

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS: AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper brings together fundamental theories and widely-accepted frameworks on organizational learning and learning organizations. Summarizing literature, debates and critiques in these two vast literature domains, the paper proposes an integrative framework that highlights the dynamics of organizational learning and learning organizations, and guides both academia and practitioners for a learning oriented change process. By using the framework, it is suggested that organizations will be capable of acting wisely, and managing the learning and change processes effectively, and hence, they will be in control of their actions. It is further noted that taking the tensions identified in this paper into account will provide organizations with many benefits and enhance both their dynamic knowledge renewal and learning capacity in relation to organizational goals.

Keywords: Organizational Learning, Learning Organization, Change.

ÖRGÜTSEL ÖĞRENME VE ÖĞRENEN ÖRGÜTLER: BÜTÜNLEŞTİRİCİ BİR ÇERÇEVE

ÖZET

Bu makalede örgütsel öğrenme ve öğrenen örgütler üzerine geliştirilmiş temel teoriler ve genel kabul gören çerçeveler bir araya getirilmiştir. Çalışma kapsamında, ilgili yazın, tartışma ve eleştiriler özetlenerek, örgütsel öğrenme ve öğrenen örgütlere ilişkin dinamikleri öne çıkaran, akademi ve iş dünyasına öğrenme odaklı bir değişim süreci için yön gösteren bütünlendirici bir çerçeve önerilmektedir. Değişim ve öğrenme süreçlerinde, önerilen çerçevenin rehber alınarak izlenmesi neticesinde, örgütlerin daha bilinçli hareket edeceği, süreçleri daha etkin ve kontrollü bir şekilde yönetecekleri öngörülmektedir. Tanımlanan gerilimlerin değerlendirilmesinin örgüt yararına hizmet edeceği, örgütsel bilginin dinamik olarak güncellenmesi ve öğrenme kapasitesinin hedefler doğrultusunda artırılmasına katkı sağlayacağı belirtilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Örgütsel Öğrenme, Öğrenen Örgüt, Değişim.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, technological developments, globalization and accordingly increased competition, and changes in the attitudes of employees in organizational settings pushed organizations into turbulent and demanding environments. In response, organizations have been forced to create their own recipes through new management styles, new organizational structures and processes - that seemed to be in favour of them - firstly in order to survive, and then to remain competitive. In this sense, while most organizations were subjected to several fads and fashions, only some were able to come up with effective and efficient solutions, and improved their organizational performance. On the contrary, though most organizations experienced failures and unintended organizational changes, and reflected poor economical indicators through various popular management techniques, they were 'more admired, perceived to be more innovative, and rated higher in management quality' (Staw & Epstein, 2000: 523).

Within such a context, some concepts have been utilized improperly both in theory and practice, like the ones 'organizational learning and learning organization'. While these two concepts differ widely in their meaning and area of application (Jones & Hendry, 1994; Easterby-Smith, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al., 1998; Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999), they were used as if they meant to serve for the same purpose, same philosophy and same ideology.

One reason for this situation has been the lack of general and widely accepted theories in this area (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991; Crossan et al., 1999; Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999). Besides, as scholars and practitioners tried to apply already constructed theories and frameworks to their own studies, and made use of them in new management techniques, they gave rise to confusions in the relevant literature. The increasing influence of different perspectives and accordingly the divergent nature of theories developed in this area also created further confusions (Easterby-Smith et al., 1998). In addition, the lack of empirical studies (Huber, 1991; Miner & Mezias, 1996; Easterby-Smith, 1997; Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999) - that both scholars and practitioners could benefit from- turned this area into a conceptual one where few widely accepted theories have been in a cycle of deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction through literature review-like articles, summaries, and propositions hindering creative work and new theory evolution, and constraining the area to a review perspective.

Thus, this paper aims to briefly present widely-accepted and discussed fundamental theories, frameworks, and ideas about organizational learning and learning organizations, and then to summarize the current debates and critiques in this area, and finally to propose a conceptual framework for learning-oriented change that will contribute to this developing area of study.

2. Organizational Learning

Organizational learning has been an important area of study for researchers in the last decades as learning has been an inevitable part, process, and outcome for individuals, groups, and organizations in every organizational setting starting from the very early stages of every organization. Today, although to some extent radical change is generally seen as superior to incremental change (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990), it is also widely acknowledged

that instead of radical and rapid organizational changes, continuous changes and developments are more beneficial and advantageous for organizations. While these two perspectives create a conflict, nowadays, there is also a general belief for utilizing both perspectives where appropriate. However, whichever perspective organizations prefer, there is one certain thing that necessitates increased learning for more efficient and effective outcomes. Additionally, today's business and social environments are creating new uncertainties every moment besides the existing ones, and greater the uncertainties organizations face, greater the need for learning within organizations in all levels in order to cope with diverse arena of uncertainty.

From another point of view, as Argyris puts it in an interview with Mary Crossan, previously '... managers used to say that they hired a hand, and they really meant it. They did not mean they hired a mind. But today they do say they hire minds. In a world where minds are hired, learning becomes central' (2003:45).

Thus, being aware of this pre-condition or better to say the obligation to survive in tough chaotic environments, organizations have been in a process of applying several management styles, techniques (i.e. training, seminars, and self-development courses), and organizational structures in order to develop both their own and their employees' learning capacities.

However, in response to that amount of interest and affinity in learning, publications were quite few and far between late 1950s (when theories on organizational learning first started to emerge) and 1980s in academic circles. In contrast, there has been an increased interest in organizational learning and enormous amount of work was published in 1990s, which turned the relevant literature into a broader and diffused one, with an increased number of journals published in this area, covering a wide range of issues including 'analysis, synthesis, review/evaluation, and application' of organizational learning and related topics (Crossan & Guatto, 1996:110; Wang & Ahmed, 2003).

