IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Support and connect employees to facilitate learning

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Introduction

This issue of *The Learning Organization* contains papers dealing with a variety of interesting topics and aspects of learning organizations. The themes addressed include supervisor support, coworkers' responses to others' knowledge sharing, training transfer, responsible research and innovation (RRI), and employees' physical and mental safety. It also contains review articles on knowledge management of small and medium enterprises and talent management.

From these papers' findings, the most important implications for practitioners will be presented in the following sections.

Build interpersonal relationships for knowledge management

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play important roles in society. Naturally, start-up firms, which usher in a new era, grow through the SME stage. Therefore, knowledge management (KM) in SMEs and the resulting innovations are important for society.

Fauzi, Saad, Ahmad, Fauzi, and Ahmad (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis of previous studies on KM applications in SMEs. They then classified the studies into several clusters based on citation relationships among the literature and the co-occurrence of keywords.

As a result, *first*, clustering based on citation relationships extracted the main research themes in this domain: factors to achieve successful KM in SMEs; improving KM capability in SMEs; the relationship between technology, organization, environment and SME performance; and the effect of technology implementation in SMEs. *Second*, clustering based on the co-occurrence of keywords identified the following research themes: KM as a driver of innovation in SMEs, models and frameworks for information technology (IT) in SMEs and capabilities needed to improve SME performance.

Of note is the importance of KM in SMEs. At the social level, the development of SMEs strengthens society. Indeed, in job creation, SMEs contribute more than larger enterprises (de Wit & de Kok, 2014). Of course, due to their small size, SMEs may be more resource-constrained than larger enterprises. But SMEs have specific advantages. For example, SMEs may be able to make decisions more flexibly and respond more quickly to environmental changes than larger firms, which are constrained by greater organizational inertia. That is why the spin-off of new businesses is taken as a means to foster innovation (Christensen, 1997).

However, SMEs are not completely free from the traps of past success (McKeown, 2012); mechanisms are needed to make KM and learning effective. For example, Pattinson and

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Preece (2014) claim that *reciprocity* (reciprocal relationships) is important for learning in science-based SMEs. Reciprocity among employees creates *mutual trust* (credibility), and these relationships become *social capital* that facilitates learning activities. This is why face-to-face communication is important when establishing a learning community (Akkerman, Petter, & de Laat, 2008). Thus, in SMEs, due to their small size, it is important to build relationships among employees in promoting KM.

A typical example is the relationship between members and their supervisors. Whereas the importance of supervisor support is discussed in Matsuo (2024), as in the next section, it is precisely in SMEs that it is important to build a close relationship between supervisors and members.

Support your employees informally to capitalize on their strengths

Everyone desires to feel supported by his or her organization. In other words, *perceived organizational support* (POS) is important for employees. In particular, employees desire to be supported by the organization in their efforts to leverage their strengths. Previous studies have shown that *POS for strengths use* – employees' beliefs about the degree to which the organization supports them to use their strengths in the workplace (Matsuo, 2024, p. xx) – prevents employee burnout and absenteeism and improves work engagement, strengths use and job performance.

In particular, support from a supervisor influences employee behavior; he or she is one of the closest persons in the organization to the employee and may exercise direct authority over the employee. And that behavior includes knowledge sharing within the organization. Hence, Matsuo (2024) examined *perceived supervisor support (PPS) for strengths use* – employees' beliefs about the degree to which their *supervisor* supports them to use their strengths in the workplace (Matsuo, 2024) – among types of POS for strengths use.

Matsuo (2024) revealed that PPS for strengths use improves employees' work engagement. It was also found that employees' work engagement further enhances employees' knowledge self-efficacy and thus knowledge sharing (KS) intentions, which refer to "the degree to which one believes that one will engage in a knowledge-sharing act" (Matsuo, 2024, p. xx). In other words, PSS for strengths use enhances KS intentions by increasing work engagement and knowledge self-efficacy.

There have been many studies on the effectiveness of *POS* for strengths use. Meanwhile, Matsuo (2024) focused on *PSS* for strengths use and found the importance of supervisor support. This result suggests the importance of workplace leaders in knowledge management. In other words, in addition to creating formal mechanisms to enable employees to use their strengths, it is also important for workplace supervisors to encourage and provide opportunities for employees to use their strengths on an *ad hoc* basis.

