structures. It is useful to remind practitioners of its dimensions:

- creating continuous learning opportunities;
- promoting dialogue and inquiry;
- encouraging collaboration and team learning;

- establishing systems to capture and share learning;
- connecting the organization to its environment;
- empowering people to adopt a collective vision; and
- having leaders who model and support learning at the individual, team and organizational levels.

Practitioners who want to develop their enterprise as a learning organization or who simply want to determine whether and to what extent their company or organization is a learning organization should use this instrument as an excellent diagnostic tool.

### **What to do when we cannot work onsite?**

The authorities managing the declared pandemic COVID-19 decided that it would be a good idea to impose more or less strict lockdowns and prevent further work activities on site. The world found itself in an unprecedented situation that paralyzed it on the one hand and left it wondering how to proceed on the other. So what could we do if we could not work? Well, there are many things we were able to do despite the restrictions. The lockdowns were a great opportunity to learn and catch up on things we had been putting off because of the stress and overwhelm we had experienced during our hectic work days and years. Among others, a large energy conglomerate in India did just that – used this time to learn (Rai & Maheshwari, 2022).

The company implemented a learning and development program to develop employees through intensive online training. The program included training in various areas such as technology, finance, health and safety. The program was called “the 45-day learning challenge.” In total, more than 100 online learning opportunities were offered. Outside organizations and agencies were also invited to participate and offer learning sessions. This contributed to the professional and personal development of employees. However, the educational program was also extended to family members to teach them various job and life skills. Of particular interest was the “Art of Living” – a holistic wellness program. The result was not only new learning, knowledge and wellness for employees and their families, but also the introduction and application of new learning technologies and methods such as the internal learning portal, webinars, intranet, online forums, social media, mobile applications and webcasts. Interaction was thus uninterrupted and dialog constant both internally and with external stakeholders. And when employees and their family members were not learning, they were able to spend valuable time with their families and engage in hobbies. On this occasion, they also learned a lot about themselves!

### **Higher education in Vietnam**

The last paper in this special section focuses on internalization as a strategy to improve the quality of higher educational institutions in Vietnam (Duy, Hoai, & Cassells, 2023). Globalization is the most obvious factor contributing to the increasing internalization of global higher education institutions. However, despite the proclaimed benefits, internalization has unfortunately caused a paradigm shift from the former cooperation to competition among higher education institutions (Van der Wende, 2001). As a result, internalization is now seen as a means to increase institutional competitiveness, but also to obtain greater financial resources. For this reason, many institutions emphasize their commercial orientation to attract foreign students and faculty, while quality is viewed in terms of the level of process documentation rather than the actual quality of teaching. Asian countries are also using internalization to increase their competitiveness, but also to reform

their higher education systems, especially from the perspective of standardizing their study programs with foreign institutions. For students, a multicultural environment is beneficial as they learn about foreign cultures and improve their sociocultural adaptation skills. However, it is not necessarily beneficial for their country of origin, as it encourages brain drain.

Duy et al. (2023) reported that internalization of higher education in Vietnam is not only sought by universities but also demanded by the government as a means to improve the quality of higher education. They report that universities pursue multiple goals through their internalization activities:

- creating and disseminating new knowledge;
- improving the knowledge and skills of staff and students; and
- improving the college's position in the world rankings.

More emphasis is placed on improving the knowledge of faculty, as they are the main agents who transmit and disseminate knowledge, especially to students. International mobility and research collaboration are also helpful in this regard. However, financial benefits are one of the most important goals. If a college offers international degree programs, it will attract more international students and earn from tuition fees. This is still difficult for Vietnamese universities, whose numbers have more than doubled in recent years. Currently, international students mainly serve to make the international focus more visible and thus attract more domestic students. Nevertheless, Vietnamese degree programs are attractive to foreign students, especially from Korea and Japan.

Efforts by Vietnamese HEIs to improve internalization are still quite unplanned, erratic and opportunistic, which is to be expected in the early stages when such activities are required. These activities are mostly based on personal network connections and even luck. However, many foreign faculty are kind enough to offer their help and support free of charge and to participate in joint research projects. The rapid adoption of online learning programs encourages these activities and contributes to increased international collaboration and learning.