2.1. A Brief History

While Bateson's (1973) deuterio-learning (learning to learn) has been influential in the literature, it was mainly after Argyris and Schön's (1978) single/double-loop, and deuterio-learning concepts that a new area in organizational studies commenced to develop and attract further interest with new ideas and theories. In Argyris and Schön's (1978) definitions, single-loop learning is just the basic error detection and correction process, double-loop learning is the process of error correction through changing the governing values and accordingly actions, and deuterio-learning is the inquiry into learning systems of an organization and develops the capability of an organization in preferring right learning style afterwards. Although Argyris and Schön provided further explanations for organizational learning from different perspectives in their studies, their learning loops have been the mostly referred ones in the relevant literature (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003).

The first ideas on organizational learning were mainly the ones prioritizing individual learning in organizations. While some authors have reflected a similar tendency, as Senge (1990) who states that 'organizations learn only through individuals who learn' (p.236), or as Dodgson (1993) who argues that 'individuals are the primary learning entity in firms and it is individuals which create organizational forms that enable learning in ways which facilitate

organizational transformation' (377-378), it is widely accepted that organizational learning requires more than individuals' learning and cannot be realized as just 'the cumulative result of their members' learning' (Hedberg, 1981: 6). Argyris & Schön (1978) also point out that while organizational learning necessitates individual learning, it is not a sufficient condition for the whole learning process. As Crossan et al., (1999) denote that 'some learning is embedded in the systems, structures, strategy, routines, prescribed practices of the organization, and investments in information systems and infrastructure' (529).

In fact, all these views mainly support the idea that organizational learning requires a multi-level process. For that reason, today, it is widely accepted that organizational learning can be best conceptualized and understood in three levels, namely, individual, group, and organizational (Dodgson, 1993; Crossan et al., 1999). On the other hand, while Crossan et al., (1995) propose a fourth level, namely 'interorganizational', Marsick & Watkins (1999) suggest a different name for the fourth level 'global' that brings a new area of research and makes the learning process more complex by integrating the inter-organizational relations and organization-environment transactions into organizational area.

2.2. Definitions, Frameworks and Models

As Fisher & White (2000) define, 'organizational learning is a reflective process, played out by members at all levels of the organization that involves the collection of information from both the external and internal environments, [where] this information is filtered through a collective sensemaking process, which results in shared interpretations that can be used to instigate actions resulting in enduring changes to the organization's behavior and theories-in-use' (245). While this definition seems to be a general one, and does not seem to include crucial concepts explicitly, such as single/double-loop learning, low/high-level learning, and learning levels namely individual/group/organizational as previously proposed in the literature, it, in fact, summarizes well enough what organizational learning really means and stands for. So, to summarize the general models and frameworks through this definition;

First of all, the definition presents a similar approach as Huber's (1991) four constructs namely knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory, through which Huber provides a perspective which mainly deals with how information can be gathered, disseminated, and kept inside and around the organization. In addition, as the definition emphasizes the inclusion of all levels in the learning process and the collective sensemaking process, it provides a similar understanding as the sound framework suggested by Crossan et al., (1999). More specifically, Crossan et al., (1999) stress the crucial role of organizational learning in strategic renewal processes and provide their framework where the learning process of an organization is clearly identified through three levels (individual, group, and organization) in two dimensions (feed forward, and feedback), where four learning processes, intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing connect the three levels, underlying both individual and collective learning.

On the other hand, as Huber (1991) states 'an entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviors is changed' (p.89), and while Brown & Duguid (1991) share a similar perspective and emphasize that 'workplace learning is best understood,

[then] in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed' (p.48), with an influence on behaviors, Fisher and White stress the same observable part of organizational learning process namely the changing behaviors in result of learning. Besides, stressing the reflective nature of organizational learning, they refer to Dodgson's (1993) idea that 'it is not only what a firm knows or what skills it possesses, but how it uses these' (p.383), which requires mainly reflexivity in the learning process.

While the literature on organizational learning has developed, it has been mainly dominated by review and/or debate articles, rather than studies focusing on theory development (Easterby-Smith, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al., 2000; Wang & Ahmed; 2003). Therefore, summarizing the main frameworks is not that challenging for scholars in this area, which is therefore a preferred way of contributing to literature.

However, by means of broadening Argyris and Schön's single/double loop approaches, several scholars proposed different perspectives that have been frequently referred afterwards. For example, what Hedberg (1981) proposes is that there exist three modes of learning, which serve for different goals and accordingly changes in organization-environment relationship, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Three Modes of Learning

Learning modes	Change in organization-environment relationship
Adjustment learning	Fluctuations, minor changes that are reversible
Turnover learning	Significant partial changes that are irreversible
Turnaround	Substantial changes that are irreversible

Source adapted from: Hedberg, B. (1981). How organizations learn and unlearn. In P. C. Nystrom and W. H. Starbuck (Eds), *Handbook of Organizational Design*. London: Cambridge University Press.

On the other hand, Fiol & Lyles (1985) differentiate lower-level and higher-level learning as:

Lower-level learning: Focused learning that may be mere repetition of past behaviors - usually short term, temporary, but with associations being formed. Captures only a certain element - adjustments in part of what the organization does. Single-loop. Routine level.

Higher-level learning: The development of complex rules and associations regarding new actions. Development of an understanding of causation. Learning that affects the entire organization. Double-loop learning. Central norms' frames of reference, and assumptions changed' (810).

Senge's (1990) adaptive and generative learning, Dodgson's (1991) tactical and strategic learning, and March's (1991) exploitation and exploration are also within the most referred approaches in organizational learning literature sharing similar perspectives as Argyris and Schön, and Fiol and Lyles.

