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An Investigation of the Characteristics of Learning Organizations in Turkish Companies: Scale Validation

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Abstract

In this study it was aimed to identify the characteristics of learning organizations and testing the learning organization scale in Turkish companies. The questionnaire was applied to 48 managers and 426 employees in 11 companies, operating in outsourcing for call center industry. The reliability and validity of the "Organizational Learning" scales developed by Mets and Torokoff (2007), which were based on Senge's five disciplines, in order to determine the characteristics of the learning organizations was investigated for Turkish study population within the scope of this study. According to study findings, it can be stated that aforementioned scale is a powerful tool that can be used to measure organizational learning with its high reliability and validity, specifically for Turkish respondents. The reliability and validity of the "Organizational Learning" scales developed by Mets and Torokoff (2007), which were based on Senge's five learning disciplines and Mets' three-dimensional learning model, for the Estonian enterprises, were investigated for Turkish study population within the scope of the study and results indicate that this scale is considered valid and reliable for Turkish use.

Keywords: Learning organizations, organizational learning, characteristics of learning organizations, scale validation

1. Introduction

Looking at the recent studies, it is observed that the important role of knowledge, learning and culture in the organizational management has become the main research subject of social sciences (Currah & Wrigley, 2004:17). The reason for this is that the "learning" has become an indispensable element for organizations, which are obliged to adapt the changes around to get over this process (Fard, Rostamy & Taghiloo, 2009:49). Employees are required to devote themselves to learning, for organizations to survive in this changing dynamic environment (Kumpikaite, 2008:25). It is necessary to strengthen and encourage employees, rather than managing employees, in order to operate within today's changing dynamic environment. The aim in such an approach is to try to have creative employees that have intrinsic motivation and willing to learn and improve themselves, as well as capable of combining personal goals with organizational goals (Amidon, 2005:409).

The human resource management approach, which has been defined years ago and have been improved numerous times since then, has brought a new approach and perspective at every stage of its development. Today, the

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development of the "learning organization" concept is the utmost point that has been reached by the human resources management (Juceviciene & Leonaviciene, 2007:569). The concepts of the learning organization and organizational learning, and the application of these concepts in the business world were gradually studied by researchers in the last decade (Wang, Yang & McLean, 2007:154, Andrew & Neil, 2004:17). Academics in Turkey devote more attention as well, to the topic of organizational learning in recent years and continue to perform studies in this regard currently (Diken, Öztürk & Çoban, 2006, Atak & Atik, 2007, Erigüç & Yalçın Balçık, 2007, Kapu & Aybas, 2008, Öneren, 2008, Gizir, 2008).

Although the learning organization concept started to be developed in the 1960s by Chris Argyris's study, it became a contemporary practice that draws attention only after the book called *Fifth Discipline* published in 1990 by the author Peter Senge (Atak & Atik, 2007:64). The generally accepted "learning organization" concept, which was made popular by Peter Senge in the 1990s, refers to continuous efforts and training of employees on improving their capacities to achieve the intended goals (Jeong, Lee, Kim & Lee, 2007:54).

Organizational learning is a major component in developing the organizational performance and creating a competitive advantage (Garcia-Morales, Ruiz-Moreno & Llorens-Montes, 2007:529). It is essential for businesses to be prepared for continuous training in order to proactively manage and respond to the constant emergencies and they need to adapt this into their internal processes and practices (Currah & Wrigley, 2004:1). In most of the studies, it has been demonstrated that being a learning organization increases the effectiveness of the organization (Jeong, et al., 2007, Tsai, 2008). Also, an increase in financial performance of the organizations that adopt and implement the concept of the learning organization is observed (Davis & Daley, 2008:52).

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Concept of Organizational Learning*

Looking at the literature on organizational learning, it is seen that we are faced with a complex structure, which is still debated by researchers (Davis & Daley, 2008:52, Acosta, 2004). Although same considerations have been proposed basically, there are some noticeable differences between of approaches of the researchers. It can be said that these differences are grouped into three questions; which are: what are the factors that make an organizational learning organizational, what are the components of organizational learning, and determination of the necessary conditions and processes that create a learning organization (Acosta, 2004). It is evident that these differences are originated from the change in ideas dominant in the organizational learning literature. If the way to address the concept of learning, which forms the basis of this change in ideas and organizational learning, can be well understood, it will be seen that the differences disappear.

Every employee has a learning capacity to a certain extent (Pedder, 2006:180-182). Individuals working in all kinds of organizations have gained their positions after a certain selection process more or less. However, being content with this, in other words considering that the employees recruited in the organization have adequate knowledge is the biggest obstacle in front of the organizational progress. Encouraging employees to access information and use it in a creative process lies at the heart of being a learning organization. And, this can be achieved by taking measures to improve learning capacities of the employees. Encouraging employees to take risks in the learning process will improve their learning capacities (Pedder, 2006:180-182).

When it comes to organizational learning, what is meant by the "learning" concept is the lifelong learning. "Lifelong learning" has become a concept talked about by almost everyone in the developed or developing societies, and today it's the most studied subject in the educational literature. In lifelong learning, individuals add value to society together with themselves, and contribute to its development and modernization (Rogers, 2006:125-127).

Personal commitment to be a lifelong learner is the basis of individual learning in the organizational learning process (Stinson, Pearson & Lucas, 2006:309). In order to create a lasting change in learning behavior of the employees, organizations need to be able to create a change in their attitudes towards learning. The commitment to learning to be created in employees on a personal level will be reflected in the employees' way of doing business and will improve the quality of the work done. Organizational learning focuses on a collective process that affects the

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