Let us now derive more practical implications. To this end, we go back to the eight items in Keenan and Mostert (2013), which are the source of the measure of PPS for strengths use that Matsuo (2024) applied, and aggregate their intentions. This leads to the following specific suggestions:

- *focus* on what members are good at;
- *use* members' strengths, strong points, and talents;
- *allow* members to use their talents and to do their job in a manner that best suits their strong points;
- *enable* members to do what they are good at; and
- *align* members' strengths with their job tasks.

In summary, to enable employees to use their strengths, the organization and the workplace should support them both formally and informally. Allowing employees to use their strengths will also improve their self-efficacy and encourage the application of learning outcomes to practice, as will be discussed later (Lathabhavan & Hl, 2024).

Everyone is a contributor: activate knowledge sharing with reciprocity

To share knowledge, someone must provide knowledge. However, people have psychological ownership of knowledge, which inhibits their willingness to disclose knowledge (Héliot & Riley, 2010). Therefore, an organization needs to increase its members' willingness to contribute to knowledge sharing.

Tang, Lai, Chen, and Fu, (2024) examined the mechanisms by which the contribution to knowledge sharing, or knowledge provision, influences co-workers' reciprocal behavior. Tang et al., (2024) revealed that knowledge provision encourages reciprocal knowledge sharing, although they could not find evidence that knowledge provision leads to coworkers' helping behavior. It was also found that the effect of knowledge provision on coworkers' *reciprocal* knowledge provision is mediated by respect for knowledge contributors. In other words, knowledge sharing (provision) improves respect recognized by coworkers, which further encourages coworkers' reciprocal knowledge sharing. Furthermore, it was found that contributors' competence strengthens the relationship between knowledge sharing and respect.

Thus, in promoting knowledge sharing in an organization, all members need to understand that knowledge provision is a reciprocal activity as follows. The contributor's knowledge provision encourages coworkers' knowledge provision. By switching the roles, we can say that coworkers' (reciprocal) knowledge provision leads to the next cycle of knowledge provision by the initial contributor. In this way, an upward spiral of knowledge provision and knowledge sharing can be established.

Furthermore, it should be noted that respect for contributors mediates such a reciprocal relationship. In other words, to establish the abovementioned spiral, all members, including not only the initial contributor but also the coworkers, should be worthy of respect. Similarly, the importance of job competence, which strengthens the relationship between knowledge provision and respect, is not limited to the initial contributor. The competence of all members, including coworkers, strengthens the relationship between knowledge provision and respect.

In this way, we see, once again, that not only some specific members are knowledge contributors. All members of the organization are potential contributors. Thus, knowledge sharing is an organizational activity that involves all members.

Increase members' self-efficacy to take advantage of training results

Various types of training are conducted to improve organizational members' competence and performance. However, training is meaningless if the learning outcomes from the training are not applied to the job, i.e. if the learning outcomes are not transferred to the job.

Lathabhavan and Hl (2024) examined the factors that affect training transfer and the underlying mechanisms. Among their results, the role of self-efficacy deserves attention. That is, self-efficacy leads to increasing autonomy and opportunity to perform at work, thereby promoting training transfer. Thus, Lathabhavan and Hl (2024, Figure 1) claim that self-efficacy influences autonomy and opportunity to perform.

More importantly, however, the influence in the opposite direction should not be ignored. In other words, work conditions such as autonomy and opportunity to perform may increase employees' self-efficacy. Meanwhile, if autonomy is low or the opportunity to perform is not given in a job, employees will not perceive self-efficacy. Such situations give rise to *learned*

helplessness (Seligman, 1972); if one iterates attempting to change things without success, he or she will give up such an effort even after circumstances have changed.

Management must prevent such learned helplessness and attempt to increase members' self-sufficiency. Specifically, they should not hinder the member's attempts to apply the training outcomes to their job. Even if it does not lead to short-term success, the transfer attempt itself should be positively evaluated. Such a management reaction will reinforce future transfer behavior. Also, if feedback is given on the training transfer, it will improve transfer behavior and, in the long run, improve job performance.

Thus, management should encourage members to improve their self-efficacy through training transfers.

Encourage collaboration between talent management researchers and practitioners

In an increasingly competitive environment, the role of talent – "the most potential employee who plays a role in developing value for the organization by using their capacity" (Patra, Datta, & Bose, 2024, p. 467) – is increasing. Therefore, talent management (TM) is becoming more important. This situation is the background for the publication of *The Learning Organization's* special issue on talent management (Volume 31, issue 4).

