Examining Asymmetrical Relationships of Organizational Learning Antecedents: A Theoretical Model

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Abstract: Global era is characterized by highly competitive advantage market demand. Responding to the challenge of rapid environmental changing, organizational learning is becoming a strategic way and solution to empower people themselves within the organization in order to create a novelty as valuable positioning source. For research purposes, determining the influential antecedents that affect organizational learning is vital to understand research-based solutions given for practical implications. Accordingly, identification of variables examined by asymmetrical relationships is critical to establish. Possible antecedent variables come from organizational and personal point of views. It is also possible to include a moderating one. A proposed theoretical model of asymmetrical effects of organizational learning and its antecedents is discussed in this article.

Keywords: organizational learning, antecedents, asymmetrical relationships.

It is essential to realize that in turbulent and uncertainty conditions characterized by very fast changing circumstances, each organization deals with forceful competitions. Within such situations, it is recognized that organizational learning has a significant role both for the individual and the organization. Within organizational context, the learning activities

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might happen if there are some possible supports and opportunities for individuals to improve their capabilities including their knowledge to reach higher performance. In turn, this will be beneficial for the organization in which they become members, in terms of strengthening the competitiveness of services produced to attract many more customers by fulfilling their satisfaction. For modern organizations, organizational learning is a must. It can be viewed as a strategic way to fulfill the market demand.

From human resource perspectives, sustainability of individual employability can be obtained through maintaining adaptability skills needed by the organization in originating competing values into action. The employees need to improve their analyzing capabilities, so they are able to anticipate any possible changing situations happening and to modify the needed activities that can uphold the performance and even advance the diversity and quality of services as required. Argyris (1995) and Blackman et al. (2004) have pointed out that organizational learning might occur in two ways. First, it is called single-loop learning that arises when the organization engages possible changes through detecting and correcting errors of individual behaviors. Second, it is called double-loop learning that happens when the organization engages not only correcting errors but also changing underlying programs or conditions called governing variables that cause individuals' misbehaviors and motivate them not to do so.

Jashapara (2003) has found valuable evidence indicating that organizational learning focused on either efficiency or proficiency has significant effects on organizational performance. In relation to the importance of organizational learning, Cheng and Ho (2001) have provided similar support. They found that learning motivation and commitment to career has significant effects on learning transfer. The transfer of learning is a potential factor for individuals to utilize new methods in their work, which is important to achieve higher performance.

However, for research intentions, deeper exploration of potential antecedents of organizational learning is required within which such kind of learning is affected. So, through empirical investigation we are able to understand whether its antecedents give direct effects or not to organizational learning. Examining a theoretical-based perspective is needed in order to be aware of asymmetrical relationships. Researchers are able to use organizational learning materials that have been deeply and widely elaborated. For practical implications, empirical findings are

valuable sources for research-based solutions for the organization that would like to instill learning motives for its members through modifying or providing better antecedents.

Methodologically, an asymmetrical analysis is vital to understand the possible causes and consequences with relevant and appropriate explanation of the relationships among variables investigated. Rather than knowing only symmetrical relationships, knowing asymmetrical one is more important when we are conducting cause-effect studies. According to Kerlinger (2002), in symmetrical relationships, it doesn't matter which one is the independent or the dependent variable, and what we need to know is their relationships. Moreover, deep theoretical understanding has to be explored to understand the relationships. Conversely, in asymmetrical studies, determining the causes and the consequences is urgent. Mathematically, it can be expressed by using if-then statements. Simply, if X then Y, or in simultaneous effects, if X_1, X_2, X_3, … then Y. In other words, establishing predictor and criterion variables are crucial to consider. Predecessor variables investigated have to have either direct or indirect effects to their successors, and theoretically, those effects must be able to explain.

Considering the importance of organizational learning for organizational effectiveness, we need to explore its potential antecedents, and prove it whether theoretically there is (are) direct effect(s) or not to its consequences, through the intervention of a possible moderator(s). This article is intended to figure out asymmetrical relationships of organizational learning antecedents as a theoretical model.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Organizational learning can be defined as activities of learning taken by an organization and its members to enhance their capacity. It refers to 'how' members' proficiencies and processes of knowledge development can be carried out in such organization. Some desire to institutional change can enhance organizational effectiveness, seek growth, and envision the future, enabling them to get there through learning (Griego et al., 2000).