2.3. Searching for a Balance

Easterby-Smith Araujo, (1999) summarize the views on organizational learning in two categories, where one is the technical view which ‘assumes that organizational learning is about the effective processing, interpretation of, and response to, information both inside and outside the organization’ (3) and the other one is the social view which ‘focuses on the way people make sense of their experiences at work’ (4). However, while the organizational learning literature seems to develop within these two categories, today, the need for a balance between these views is widely recognized since the dynamic and constantly changing environments force organizations to acquire diverse skills and practice them in a synchronized way, which further necessitates proactive learning in organizations (Lassey, 1998).

As Hoffer states ‘In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists’ (Eric Hoffer quoted in Marsick & Watkins, 1999: 45). Therefore, organizations (including employees at all levels) should be capable of utilizing both their technical and social skills to improve their learning capacities and skills in order to benefit the future.

From a similar point of view, while Jones & Hendry (1994) propose that the concept of organizational learning is a ‘catalyst for focusing attention on softer and underlying social, value, and ethical issues, which are emerging as important criteria in assessing the competence and capability of an organization and its people’ (153), they stress the importance of both soft (informal, unintended, and indirect) and hard (formal, pragmatic, and training-based) approaches to organizational learning. Similarly, March (1991) suggests a shared perspective in the relevant literature, proposing that organizations should balance exploitation and exploration within their learning processes. He proposes that ‘adaptive processes, by refining exploitation more rapidly than exploration, are likely to become effective in the short run but self-destructive in the long run’ (71) and excess of each one will create an unbalance in organizational routines. Thus ‘maintaining an appropriate balance between exploration and exploitation is a primary factor in system survival and prosperity’ (71). Recent work on evaluating the factors that lead to a balance between exploitation and exploration capabilities has been referred to as organizational ambidexterity (Raisch et al., 2009).

While the challenge might be to go beyond single-loop learning (Dodgson, 1993), what lies beneath these ideas is that organizations should be in a process of continuous and constant learning so that they can be capable of facing various kinds of problems both inside and outside the organization.

2.4. Unlearning

Coopey & Burgoyne (2000) argues that ‘learning is a broad concept, concerned not so much with knowledge acquisition and protecting intellectual capital, as with understanding who we are and what potential we have to contribute to our own and others’ development’ (872). While learning requires application of new behaviors, new insights to organizational actions and routines, it also ‘necessitates experimentation, unlearning of past methods, and encouraging multiple viewpoints and debate’ (Fiol & Lyles, 1985: 811). As Weick (2002) concludes (referring to Lao Tzu) ‘at a time when organizational learning is usually treated as

an issue of acquisition, it is easy to forget that learning is also sometimes an issue of dropping the interest of wisdom' (15).

As Hedberg defines 'unlearning is a process through which learners discard knowledge' and 'unlearning makes ways for new responses and mental maps' (18). It is unlearning and reframing that 'can enable an organization to move between environments' (10). Besides, 'learning can be severely constrained by a failure to unlearn existing knowledge and skills and to reframe knowledge that remains functional' (Coopey & Burgoyne, 2000: 878). Therefore, organizations should pay more attention to unlearning for a healthier development.

However, individuals and organizations generally insist on using already existing processes, ways, routines that they used to, and both learning and unlearning is a challenging process for them. As Hedberg (1981) points out 'unlearning in the human mind is a cumbersome and energy-consuming process' (18). He also states that (organizational) success acts as another constraint for unlearning processes, since organizations tend to rely on previous experiences, successes while dealing with uncertainties due to environmental changes. Within this perspective, while Argyris (1991) discusses the smart profile of successful employees and their defensive attitude to learn new ways of things, he states that most people in organizations still don't know how to learn and accordingly resist learning, which eventually leads to resisting action in unlearning. On the other hand, from an organizational perspective Hedberg (1981) suggests that it is even more difficult for organizations to discard knowledge than to gain new information.

This perceived challenge in unlearning might sometimes turn into a competitive advantage for organizations. While Hedberg (1981) suggests that 'balances between organization's abilities to learn and to unlearn appear necessary for long-term survival' (p.19), Easterby-Smith (1997) points out that, in case of rapid environmental changes, organization's ability to unlearn might be a first-aid tool in its survival process shaping its future. Thus, the process of learning, unlearning, and relearning stays as a challenge for most organizations. As Hedberg (1981) emphasizes, 'to learn, unlearn, and relearn is the organizational walk: development comes to an end when one of these legs is missing' (p.23). What Coopey & Burgoyne (2000) propose might be an efficient and effective way of achieving the balance among learning, unlearning and relearning, where they suggest that 'an open form of politics works to protect difference and variety, stimulating organizational members to question performance feedback more persistently and to challenge each other to experiment with new alternatives' (879).

3. Learning Organizations

Although previous literature provided some clues about what the learning organization really aims and what idea lies behind it, through utilizing different namings like 'learning system' (Schön, 1971), 'learning community' (Pedler, 1981), and 'learning company' (Pedler & Burgoyne, 1988), the concept of 'learning organization' has been frequently used among academics and practitioners mainly in the last two decades. It was mostly and mainly the consultants and practitioners whose contributions have formed the relevant literature in the last decade (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999). Since then, the idea of becoming a learning organization has spread to every kind of industry (James, 2003) and it is widely acknowledged

that 'without learning there is no improvement and without improvement organizations stagnate (Lassey, 1998: 1).