### **Developing learning organization in the public university**

Annan-Prah et al. (2023) examined the human aspect of the learning organization of administrative staff in a public university context. The human aspect, in turn, is part of the DLOQ developed by Marsick & Watkins (2003). According to this, the learning organization consists of seven dimensions that are divided into two parts: the human aspect and the structural aspect. Leufvén, Vitrakoti, Bergström, Ashish, & Mållqvist (2015) identified four levels in Marsick and Watkins's (2003) learning organization model:

- (1) the individual level, which refers to continuous learning, inquiry, and dialogue;
- (2) the team or group level, which refers to collaboration and team learning;
- (3) the organizational level, which refers to embedded systems and employee empowerment; and
- (4) the global level, which refers to system connections and strategic leadership.

Annan-Prah et al. (2023) focused on what they called the "human aspect" (PALO) or continuous learning, inquiry and dialogue, collaboration and team learning, and employee empowerment.

People are the most important asset in any organization, from which systems and structures emerge. When people learn, dialogue and collaborate as a team based on empowerment, new knowledge is created and new and innovative value is generated that helps improve overall performance. It is interesting to note how demographic characteristics affect the dimensions of the learning organization, particularly the workforce aspect. Educational level is the most obvious differentiating factor, as it can have a major impact on how employees perceive learning activities. The number of years of experience is another interesting factor, as it affects how employees behave in organizations.

[Annan-Prah et al. \(2023\)](#) found that administrative staff with diploma in the public university that they chose for their research performed better in PALO activities than employees with a postgraduate degree. Apparently, university graduates engaged more in continuous learning, inquiry, dialogue, collaboration and team learning. In addition, administrators with 5–10 years of experience performed better than those with more than 15 years of experience. Practitioners working in such settings should find out if this is the case in their organization and consider strategies to engage everyone in learning, inquiry, dialogue and collaboration in team learning. Those with more education and experience can provide valuable input to their less educated and experienced colleagues as collaboration, dialogue and knowledge sharing are critical for organizational success. Mentoring could be one such strategy to achieve this goal. More ideas follow next.

### Modern workplace learning

[Muzam et al. \(2023\)](#) examined modern workplace learning. Today, the demands and challenges are greater, but so are the opportunities and possibilities for workplace learning. Workplace learning is key to individual and organizational productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. Information and knowledge are losing value every day, so information, skills and knowledge must be constantly updated and kept current. For this reason, organizations use a variety of tools and contexts to promote individual learning in the workplace. For example, learning can be formal, informal, activity-based, experiential, independent and collaborative. Although all forms are possible and necessary, organizations and their leaders choose the form that is most appropriate for their employees, needs, culture, context and requirements.

Formal learning is structured and delivered in an organized way within an institution. It has a clear structure and desired learning outcomes followed by carefully crafted instructional materials. Trusted experts, trainers and educators are selected to deliver such training, and all specifications are agreed upon in advance. It is beneficial to combine formal learning with informal learning when employees continue to ask questions, discuss things and seek solutions to their problems after participating in formal learning. However, this type of learning is not planned or structured and occurs according to the needs and desires of those involved. Every company should have customized formal learning programs, especially for new employees who go through a comprehensive orientation and socialization program. In this way, individuals acquire the basic and necessary skills and competencies to be able to work productively, but also to use other forms of learning.

These processes are supported by technological advances, so that employees not only learn more productively and successfully, but also their motivation is increased. For this reason, many organizations use various gamification options and let individuals earn badges or certificates that make them more competitive and eager to learn. These processes can be organized on-site, but also in a virtual environment where individuals can benefit from online courses offered by third-party providers like LinkedIn and Coursera. Employees generally value the learning opportunities offered to them, as it makes them more

productive and eligible for promotion and/or salary increases, but also improves their employability and future prospects in this regard.

However, individuals can create their own learning opportunities and use various work tasks as learning opportunities. For example, they can observe others performing certain tasks and learn from them, ask questions, practice and solicit feedback, engage in informal networking with colleagues, engage in imitation and shadow learning. Some people are more motivated to learn more and different things than others, and this cannot be completely forced, only encouraged and stimulated. However, some forms of learning, such as shadow learning, can be organized through planning. A good social environment is critical in this regard.