Philosophically, in his very prominent work, Senge (in Smith, 2001; in Steiner, 1998) has identified dimensions in which people within organization as a whole are shifting their mind, creating a knowledge-based organization, and transforming from bureaucracy machine that is very mechanistic to organizational learning emphasizing cognitive

development of organization members. These dimensions, called five disciplines, involve system thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning. It is widely recognized that these dimensions are the cores for organizations that learn.

Practically, according to Senge (in Smith, 2001; in Altman & Iles, 1998), there are two levels of learning called adaptive and generative learning. Adaptive learning refers to adjusting activities of organization or correcting misbehaviors of its members into new ones that match the current situations. Although adaptive learning is important for the organization to survive in very tumultuous circumstances, it is not sufficient. It must be joined with generative learning in which organization needs to continually discover and expand the capacity of its members to create their future, focusing on developing new perspectives, options, and all possibilities that could occur.

Parallel to adaptive and generative learning, Argyris and Schon (in Altman & Iles, 1998) have also proposed two levels of learning called single-loop and double-loop. They mentioned that the former refers to detecting and correcting errors in continuous improvement process without questioning any challenging possible future, or it is known as *doing things better*, while the latter refers to inquiring the possible challenge, leading to deeper understanding and reassessing the organizational values and assumptions, or it is known as *doing things differently* or *doing different things*. Furthermore, from these two levels of learning proposed by Argyris and Schon, Jashapara (2003) has incorporated both single-loop and double-loop learning and classified the learning into five dimensions as a useful tool to measure organizational learning: focusing on efficiency, innovation, direction, proficiency, and concentration. Such a perspective views that competition is never static, and consequently, learning is intended to dynamic processes of change and continually conducted, leading to the improvement of competitive advantage. The main outcome of learning can be seen from the achievement of higher organizational performance.

POSSIBLE ANTECEDENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Theoretically, there are strong arguments that supportive organization will provide positive impact on learning. In organizational life, the process of learning will depend on two determinants: organization and individuals. The first relies on to what extent the organization provides support for individuals to reshape their capabilities including

knowledge and behaviors; while the second relies on to what extent each individual has a changing perspective. Each of these two concepts will be briefly discussed in the following sections.

Perceived-Organizational Support

From the organizational standpoint, perceived-organizational support is considered as one of possible essential antecedents of organizational learning. The evidence comes from a research field conducted by Griego et al. (2000) who found that there are two predictors that significantly affect the learning of organization members in terms of (1) rewards and recognition, and (2) training and education. Intended to achieve high levels of learning, those two predictors have to be established and set up by the organization to its members. Furthermore, the members will feel that the organization where they belong to provides attention and concern to them. Rewards and recognition are the sources of employee satisfaction, while training and education are activities for advancing their capabilities. In turn, these will motivate and enable them to obtain higher performance.

Bhatt (2000) mentioned that there is a connection between individual learning and organizational learning. The organization culture that supports the learning affects the process of knowledge creation in the organization. The role of perceived-organizational support is to build trust and intentions of people within organization, and to provide psychological attachment among them. Moreover, a large part of innovation, knowledge distribution and sharing in organization is based on the trust of its members. Organizational culture that doesn't support and promote experiential learning, informal peer reviews, and informal guidance for individuals is likely to be having difficulties with knowledge that is no longer effective in fast changing customer demands. In other words, if there is no concern of organization for its members to learn new things related to their duties, such organization is not able to provide services as needed by market, and accordingly it is not able to longer stay in very competitive circumstances.

As mentioned by Eisenberger (in Polly, 2002), employees will develop their quality-related beliefs to organization regarding to what extent the organization cares and concerns about them, appreciates their contributions, and provides assistance when they are dealing with some difficulties. Eisenberger further points out that the dimensions of support perceived by employees involve care or concern, consideration, help, and

opportunity. Using those dimensions, Polly (2002) revealed that there is significant effect of perceived-organizational support on organizational commitment shown by the employees. Moreover, it will motivate them to perform better, reflected by less absenteeism, high involvement, low turnover, and better service quality given to customers.