While decades before, Schön (1971) stated that 'we must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are 'learning systems', that is to say systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation' (quoted in Pedler & Burgoyne, 1988: 253), the late development of literature on learning organization is in fact surprising. As Pedler & Burgoyne (1988) emphasize, while the domination of the 'overly male' way of thinking in organizational settings and life have shaped organizations into output-oriented structures, and accordingly delayed the development of such ideas, concepts such as the learning company will provide a feminine touch and offer a kind of transformation in addition to output orientation to organizations.

Besides, being aware of the fact that learning is an expensive process and requires investment, and while, in general, 'the costs of learning are immediate and the benefits are long-term' (Dodgson, 1993: 389), and accordingly becoming a learning organization is a challenging and time-consuming process (Senge, 2003), previously, it was not a preferred strategic tool for managers and company shareholders for the purpose of organizational development, which also stands as another logical explanation for delayed development of learning organization area.

3.1. Definitions, Frameworks and Models

Huysman (1999) defines the learning organization as 'a form of organization that enables the learning of its members in such a way that it creates positively valued outcomes, such as innovation, efficiency, better alignment with the environment and competitive advantage' and 'is one that creates structures and strategies which facilitate the learning of all its members' (61-64). In addition, Huysman emphasizes that learning is not only an outcome but also a process within the organization. Dodgson (1993) shares a similar approach and proposes that learning organizations are 'firms that purposefully construct structures and strategies so as to enhance and maximize organizational learning' (377). However, he further differentiates learning organization 'as one that moves beyond [this] natural learning, and whose goals are to thrive by systematically using its learning to progress beyond mere adaptation' (380). What Dodgson (1993) points out, in fact, is one of the crucial characteristics of the learning organization: adaptability. Learning organizations are generally seen as more adaptive and flexible in their nature, since they do have the capability of being adaptable. However, as Huber (1991) points out, the distinction between adaptation and adaptability is important; while adaptation is just appropriate in the short run and seen as a remedial action, adaptability provides improved performance and success to an organization in the long run.

Learning organizations maintain their adaptive structure basically through continuous learning. As Swieringa & Wierdsma (1992) emphasize 'learning organizations are not only capable of learning, but also of learning to learn' (quoted in Lassey, 1998: 7), which supports the idea that adaptive and flexible structure of learning organizations is continuously enhanced and updated through feedback and feed forwarding processes which provide further adaptability to

the organization. While Levinthal & March (1993) find it difficult for organizations to perform learning meaningfully during a continuous process of environmental adaptation, Pedler & Burgoyne (1988) stress the importance of 'an increased organizational capacity to learn' in fast-changing environments, where organizations face improbable and often highly ambiguous situations and have to decide and act simultaneously.

From another perspective, Mayo & Lank (1997) suggest that 'a learning organization harnesses the full brainpower, knowledge and experience available to it, in order to evolve continually for the benefit of all stakeholders' (7). While Burgoyne et al. (1994) also emphasize the importance of organization's stakeholders, they point out that 'organizations now have to respond, more than ever before, to people's needs for meaning, identity and purpose to be met through their transactions, from whatever stakeholder position (employee, owner, supplier, customer, neighbour) with organizations' (2).

In their recent study, Marsick & Watkins (1999) define learning organization as 'one that is characterized by continuous learning for continuous improvement, and by the capacity to transform itself' (10). In addition, they provide a four-level learning organizational model, where learning is mainly in and within these four levels - individuals, teams, organization, and global. Their model 'learning organization action imperatives' proposes that links within these four levels lead to a continuous learning and transformation in the organization.

Pedler & Burgoyne (1988) emphasize that learning organizations do have formal policies and procedures, and that it will be wrong to think that these are all removed. They argue that learning organizations need 'new forms of relations and managing as well as greater provision of development opportunities' (p.262). In a similar manner, Sugarman (2001) also states that 'better learning' requires 'better relations' in organizational settings, which necessitates challenging organizational changes by means of employee behaviors within the organization, and accordingly revisions in relations among them.

While the literature provides further but somewhat similar approaches about how a learning organization should be, James (2003) draws attention to the lack of knowledge on how to design a learning organization. Accordingly, she proposes a model, that she calls 'learning organization web', which is more transformational and 'engages everyone into exploration, exploitation, and transfer of knowledge, increasing the collective learning throughout the organization and the capacity to create its future' (47). According to this model, learning organization lies among the six crucial concepts: transformational leadership, dispersed strategies, integrating mechanism, egalitarian culture, horizontal structures, knowledge workers (James argues that everyone in learning organizations should become knowledge workers). The model forms the basis for the learning organization, and is in fact a combination of several characteristics of learning organizations already mentioned previously. However, the way they are connected (through beliefs, balance, behaviour, and boundarylessness, which form the 'DNA' of the organization) makes the model unique and attractive for practitioners. In accordance with her model, James also points out that each learning organization should also be a teaching organization, which requires further skills for learning organizations.

However, one point should be clarified. While the above models and frameworks provide a ‘success’ route for organizations, not all learning organizations will become one of world’s leading companies or organizations, as learning is not ‘following a path of greater and greater elaboration, beauty, civility or fit with the environment. The essential element is not that development leads to higher and higher states but that it inexorably leads somewhere’ (J. G. March quoted in Huysman, 1999: 62).

3.2. Learning Styles

With a focus on information processing, McGill et al., (1992) define learning organizations as companies ‘that can respond to new information by altering the very ‘programming’ by which information is processed and evaluated’ (5), and emphasize the distinction between adaptive and generative learning processes in learning organizations, where the former leads to incremental changes in the organization, the latter creates a transformational change. From another point of view, while Prahalad & Hamel (1990) stress the importance of learning capacity for sustainable competitive advantage, Hedberg (1981) draws attention to the probable weaknesses in organizations due to slow learning in turbulent environments. On the other hand, Sugarman (2001) points out the two distinct learning styles of learning organizations, namely ‘creating new knowledge’ and ‘sharing knowledge’ which differentiate learning organizations from others, and Senge (2003) mentions the importance of ‘intimate and systematic’ learning and adds that organizations should also be capable of linking knowledge and action in appropriate contexts.