Marlapudi and Lenka (2024) conducted a scoping review of 200 empirical studies on talent management published between 2010 and 2023. They then extracted research trends, main themes, and other characteristics of talent management research. The findings are manifold, but this paper focuses on the following two points.

The *first* point is the high interest in TM among practitioners. Marlapudi and Lenka (2024) point out that a certain number of TM papers are co-authored by academicians and non-academic practitioners. The affiliations of non-academic authors include consultants, manufacturing and IT companies, reflecting the high level of interest in TM in these domains.

In addition, Marlapudi and Lenka (2024) review emphasizes the importance of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, such as in setting research questions and drawing research designs for future research. Furthermore, practitioners' experiences will provide useful input for future TM research, such as suggestions for practicably important themes.

At the same time, their collaboration is important also for practitioners in implementing more persuasive "evidence-based talent management" (Marlapudi & Lenka, 2024, p. xx). According to Patra et al. (2024), TM consists of the following practices:

- attracting and retaining the potential employee;
- talent development (including training); and
- deploying the talent.

The findings of empirical studies will be useful for implementing TM in each of these domains.

The *second* point is the importance of TM in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). According to Marlapudi and Lenka (2024) review, SMEs occupy only 4.5% of the organizations addressed in the TM studies. However, as Fauzi et al., (2024) state, KM is important in SMEs, and talent should play a significant role in this process. In addition, related to the first point, SMEs may benefit greatly from working with academicians because SMEs are expected to have less scientific knowledge than larger enterprises.

Thus, collaboration between practitioners and academicians will become more important in TM research and practice.

Align ethics and economic values through double-loop learning

Today, the social responsibility of academic research is becoming increasingly important. An effort to address this issue is called *responsible research and innovation* (RRI), which aims to build trust between society and science (Ten Holter, Stahl, & Jirotka, 2023).

According to the European Commission (EC), the key areas of RRI are ethics, gender, open access, science education and public engagement, whereas *governance* was also included previously. In other words, researchers and research institutes are required to ensure ethics in research activities and to eliminate the gender gap. They are also required to maintain open access to research results, implement science education and improve public engagement for the future.

In this context, Wicher and Frankus (2024) examined the role of organizational learning and organizational change in promoting RRI. To this end, they conducted a case study of the RRI implementation process in two research institutes in The Netherlands and Germany. Both of these organizations aimed at implementing RRI in line with a project launched by EC – Joint Effort for Responsible Research and Innovation (JERRI).

As a result of Wicher and Frankus (2024) study, various types of learning were observed during implementing RRI. Such learning includes both single-loop and double-loop learning. *Single-loop learning* here refers to the implementation of procedures, tools, toolkits, practices and activities. D*ouble-loop learning* refers to reflection, adjustment and change in culture, norms and values. Double-loop learning also involves both *reflective learning* (redefining organizational problems and entailing feedback loops) and *reflexive learning* (changing the mental models of individuals) (Wicher & Frankus, 2024). Both types of double-loop learning lead to redefining organizational problems, tasks and challenges.

More importantly, both single-loop and double-loop learning are inseparable from the context in which the organizations are located (Wicher & Frankus, 2024). In other words, both types of learning have some aspects of *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Both of the two institutions observed implemented a variety of activities in each domain of RRI (ethics, gender and societal engagement). In such activities, however, *tension* – "two co-existing contradictory forces with conflicting goals" (Fang, Chang, & Peng, 2011, p. 774) – arises between ethical and economic values. It is not easy to reconcile the pursuit of ethical factors in research together with pursuing economic values. Therefore, in promoting RRI, it is important to mitigate the tension between ethical and economic values.

One such way to mitigate the tension between conflicting values is to emphasize public interest. For example, even among competing firms, cooperation is encouraged in activities that contribute to improving public interest, with tensions between competition and cooperation mitigated (Nakanishi, 2020). Similarly, the management of research institutes should emphasize that RRI is a public-oriented activity.

In addition, more effective in resolving tension is double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Double-loop learning modifies the values, beliefs and norms of the organization. Double-loop learning can be applied to promoting RRI in the following ways. That is, institutions should incorporate the pursuit of RRI elements (ethics, gender, and societal engagement) into their organizational norms. In doing so, the organization will naturally move in a direction that promotes RRI. Conversely, it is difficult to coexist ethics and economic values without modifying norms.