Emphasizing learning and development for individuals is critical contributor to innovative culture for organization. From his review, Hurley (2002) has identified that learning is facilitated by certain organizational culture that supports the involvement in terms of decentralization of decision-making and low formalization, management support of risk-taking and treating failure as an opportunity to learn, management system that provides comprehensive information, facilitative leadership that minimizes bureaucratization, and nurturing management for good ideas and proactiveness. All of those aspects will be perceived as kinds of support.

Perspective to Change

From individual point of view, perspective to change is considered as one of possible important antecedents that can affect the organizational learning. In negative perspective, it is also called resistance to change. The higher resistance to change the lower a perspective to change will be, and so the individual initiative to learn. Davis and Newstorm (1989) have described several elements of individual perspective to change. These involve: (1) logical, rational objections which include time required to adjust, extra effort to learn, possibility of less desirable conditions such as skill downgrading, economic cost of change, and questioned technical feasibility of change; (2) psychological, emotional attitudes which include fear of unknown, low tolerance of change, dislike of management or other change agent, lack of trust in others, and need for security – desires for status quo; (3) sociological factors, group interests that include political conditions, opposing group values, parochial – narrow outlook, vested interest, and desire to retain existing friendships.

From the studies conducted to employees continuing study at higher degree and to educational human resources, Djatmika (2002) and Djatmika and Soetjipto (2003) found that perspective to change has significant contribution to orientation of career development characterized by highly initiative improvement of core competencies-related to work required. This perspective comes from individuals affected by either the

degree of internal motivation to achieve higher performance or external factors, such as the changing circumstances that instill them to obtain a better satisfaction related to their career.

Dunning (1995) confirmed the significant role of trait importance and modifiability that contributes both to self-assessment and self-enhancement motives through integrated learning orientation and to performance. His research findings revealed that integrated learning orientation would be determined by high trait importance within which such learning did not happen with the low one. So, it can be concluded that the higher trait importance, the more integrated learning orientation will be for individuals. Similar results explained that individuals who have high modifiability conditions would have higher integrated learning orientation contrasted to the low one. In addition, the interaction between high trait importance and high modifiability substantially affected performance through the mediation of learning.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: A POSSIBLE MODERATOR

Organizational commitment is an essential factor in understanding and explaining work-related behaviors of employees in organization reflected by to what extent their identification and involvement. It concentrates to employee attachment. Referring to Meyer and Alen (in Lee, 2000), there are three dimensions of employee's organizational commitment expressing the attachment viewed as affective orientation, cost-associated-recognition to leave, and moral obligation to remain. These dimensions are commonly accepted as affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The organization needs highly committed individuals considered as attitudinal assets.

However, commitment is not able to stand-alone. As work-related behaviors, there should be mutual interaction between organization and its employees. Regarding creating organization that meets tomorrow's needs, such organization requires fundamental shifting of individual attitudes toward organization in terms of developing creativity and innovation. Retaining committed individuals, organization needs to provide support to them (Zairi, 1999). To develop commitment, Burnes et al. (2003) suggest that organization has to promote in a deliberate, systematic, and synergistic approach that involves everyone in the organization. Through learning, organization will be able to transform itself continuously by developing and involving all of its members. A similar opinion given by Chan et al. (2003) shows that being able to adapt to changes and

eliminating blindness, organizational learning is progressively recognized as a practicable survival strategy. They have augmented three essential components to organizational learning; they are commitment to learning, shared vision, and open-mindedness.

Dunphy et al. (1997) have added that another important factor that reverberates attachment of individuals to organization is an engagement. They define engagement as the competence to involve the members of the organization actively and coherently in the new chosen directions. Engagement is considered as an urgent individual commitment to involve in enhancing his/her capabilities regarding the duties taken in charge. Moreover, they have elaborated and examined the components of such engagement in the context of organizational change effectiveness. From their research, it was found that all of those components have significant relationships with the effectiveness of organizational changing. The components include the following: (1) achieving widespread commitment to carrying out key decisions, (2) getting people motivated about their work and the firm, (3) taking timely and effective action – not just planning and talking about things, (4) achieving coordinated action throughout the firm, (5) throughout the firm, communicating on all matters relevant to people and their work, and (6) identifying, setting and spelling out new directions for the firm.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: A THEORETICAL MODEL

So far, I have briefly reviewed organizational learning, possible antecedents, and its moderating variable. By framing and knitting their interconnectedness, a theoretical model can be developed, putting it all together into asymmetrical relationships. The model of relationships can be represented as Figure 1.