In addition to the above-mentioned learning styles, unorganized (Leymann, 1989), ‘unnoticed and hidden’ (Jones & Hendry, 1994: 155) learning also rest as a valuable source for competitive advantage for organizations. As it reflects what takes place in natural settings and provides what is being learned through informal relations, besides formal ones, in case that an organization becomes aware of these learning processes, organization’s learning capability can increase and accordingly it can act more wisely in the long run. Similarly, as ‘nowadays, the development of organizations privileges diversity, variety, urgency, and immediacy’ (Roux-Dufort, 2003: 24), it is clear that the increased awareness will lead to diverse organizational skills to deal with these issues. Weick (2002) states that ‘networks capable of organizing for ambivalence learn faster than do networks that are organized solely for belief or doubt’ (p.14), providing a clue for the critical role of unorganized and hidden learning in organizational settings.

Two other distinctions come from Jones and Hendry (1994) where they group learning as acceptable and unacceptable, and as soft and hard in organizations. Where acceptable learning is ‘learning which supports the organization’s structure and how people should act within it’ (158), unacceptable learning is ‘learning which has to do with the emotions and the feelings people generate towards themselves, the organization’s management and the organization itself’ (159). While they argue that organizations mostly engage in acceptable learning and that few organizations carry out both types, they stress the importance of harnessing both types. They highlight the following arguments:

'By widening our understanding of the contexts in which learning occurs, and comprehending that learning is as much acquired through emotion, attitudes, communications and habit, the additional characteristics of learning - such as an individual's language development, relationships with others, experience and memory, styles of thinking, developing a sense of self and a sense of values (what may be termed as 'soft' learning) - will provide a framework for greater organizational and individual learning capability' (159).

On the other hand, Jones & Hendry (1994) stress the importance of both soft (informal, unintended, and indirect) and hard (formal, pragmatic, and training-based) learning, and the role of learning organizations bringing these two learning styles together. In fact, similar approaches do exist in organizational change literature like Rickards (1999) soft vs. hard systems approach and/or Beer & Nohria's (2000) theory E and theory Q. Thus, now we turn to the close link between learning organizations and organizational change.

3.3. Learning Organizations and Organizational Change

Learning brings competitiveness and adaptability to organizations. However, for an organization to have a sustainable competitive advantage it should create its own core competencies, as technological change, global competition and relations in organizational settings require more than just simple learning. Thus, as Prahalad & Hamel (1990) emphasize that organizations should have core competencies which are 'collective learning in the organization... (through) communication, involvement, and a deep commitment to working across organizational boundaries' (81) which requires talk, dialogue among organizational members, and then, which leads to a better understanding of organizational activities and purposes.

From this perspective 'learning often implies a real and observable strategic and/or organizational change' in organizations (Roux-Dufort, 2003:8). In a similar view, Crossan et al., (1999: 522) propose 'organizational learning as a principal means' for strategic renewal in organizations. Or as Dutta & Crossan (2003) point out 'learning produces an inventory of dynamic knowledge in response to strategic requirements and these serve to guide organizational change and renewal' (7). However, while organizational change and learning are frequently used together, as Fiol & Lyles (1985) mention 'making organizational changes or adjustments does not and should not automatically assume the existence of learning' (810). On the other hand, organizations are now trying to survive in such environments where learning better and faster has become 'an essential core competence' (Sugarman, 2001). Thus, it may be inappropriate to detach learning from change or change from learning as one necessitates the other. As Dutta & Crossan (2003) emphasize, 'change and organizational learning appear to be intimately linked' (3)

Besides, now organizations must interact with their environments for information gathering and sharing and, as Hedberg (1981) points out, 'learning takes place when organizations interact with their environment' (3), which further changes continuously and which further necessitates learning as 'understanding environments that change requires tearing down obsolete mental maps and starting anew' (Hedberg, 1981:4).

Therefore, organizational change stands as another topic that should be studied in the context of learning organizations as changes (i.e. restructuring, downsizing, and outsourcing) in such organizations might reflect different stories than ones in other type of organizations. For example, Fisher & White (2000) provide good insights from a downsizing perspective, and propose that ‘downsizing - or any other restructuring that involves broad-based personnel reduction or movement – may seriously damage the learning capacity of organizations’ (249) and therefore ‘downsizing is a high-risk strategy in a learning organization’ (248). Their perspective lies on the idea that ‘the magnitude of potential damage to organizational learning capacity resulting from downsizing is a nonlinear function that results in a progressively greater percent of capacity lost per individual as the size of the operative learning networks embedded in the organization increases’ (247).

On the other hand, it is also true that ‘there is little use in creating major change and transformation if an organization does not know what is being transformed into and why’ (Brown, 1991; Jones & Hendry, 1994:156). This idea clearly reflects the crucial role of learning in organizational change processes. Thus, thinking about the various types of changes in organizations such as planned/unplanned (emergent), continuous/episodic, rapid/punctuated, sequential/spontaneous, radical/incremental, or piecemeal/systemic, the context of learning organizations seems to provide challenging ideas about implementation and execution of these change programs whether carried out as a response to environmental pressures or as a desired transformation, internally driven. In fact, as Dutta & Crossan (2003) emphasize that ‘change cannot be distinguished as being completely environment driven or completely firm driven but is a mix of both with one predominating’ (5). They also link their perspective to organizational learning and propose that ‘the locus of organizational learning is not completely [either] outside the firm or within, but rather a mix of both’ (5). But what organizations really practice by means of change programs and learning, rests as a research question regarding the above propositions.

