



REVIEW

Training and Development Strategies for Senior and Middle Level Managers with the Purpose of Learning Organizations

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 9 March 2020

Revised: 16 March 2020

Accepted: 9 April 2020

Published Online: 16 April 2020

Keywords:

Learning organization

Training and development

Strategies

ABSTRACT

In the presence of dynamic organizational environment and a growing supply of 'knowledgeable employees' which require more professional managers to address their fast changing and increasing needs, senior and middle level managers are now required to keep up with the dynamic and learning environment more than ever. In order to train senior and middle level managers, the article has recommended four perspectives to encourage the development of learning manager. The first aspect for senior and middle level managers is to integrate learning talents into their practices. The second point is to encourage managers to provide strong support for individuals and teams to develop a learning organization. The third point encourages learning managers and organizations to be composed into the culture of the organization. The last point advocates for more open and free dissemination of information and knowledge to be allowed within an organization.

1. Introduction

Learning organization is a conspicuously new organization model. In today's era of turbulent organizational environment, the traditional organizational structure has been replaced by the flattened organizational structure of learning organization for the sake of its multi-level, pyramidal design (Luhn, 2016)^[1]. The traditional theory of human resource management implies that the traditional organizational structure model is the basis (Wen, 2014)^[2]. Therefore, it is urgently required that people adopt a new human resources management theory to support this new form of organization. With the advent of the era of knowledge-based economy, the number, and the proportion of "knowledgeable" employees

in organizations have been growing. And especially their senior and middle level managers are the most important resources for maintaining the survival and development of an organization. It is required that incentives for knowledgeable senior and middle level managers shift their focus to the spirit of motivation that meets the higher-level needs of social, self-esteem and self-actualizing needs. Peter M. Senge (1994)^[3] pointed out that the employees' attitudes toward life are just as artists' devotion to art works if they can continually fulfil their innermost desire to achieve their dreams. They are constantly creating and surpassing themselves, which is a truly lifelong learning experience. Learning is a higher level of needs, and can make the employee's social needs, self-esteem, self-fulfilment and other spiritual needs to be met. Based on the

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above background, the author will be in the role of the company's director of human resources and make specific recommendations on how the training for senior and middle level managers of a company makes them become learning managers. The author believes that the training of learning managers is inseparable from the construction of the learning organization, because the training of senior and middle level managers is closely related to the learning organization.

2. Learning and Training Strategies for Senior and Middle Level Managers

The advent of globalization and networking has forced enterprises to make a series of innovations in order to adapt to the new situation. How to make the senior and middle level managers to become learning talents will be an important part of the new management revolution. It is noteworthy that some forerunners of managing innovation have accumulated a great deal of experience in this area. Their practice shows that to be a learning organization, the enterprise must ensure that the learning behaviours of individuals and teams are integrated into a systematic track and that learning behaviours are effectively translated into creative actions. Most of the successful transformations of learning organizations mainly focus on three aspects, which mean the leadership and management, the organizational culture, and the communication and knowledge systems (Armstrong&Foley, 2003)^[4]. From the perspective of the human resources component, the author will make recommendations to train senior and middle level managers so that they may become learning managers.

3. Leadership and Management

In a learning organization, it is required that leaders and managers at all levels provide strong support to the individuals and teams engaged in learning through the following five aspects: (1) Standardizing the learning behaviour. (2) Establishing a system to promote learning. (3) Encouraging employees to make innovative suggestions. (4) Ensuring the smooth dissemination of knowledge and learning channels. (5) Enterprise resources are inclined to the people and teams engaged in learning (Bhaskar&Mishra,2017)^[5]. For example, almost every employee of Harley Davidson knows Richer and Teerlink, the CEOs, place special emphasis on learning. Richer not only invested heavily in creating Harley University, turning the corporate university into a training camp for Harley Davidson, and almost all of his speeches can be found on the discussion of learning. As early as 1980, when Bob Galvin, the former CEO of Motorola, found the poor prof-

itability of the company, the first remedy he had thought of was to invest 11 million dollars to set up a training and education centre of Motorola. Since then, the learning and growth of the employees especially senior and middle level managers have become part of the core business of Motorola.