Based on Figure 1, as represented by its asymmetrical relationships, now I come to offer five possible propositions (Ps). These are:

P_1: Perceived-organizational support will be positively related to organizational commitment

P_2: Perceived-organizational support will be positively related to organizational learning

P_3: Perspective to change will be positively related to organizational commitment

P_4: Perspective to change will be positively related to organizational learning

P$_5$: Organizational commitment will be positively related to organizational learning.
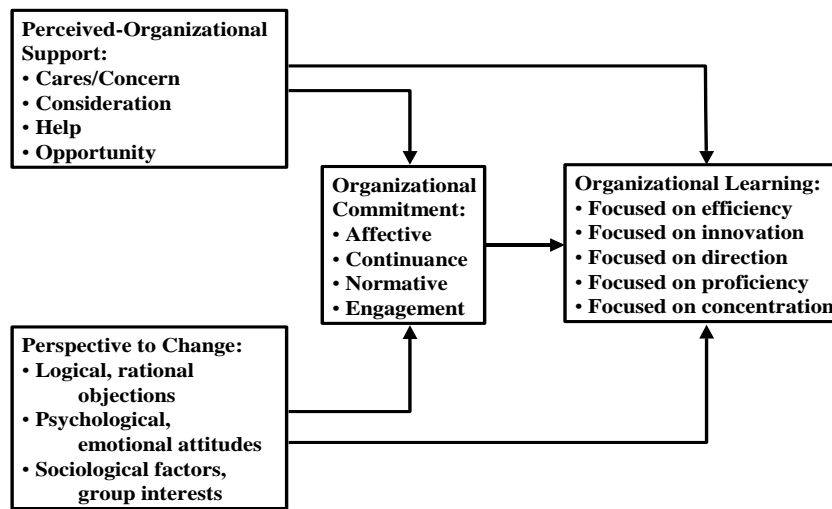

Figure 1 A Proposed Theoretical Model

Theoretically, dimensions of each variable reviewed earlier support those relationships. Firstly, the dimensions suggested by Eisenberger (in Polly, 2002) for perceived-organizational support are proper manifests to measure to what extent employees feel that organization provides awareness and concerns with their interests. Secondly, the dimensions of perspective-to-change developed by Davis and Newstorm (1989) are suitable manifest to measure the degree of agreeableness to change the employee perception regarding fast changing circumstances. Thirdly, organizational commitments are depicted by employees' attachment to the organization in terms of to what extent they are getting involved. The manifests for measuring the attachment come from Meyer and Alen (in Lee, 2000) that include affective, continuance, and normative commitments, while Dunphy et al. (1997) have included engagement as an addendum manifest related to commitment. Finally, the manifests of organizational learning come from Jashapara (2003), who has intensively classified the two dimensions of single-loop and double-

loop learning into five manifests that involve learning focused on efficiency, innovation, direction, proficiency, and concentration.

CONCLUSION

Organizational learning is a critical aspect for organizations living in turbulent circumstances. They need to augment the capabilities of their members in order to keep up with the changing market demand and fulfill customer satisfaction. Organizational learning is taken into account as a strategic way for continually improving competitive advantage and upholding the positioning.

Asymmetrical relationships of organizational learning variables are needed to understand the causes and consequences. Perceived-organizational support and perspective to change are considered two critical antecedents; in addition, organizational commitment is considered as a possible moderating variable between organizational learning and its antecedents. Theoretically, according to the elements of each variable explored, there are possible direct and indirect asymmetrical relationships. As a consequence, a proposed theoretical model can be developed. For practical implications, it is expected that empirical findings will be beneficial for organizational practices as sources of research-based solutions. To prove the propositions developed, we need to investigate the asymmetrical relationships of the proposed model in a certain organizational life.

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