In their ‘cyclical’ and ‘dynamic’ model, Dutta & Crossan (2003) engage change and organizational learning in several ways (through locus of learning, approach to learning, dimension of change, type of change, mode of learning, and learning outcome). While they emphasize that ‘change aligns closely with organizational learning only when the change initiative is emergent rather than planned’ (16), they stress the close link and overlap between change and learning. Besides, they point out the ‘potential for significant cross-fertilization of ideas between the two schools (as) change has a lot to offer learning, and learning to change’ (19).

Also, Zietsma et al., (2002) point out the close link between radical organizational change and organizational learning. Through an in-depth longitudinal study, they provide an empirical story of a forest company in British Columbia, Canada, where the company experienced a radical organizational change after a long resistance period. They compare the routines and actions of the company throughout their change processes with the four previously proposed learning processes by Crossan et al., (1999), namely intuition, interpreting, integrating and institutionalising. While their findings confirm Crossan et al.,’s model, the authors propose two more learning processes, attending and experimenting, and upgrade the overall model.

The question that ‘what kind of learning strategies lead to what kind of organizational changes?’ or the reverse can also provide insights for a research as mostly organizations start up with intended strategies but end up with emergent ones (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

4. Organizational Learning vs. Learning Organizations

Easterby-Smith & Araujo (1999) point out that while ‘the literature on *organizational learning* has concentrated on the detached observation and analysis of the process involved in individual and collective learning inside organizations, *the learning organization* literature has an action orientation, and is geared toward using specific diagnostic and evaluative methodological tools which can help identify, promote and evaluate the quality of learning processes inside organizations’ (2). From another perspective, Leitch et al., (1996) argue that while organizational learning area is much more focused on ‘outcomes and achievements’, learning organization area focuses on ‘processes and purposes’.

Easterby-Smith et al., (1998) point out some further differences between the two areas of study. They stress that while organizational learning deals with theory construction and research, learning organization literature is dominated with ‘case studies and success stories’. Or as Bapuji & Crossan (2003) point out, the literature on learning organization is ‘prescriptive in nature, practitioner-oriented and lacked scientific rigor’ (p.5). In other words, while the literature on organizational learning is dominated by academics, the one on learning organization is dominated by consultants and academic practitioners (Easterby-Smith et al., 1998).

On the other hand, there also exists a distinction between the two areas by means of what they provide for organizations. While the area of organizational learning tries to examine how organizations learn, and to reflect the realities with underlying assumptions, learning organization area tries to provide recipes, models and frameworks for how organizations should learn (Tsang, 1997; Easterby-Smith et al., 1998). From a similar perspective, Easterby-Smith & Araujo (1999) point out that while literature on learning organization concentrates ‘on the development of normative models and methodologies for creating change in the direction of improved learning processes’, the one on organizational learning concentrates ‘on understanding the nature and processes of learning (and unlearning) within organizations’ (8)

Jones & Hendry (1994), on the other hand, emphasize the tendency of organizational learning to deal with feedback. They also differentiate the two developed areas of study as proposing that it is required ‘...to hold onto the idea of the ‘learning organization’ as a direction whilst ‘organizational learning’, which is an aspect of the ‘learning organization’, is seen as a descriptive or heuristic device to explain and quantify learning activities and events’ (157), for a clearer picture. More recent work by Örténblad (2001) on the differences between the two concepts provides a similar perspective, adding to the debate the basic distinction as the character of content. He posits that the character of content in organizational learning focuses on processes, whereas learning organization is a form of organization.

Table 2 summarizes the basic differences between organizational learning and learning organization literatures.

Table 2: Organizational Learning vs. Learning Organization

	Organizational Learning	Learning Organization
Focus of literature	Observation and analysis of the process involved in individual and collective learning inside organizations	Using specific diagnostic and evaluative methodological tools which can help identify, promote and evaluate the quality of learning processes inside organizations
	Outcomes and achievements	Processes and purposes
	Theory construction and research	Case studies and success stories
Literature dominated by	Academics	Consultants and academic practitioners
Means of what is provided for organizations	Tries to examine how organizations learn	Tries to provide recipes, models and frameworks for how organizations should learn

5. Current Debates and Critiques

In recent years, several authors have drawn attention for a comprehensive theory in organizational learning (Huber, 1991; Miner & Mezias, 1996). While Easterby-Smith (1997) suggests that creation of such a theory ‘is an unrealistic aspiration’ (1086) due to distinct perspectives and diverse research agendas of different disciplines involved in this area of study, there has been a shared understanding for the necessity of ‘cross-fertilization or synthesis of work done by different research groups or on different but related aspects of organizational learning’ (Huber, 1991: 107). Besides, it is also believed that to benefit from this diversification in the literature, it is useful to match combinations of disciplines following parallel paths through a variety of routes around similar research topics (Easterby-Smith, 1997).

Dodgson (1993) also stresses the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to organizational learning and summarizes the contribution of different perspectives (organization theory, industrial economics, economic history, psychology, and studies related to business, management, and innovation). While his review has a broader perspective, Easterby-Smith (1997) provides a more detailed one where he examines each discipline’s contribution through each one’s underlying assumptions and main concerns in organizational learning, as can be seen in Table 3.

However, while Easterby-Smith et al., (1998) continue to stress this distinction in the field (with a minor change; instead of sociology and organization theory, as a discipline, they prefer to use only organization theory in their recent paper), they point out that there might be areas not-included in this table as the field is getting increasing interest from every area. In relation to this, Easterby-Smith et al., (1998) point out two problems in organizational learning

field, which are: 1) ‘confusion’ by means of divergent ideas coming from different disciplines with different fundamental assumptions, and 2) ‘oversimplification’, where authors should pay attention not to ignore the underlying assumptions when they will borrow previously established concepts.