For another example, the process that from thrive to decay and then from decay to thrive of the IOI (Intermedics Orthopedics Inc.) strongly explain the importance of leadership and management involvement in learning. Just as the business of IOI flourished, about half of managers suddenly resigned and wanted to start their own business, making IOI face the danger of falling apart (Parding& Abrahamsson, 2010)^[6]. The CEOs, Jerry and Mallory, put forward a revitalization plan, and the core content was to transform the company into a learning organization. The company's leadership developed the learning rules that regulated the learning behaviours from top to bottom. Mallory and those managers who stayed to struggle conceded that they did not know the answers to all the questions, but they were willing to work hard to learn how to answer those questions. During the learning process, the managers of IOI redefined their core competencies and developed a system to assess employee skills and personal development. In the IOI, managers encourage employees to make suggestions and comments. They often solicit opinions from front-line employees and give timely feedback on the opinions and suggestions of employees. In the meantime, the managers of IOI pay special attention to the connection and cooperation of knowledge dissemination and learning. In their opinion, on the one hand, the solution of some problems requires the joint efforts of different departments; on the other hand, the successful practices of some departments can also be used for reference by other departments. Therefore, in learning organizations, cooperation and exchange are very important aspects. When those departments and individuals who are good at innovation and learning see their learning achievements shared by all the members of the organization, their enthusiasm for learning is greatly enhanced, and the enthusiasm of the departments and individuals that lagged behind is also mobilized.

4. Energetically Instilling in Senior and Middle Level Managers the Organizational Culture

Culture is the glue of the organization (Huang& Shih, 2011)^[7]. The culture of a learning organization should be: supporting and rewarding learning and innovation; promoting the exploration, the learning, the adventure, and

the experimentation; allowing mistakes and seeing mistakes as opportunities for learning. At Harley Davidson, “keeping the smart curiosity” is one of the company’s five core values. The company encourages employees, especially senior and middle level managers, to question current practices, advocating for them to actively seek ways to improve. After 15 years of steady growth in analogue device company, the company’s five-year plan failed for the first time in the mid-1980s. Although analogue device companies still hold the leading position in the linear integrated circuit market and still have the best designers and technologists in the industry, the CEOs Ray and Staad have become keenly aware of the company’s management problem. After some thought, Staad took part in a training titled “The New Management Model” moderated by management expert Peter M. Senge. After the training, Staad had started to introduce a corporate culture that helps to organize learning. Clever Staad hoped that while introducing a new organizational culture, they would also be able to solve the management problems that had hindered the development of the company. He set up 15 analytical groups on products, markets, technology, etc., asking team members to work with new values of openness and innovation, and their job was to ask questions and find answers. After months of work, the team finally concluded that the fragmented organizational structure and the division of departments of the simulated company were the biggest chronic illness in their management. It is intriguing that in the last 20 years, nobody of the simulated company has come up with these questions.

5. Attaching Importance to Communication and Knowledge System

The lifeline of a learning organization is a free and open system that facilitates information exchange and knowledge dissemination (Armstrong&Foley, 2003)⁴. Such an exchange system must meet the following conditions: (1) Being able to generate new and useful knowledge; (2) Being able to guarantee the smooth flow of business and strategic information within the enterprise; (3) The enterprise can obtain the relevant knowledge conveniently and quickly from the outside; (4) The dissemination of information is efficient, that is, it can reach the employees and departments who need it at any time; (5) Each information point supports each other and promotes each other. In Corning, there is a training course for senior and middle level managers called “Technical Knowledge” (Filstad&Gottschalk, 2011)⁸. The purpose of this training is to enable Corning’s technical experts to understand the latest developments in related technologies in different fields

and to broaden their vision. After “charging”, the technical experts learned the rich nutrition in different professional fields and inspired the great inspiration for the development of products and technologies, leading Corning to achieve great progress of product design, production technology and production efficiency under the circumstance that the number of frontline workers had dropped dramatically.