Double-loop learning could be applied to mitigate various types of tension other than that between ethics and economic values. Moreover, the importance of double-loop learning is not limited to research institutions. In any organization, tensions arise between conflicting values. It is precisely in reconciling these tensions that the modification of values and beliefs through double-loop learning is effective.

However, *learning contexts* should not be ignored. The learning activities of the two institutions studied are not separated from their context. Both institutions engage in *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Interviewees also said that external factors influenced the RRI implementation process. Learning is not "one size fits all."

In other words, organizations should conduct original double-loop learning, which is customized for the context, to mitigate the tension between competing values.

Provide your employees with physical and mental safety

Reducing physical and mental strain on employees in performing their tasks is an important concern for organizations. Physical and mental strain leads to the occurrence of accidents, which damage companies through losing reputation. Conversely, ensuring a safe and secure work environment leads to improved corporate performance.

Kottala and Sahu (2024) proposed a resiliency framework for operations and strategic management based on a survey of large manufacturing firms in India. The focus was on applying ergonomics and reducing financial distress. *Ergonomics* refers to practices that "focuses on designing operations that guarantee undue stress and strain to worker due to the utility of embedded tools, layouts and job methods" (Kottala & Sahu, 2024, p. xx). Ergonomics is the primary tool for ensuring a good fit between a worker and his or her work environment (Kottala & Sahu, 2024). Thus, applying ergonomics can reduce physical strain during task performance. *Financial distress*, on the other hand, refers to "a condition, which indicates the incompetency of the organizations toward generating insufficient income to meet their financial obligations" (Kottala & Sahu, 2024, p. xx). Notably, Kottala and Sahu (2024) apply the concept of financial distress to employees rather than to organizations. In other words, they advocate the mitigation of financial distress for employees.

Kottala and Sahu (2024) then argue that applying ergonomics and reducing financial distress influence organizations' overall performance. The mechanism is as follows. First, applying ergonomic practices leads to reputation gains and improves brand image because it reduces negative publicity associated with accidents and discomfort. Second, eliminating employees' financial distress benefits the organization through improved performance of the individuals concerned. In addition, Kottala and Sahu (2024) identified 14 causes of employee financial distress. Of these, the most important are impulse spending, (lack of) family security, and nonavailability of emergency funding. It is worthwhile for organizations to prevent impulse spending by implementing education. In addition, providing family security and emergency funding would act as safety nets. These would mitigate the risk of economic crisis for employees.

Thus, firms should provide security to their employees by promoting ergonomics adoption and eliminating financial distress. These practices will provide the foundation for psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018), relieving mental stress and preventing organizational accidents (Reason, 1997).

Conclusions

So far, we have discussed implications based on the findings of each paper in this issue. Now, as a concluding remark, we present integrated implications based on them.

First, organizations should provide support to employees so that they can reach their full potential. Specifically, workplace safety should be provided through applying ergonomics and reducing financial distress. These do not only ensure employee satisfaction but also lead to improving corporate reputation and enhancing brand image (Kottala & Sahu, 2024).

Organizations should also increase members' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy encourages the transfer of the training received by the employee to the practice (Lathabhavan & Hl, 2024).

To improve self-efficacy, it is necessary to support employees in utilizing their strengths. To this end, in addition to POS (perceived organizational support) for strengths use, PSS (perceived supervisor support) for strengths use is important (Matsuo, 2024). In other words, in addition to formal support for employees but also informal support, such as that given by supervisors, is essential.

Second, good relationships should be established among organizational members. Building relationships between members promotes knowledge sharing. The relationship should be reciprocal, not unilateral. Reciprocal relationships reinforce knowledge-providing behavior (Tang et al., 2024). Such a relationship would also apply between practitioners and academicians. That is, practitioners and academicians should establish a reciprocal relationship. This will allow them to leverage each other's strengths in research and practice in knowledge management and other domains.

Finally, management should encourage double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Today, previously valid ideas and practices can become irrelevant or outdated rapidly. This means that organizations need to flexibly modify their values and goals without falling into the trap of past successes. Hence, double-loop learning, which involves reviewing existing values and goals, is becoming more important for organizations.

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