Individuals can also learn on a micro level by following various blogs, videos, tutorials and similar sources that help them find just-in-time solutions to their problems. The use of artificial intelligence is also becoming popular due to simulations and adaptability to desired contexts. Regardless of the technology used, however, people learn best when they try things out and learn from their experiences. However, this process can involve a lot of mistakes and repetition. Therefore, every organization should give its employees time and space to try things, reflect, try a different approach and succeed after a few attempts. However, it would be a waste of time if everyone does the same thing and learns by failing and reflecting. Therefore, a good social environment is crucial, where people feel free to share their failures and approaches to solving certain problems. Mentoring relationships can develop from this learning dynamic.

### **Quality of work life of leaders**

Imposed lockdowns changed the nature of the work almost overnight. The results were not so bad, which surprised many. It turned out that much of the work could have been done online or remotely and, even more surprisingly, that machines could replace more and more forms of work. In addition, many later questioned how to work differently on a regular basis, contributing to the combination of online and on-site work and favoring remote and hybrid work arrangements. This means that many factors affecting traditional work arrangements should be studied in a fully online or hybrid environment to determine their validity and impact on productivity, motivation and quality of work life.

Quality of work life has been the subject of previous studies. The focus has been primarily on workers. However, studies dealing with remote work and hybrid workplaces are scarce. The dearth is even greater when it comes to the impact of quality of work life on the effectiveness of leaders. [Rahul Paul & Khalid Perwez \(2023\)](#) addressed this gap by examining the relationship between quality of work life and leaders' psychological capital using an artificial neural network model. The study of managers is worthwhile because their contribution to organizational performance is undeniable, both positive and negative. Therefore, it is important to study their well-being and quality of work life, especially under hybrid workplace conditions or while working remotely and in person.

Quality of work life is a multidimensional construct and consists of many elements. For different individuals, some are more important than others. However, in general, it consists of factors such as working conditions, social integration, opportunities for growth and development, work and space recreation, and compensation and remuneration ([Catapan, Bonfim, Panucci-Filho, Veiga, & Catapan, Bonfim, Panucci-Filho, Veiga, & Catapan, 2014](#)). Working conditions refer to workload, work schedule and job security. Poor working conditions are known to lead to stress and job dissatisfaction. Social integration refers to the degree of emotional connection with other employees and support at work. Workers who receive more support and feel more integrated into the work community are less stressed

and more satisfied with their jobs. Employees are also more satisfied when they have the opportunity to learn and develop their talents, which increases their engagement and productivity. Recreation at work and during leisure time means that employees can relax outside of work, which contributes to their greater well-being and satisfaction. Finally, employee satisfaction is also influenced by the level of compensation and benefits, especially their fairness.

These factors are considered organizational resources that affect employees' work and their psychological conditions and psychological capital. Psychological capital also consists of many dimensions that contribute to a positive psychological state, such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). Both quality of work life and psychological capital are related to employee well-being (Nguyen & Ngo, 2021) and job satisfaction (Ashraf & Siddiqui, 2020). Self-efficacy refers to the individual's belief that they will be successful in what they do, which is supported by the hope that they can achieve their goals. It is also good for individuals to have an optimistic or positive attitude that is supported by their ability to bounce back from stressful situations, which is referred to as resilience. These factors also contribute to employee engagement, motivation, well-being and satisfaction (Nair, Prasad, & Nair, 2022). It is also not surprising that psychological capital also positively influences the quality of work life (Amunkete & Rothmann, 2015).

However, all these factors have not been studied in the hybrid work environment. Remote and hybrid work may offer more flexibility and work-life balance, but workers may also experience a lack of social integration and isolation, which can contribute to their stress levels. The lack of communication with others can also impact their self-efficacy as well as their hope and optimism. This type of work is good for those who are more autonomous in their work, able to set their own goals and control themselves during their work. However, it is also important to determine how the quality of work life affects the psychological capital of leaders in a hybrid environment. Rahul Paul & Khalid Perwez (2023) found that this relationship is positive, i.e. quality of work life has a positive impact on leaders' psychological capital.

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