Learning from the outside world is equally important for the training the leaning ability of senior and middle level managers. Every year, the General Electric Company appoints a group of senior and middle level managers to visit and communicate with the companies that growing well. The sole purpose of these managers to be expatriated is to share the secrets of those companies’ success. After the employees return to the company, they write down the successful tips of the companies interviewed and submit them to the company for rewriting them into teaching materials, which would be discussed, exchanged, and communicated at the executive meeting by leaders at all levels of General Electric Company. And they will learn from the business ideas and management methods used by General Electric Company.

In FedEx, the communications, the information, and the knowledge management system are mutually supportive and mutually reinforcing (Kesiena& Olivier, 2014)⁹. The performance management technology subsystem of FedEx can monitor the entire process of any package from the application to the destination. And the service quality performance information subsystem regularly publishes a comprehensive customer feedback form to grassroots employees so they understand how to improve their work to meet the customer requirements. In addition, the company also has an employee feedback information subsystem, and staff at all levels can discuss their opinions on the evaluation of the leadership at higher levels and the problems that the enterprise still has. It is because of such an interlocking and mutually-overseeing information system that FedEx and its employees have made significant strides in organizational learning and personal development.

For enterprises, learning from the experience of learning organization is very important to train the learning ability of senior and middle level managers. In addition, Peter M. Senge (1990)¹⁰ also provided a set of ways to establish a learning organization in his book “The Fifth Discipline”. Peter M. Senge believed that the establishment of learning organizations must be based on five skills training, that is, five practices. Only when these five exercises are carried out often, can the organization grow into a learning organization. These five practices are the

self-transcendence, the improvement of mental models, the establishment of a common vision, the group learning and the systematic thinking. In the author's opinion, to become a learning organization, enterprises should focus on the following ways considering their own characteristics: (1) To transform itself into a learning organization, the enterprise must start with establishing an organizational structure suitable for learning. Learning organizations are information-based and knowledge-based organizations with far less management than traditional structures. For example, when a multinational firm restructures its organization in accordance with the communication of information, it found that 7 of the 12 management levels could be eliminated. These excluded levels are not the right level, the decision-making level or the supervision level, but only the transfer stations of information. Emphasize the "flattening" of organizational structure and minimizing the internal management level of the enterprise as far as possible can make the organization more suitable for learning and building ground breaking thinking. Besides, the project management, the teamwork, the interface management, the concurrent engineering and so on can all be able to contribute to the systematic learning of the organization. (2) After having a certain foundation of organizational structure, enterprises should also focus on shaping the organizational learning culture and cultivating the learning habits, atmosphere of the organization. It is necessary to carry out regular study to the senior and middle level managers in the company to improve the overall learning enthusiasm of the enterprise.

6. Conclusion

In an economic environment where uncertainty is the only determinant, the source of a firm to obtain competitive advantages is undoubtedly the knowledge. The key to the learning training to senior and middle level managers is to be able to create knowledge, spread knowledge and apply knowledge. From the perspective of knowledge creation, the key lies in formulating a knowledge perspective and knowledge strategy. The knowledge perspective requires that employees, especially senior and middle level managers must go beyond their original knowledge and modes of thinking. The essence of the knowledge strategy is to improve the organization's ability to acquire, create,

accumulate, and develop knowledge, and the knowledge perspective and the knowledge strategy are harmonized. Dissemination of knowledge focuses on building a network system to connect knowledge among the knowledge teams. Under the guidance of knowledge perspective and strategy, enterprises apply the knowledge they learned to products and services in order to enhance customer satisfaction, gaining the competitive advantages and sustainable development. This article gives a detailed proposal of four points on the training of senior and middle level managers so that they all become learning managers. Besides, the article hopes that the relevant suggestions can provide a little reference to the transformation of the learning organization in the company.

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