Table 3: Disciplines of Organizational Learning

Discipline	Ontology	Contribution/ideas	Problematics
Psychology and OD	Human development	Hierarchical organization; importance of context; cognition; underlying values; learning styles; dialogue	Defensive routines, individual to collective transfer
Management science	Information processing	Knowledge; memory; holism; error correction; informing; single and double loop	Non-rational behaviour; short vs. long term information overload; unlearning
Sociology and organization theory	Social structures	Effects of power structure and hierarchy; conflict is normal; ideology and rhetoric; interest of actors	Conflict of interests; organizational politics.
Strategy	Competitiveness	Organization-environment interface; levels of learning progressively more desirable; networks; importance of direct experience; population-level learning	Environmental alignment; competitive pressures; general vs. technical learning
Production management	Efficiency	Importance of productivity; learning curves; endogenous and exogenous sources of learning; links to production design	Limitations of unidimensional measurement; uncertainty about outcomes
Cultural anthropology	Meaning systems	Culture as cause and effect of organizational learning; beliefs; potential cultural superiority	Instability and relativity of culture as barrier to transfer of ideas; whose perspective dominates?

Source adapted from: Easterby-Smith, M. 1997. Disciplines of organizational learning: contributions and critiques. *Human Relations*, 50(9), 1085-1113.

On the other hand, though the interest in the field is increasing day-by-day, Easterby-Smith & Araujo (1999) point out the shortage of studies ‘that attempt to induce theory from existing practice, use a small-number of in-depth cases, focus on micro-practices within organizational or transformational settings, and study processes leading to learning outcomes’ (11). In a similar manner, Huysman (1999) also stresses the lack of empirical research and calls

for 'more empirical stories'. However, for some specific topics in the literature (e.g. antecedents and outcomes of learning) 'it is now possible to conduct large-scale cross-sectional research' (18) as Bapuji & Crossan (2003) put forward. In that sense, the research by Chaston et al., (2001) in small UK manufacturing firms is a good example. Through a survey study, they find that entrepreneurial firms do use 'higher-order' (double-loop) learning and perform better than the non-entrepreneurial ones in this process. On the other hand, Easterby-Smith and Araujo's (1999) call is for 'a measured and healthy pluralism in developing theories of learning in and around organizations' (17). They propose that, for a better understanding of implementation of organizational learning, research should cover both the insiders (within organization) and outsiders (i.e. consultants) interpretations.

From a methodology perspective, Easterby-Smith et al., (2000) point out that while fundamental research techniques are applied in this area, there exists a tendency to utilize more qualitative ones related to language, linguistics and behaviour in organizations as recent years bring an interest in narrative and story-telling. Easterby-Smith et al., (2000) also draws attention to some promising issues in the literature that can broaden and enrich the area through further findings such as studying 'workplace activities and workplace practices' (790).

As in other areas of organization studies (i.e. strategy) the day-to-day practices of employees, workers, and organizational members are getting higher attention, as it is widely believed that practice perspective reflects more than solid pictures and formal structures in organizations. Besides, the dominant belief that organizations are not static entities; they are socially constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in their continuous processes makes micro activities, and routines and details of organizational life more important than ever.

From another perspective, Easterby-Smith & Araujo (1999) draw attention to the necessity of research related to the impact of cultural differences within learning processes in organizations. Besides, as Taylor & Easterby-Smith (1999) emphasize, there exists a necessity of assessing the effects of national culture on both ontology and technology of organizational learning and of exploring these results in different cultures to have a better understanding of organizational learning worldwide. It is believed that these kinds of studies will be a guide for international and multinational companies (Taylor & Easterby-Smith, 1999) in formulating their learning processes, environments, and techniques in a better way. It is also believed that broadening research into a cross-cultural one can also be further step to practice the new routes in research methods that are more flexible in their nature, that take into account power differences and political nature of countries, and where researchers rely more on reflexivity (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999).

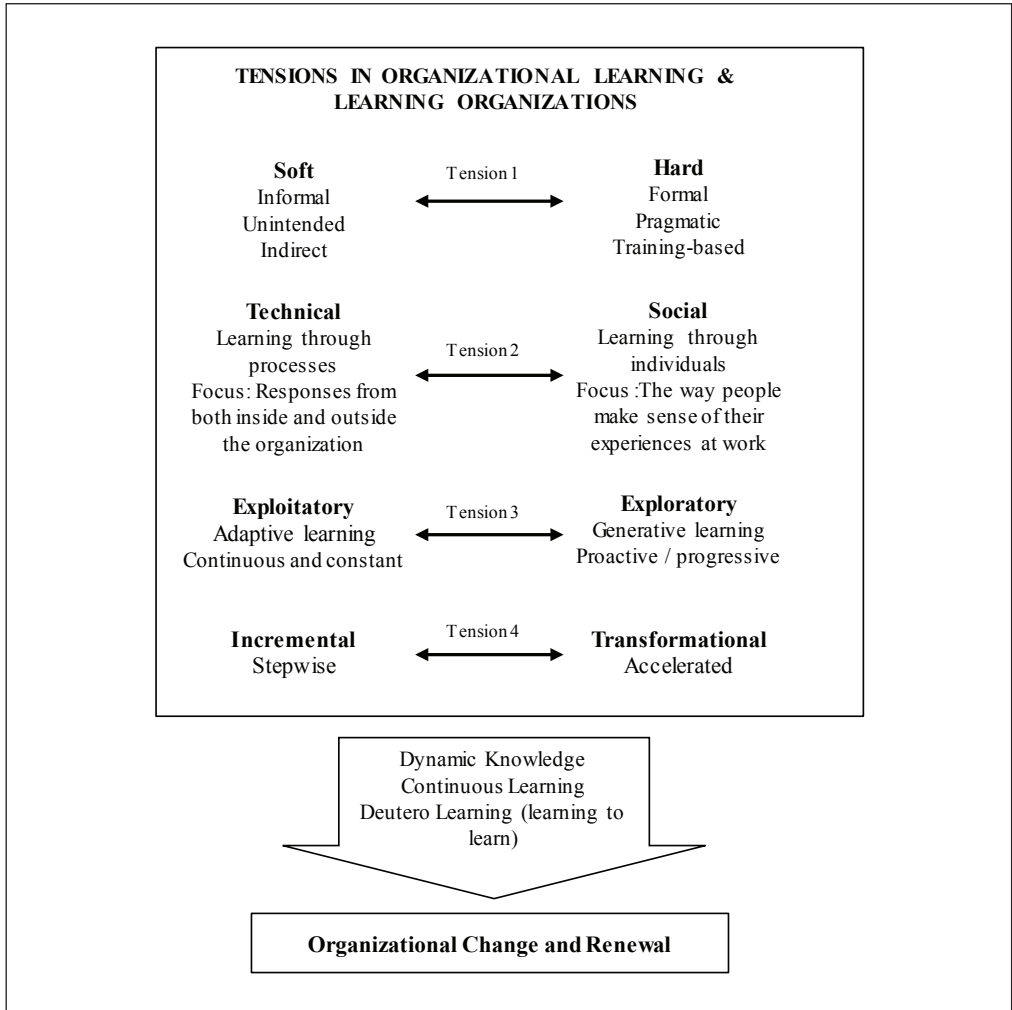
Finally, Easterby-Smith & Lyles (2003) provide challenging areas of research for developing a better understanding of 'organization' and 'learning' such as 'emphasis on practice, on making direct interventions into the world one is studying, and on relying on the subjective experiences of the authors run counter to the training and values of most management scholars, especially those trained within the positivist and empiricist traditions' (54).

6. Proposed Framework for Learning-oriented Change

Having reviewed the commonalities and differences between literature streams on the concepts of organizational learning and learning organizations, in this section we propose

a framework that brings together the dynamics of learning within organizations. Dutta & Crossan (2003) emphasize that ‘change aligns closely with organizational learning only when the change initiative is emergent rather than planned’ (16), and they stress the close link and overlap between change and learning. Figure 1 depicts the tensions stemming from learning within organizations and how these tensions lead to organizational change through continuous learning and accumulation and dissemination of dynamic knowledge.

Figure 1: Proposed Framework for Learning-oriented Change



Organizations learn through efforts towards sustaining a balance between multiple tensions. On the one hand, there is a need for learning through formal training processes which are intended and planned nature. On the other hand, stemming from the emergent nature of

organizational dynamics, learning may emerge through informal and indirect processes. We call this act of harmonizing the tension between the “hard” and “soft” natures of learning (Tension 1). There is a second tension which is based on the duality between the focus of learning. Learning is rooted in the efforts of people to make sense of their experiences at work from a social perspective, and it is rooted in the effective processing and response of organizations to information inside and outside organizations as well, from a more technical perspective. A third tension is between the attempts to exploit existing resources for constant learning and attempts to explore new opportunities through proactive learning. A well-balanced form of this tension leads to the capability of organizational ambidexterity. Finally, the choice of whether incremental change through stepwise learning or transformational change through accelerated learning leads organizations towards facing a fourth challenge. Efforts of organizations to ensure a balance between these four tensions lead to the development and maintenance of continuous learning and dynamic knowledge capabilities.

We propose that these dynamics form the basis of organizational change and eventually, organizational renewal. In this sense, the framework provides an open space for a well-structured and properly-designed flow diagram of organizational learning and change process that brings forward the dynamics.

We hope that future research will verify the existence of these tensions. An inductive approach using qualitative methodology would be useful in developing theory from qualitative data. Particularly, future research should focus on utilizing the case study approach since the research strategy in this approach is to understand ongoing dynamics in specific settings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

7. Conclusion

Learning, and how it is managed in organizations, is a key strategic issue. In this conceptual paper, we tried to analyse extant literature on organizational learning and learning organizations and summarized the current debates and critiques in the area. Proposing a conceptual framework for learning-oriented change, we aimed to integrate the current tensions and dynamics in organizations that lead to continuous learning and therefore to learning-oriented organizational change and renewal.

Taking this integrative framework as a guide in learning and change processes, we suggest that organizations will enhance their capabilities in terms of wise action, effective management and controlled progress. Furthermore, it is advised that by taking the above mentioned four tensions into account, organizations will strengthen their ‘learning to learn’ ability and will improve their dynamic knowledge renewal processes in relation to organizational goals.

In terms of summarizing the literature and transferring academic ideas/views and models into an integrative framework, the paper provides a clear space for an empirical research for academics, while it brings a practical process management tool for practitioners and managers.

Though the paper lacks empirical research to validate and strengthen its views and propositions, we believe that through qualitative research mainly via case studies and data collection by practitioner/management experiences of organizations, varied in size and

diversified in different sectors, the debates offered in the paper will be further clarified and the proposed framework will be tested and revised accordingly.

The question that ‘what kinds of learning strategies lead to what kind of organizational changes?’ or the reverse can provide insights for future research. There is further empirical work to do to validate the proposed framework in terms of its suitability, usefulness and acceptability and this is a clear agenda for further research.

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