DEVELOPING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL RELATED ORGANIZATIONS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK

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DEVELOPING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL RELATED ORGANIZATIONS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled

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is the best of the author's knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL RELATED ORGANIZATIONS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK

By

Constance Rinen Justin Wah

Organizational initiatives to build a learning organization are inarguably important and strategic in the context of gaining and sustaining business competitive advantage. In this thesis, I report a completed research work pertaining to understanding various organizational approaches towards developing a learning organization in the context of tourism and cultural related organizations in Kuching, Sarawak. Firstly, this study examines the participated organizations and their approaches in creating a learning organization. Secondly, it attempts to determine factors that can contribute towards effective learning in the context of employees of the tourism and cultural related organizations. Finally, this study identifies in what ways the participated organizations have engaged the use of ICTs to promote a systematic organizational learning in the organization. In the research, I deployed both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain data. An in-depth interview method was used to obtain qualitative data; a survey method was utilized to obtain descriptive data and also to test the proposed hypotheses relevant to this research. Overall, ten (10) organizations participated in this study. Out of this, eight (8) organizations participated in the interview. Questionnaires were distributed
to all (10) organizations to obtain the feedback from their employees at various work levels. Five hypotheses were proposed and tested to find out factors (i.e., ICT usage, creativity, peer influence, management support and training) that influence effective learning in the context of an organization. In general, this study found that at the management level, factors such as work culture, organizational learning activities and leadership style can influence organizational approaches in promoting and building a learning organization. The outcomes from the survey further reveal that factors such as ICT utilization, training and creativity can directly influence employee’s learning efforts. Interestingly, this study found no significant relationship between peer influence and employee’s learning effort. The findings of this research inarguably will fill the present literature gap and also have various important managerial implications.
ABSTRAK

PEMBANGUNAN ORGANISASI PEMBELAJARAN DI DALAM KONTEKS ORGANISASI PELANCONGAN DAN KEBUDAYAAN DI KUCHING, SARAWAK

Oleh

Constance Rinen Justin Wah

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0  Introduction

In the context of today’s digital economy, organizations are being pushed to reassess their strategic approaches to effectively function and compete. To date, many forms of change initiatives that have been implemented at the organizational level from various organizations (particularly in the developed countries) have been strategically focused on capitalizing old and new knowledge. Modern organizations now are making a serious attempt to become a learning organization and treat knowledge as an important organizational asset.

A learning organization refers to an organization that attempts to realize certain work attributes such as teamwork, long-life learning, employee participation and development that constantly orientates towards knowledge acquisition and sharing, as well as promoting innovation and creativity. It was argued that an organization can learn only through the constructive participation and efforts of its employees to learn (Senge, 1994). Zuboff (1988) mentioned that:

“Learning is no longer a separate activity that occurs either before one enters the workplace or in remote classroom settings. Nor is it an activity preserved for a managerial group. The behaviors that define learning and the behaviors that defines being productive are one and the same. Learning is not something that requires time out from being engaged in productivity activity; learning is the heart of productive activity. To put it simply, learning is the new form of labor (p. 395)”.
Further, Dixon (1999) argued that the process of learning in organization must involve various work levels (individual and group) and has to be strategically integrated. This is important to ensure an effective learning process will take place in the organization’s context, where activities such as creating and sharing information and knowledge are being emphasized. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being implemented and utilized to promote and facilitate learning activities and processes in organization. Many studies have reported evidence of how ICT can effectively facilitate in the learning process at various work levels. See for example studies done by Rebey et al (2000), Massino (1999) and Neilson (1997).

From the perspective of tourism and cultural related organizations, there have been many ongoing efforts globally to encourage effective learning process to take place in organization. In the museum sector, for example, ICTs have been engaged extensively. Beier et al. (2004) elaborate that effective web navigation can facilitate users to obtain the right information and promote user personalization. These ICT attributes no doubt offer enormous potential to promote museum. In general, ICTs can improve learning process, stimulate visitor’s loyalty, attract new audience and also, can contribute towards the creation and development of online communities.¹

Despite the ongoing calls and efforts to encourage the participation of tourism and cultural related organizations to become a learning organization, pertinent research in this area is still underdeveloped. This study aims to address this gap. It attempts to study various

organizational approaches towards developing a learning organization in the context of tourism and cultural related organizations in Kuching, Sarawak.

1.1 Research Objectives

In general, this study investigates various organizational approaches towards developing a learning organization in the context of tourism and cultural related organizations in Kuching, Sarawak.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

(i) To examine the participated organizations and their approaches in building a learning organization.

(ii) To determine factors that can contribute towards effective learning in the context of employees of the tourism and cultural related organizations.

(iii) To identify in what ways the participated organizations have utilized ICTs to promote a systematic organizational learning in the organization.
1.2 Justification of Study

The importance of tourism and cultural related organizations that function to advance knowledge and to promote cultural and historical artifacts is inarguable. In the context of promoting cultural and tourism, these organizations have a very important role to play particularly with regard to creating societal awareness and building interest to learn about culture and history.

To date, research pertaining to building learning organizations in the context of Sarawak is scarce. From the academic standpoint, this study can address this limitation in several ways. One is about providing empirical evidence pertaining to the various approaches related to organizational learning activities. Second is about increasing understanding about the roles of both top management and the lower management, and how the dynamics of their relationship can shape the outcomes of the learning activities that have taken place in the local organizations.

From the managerial standpoint, the outcomes from this research can be very valuable to the top management to reassess their approaches in promoting learning activities in organization.
1.3 Empirical Setting

In Sarawak, there are many forms of cultural heritage and historical artifacts. For example, historical sites and buildings in Sarawak that are popular among the local and the tourists include places such as Mulu Cave, Square Tower, Sarawak Museum Building, Astana Building and Mongkos Longhouse. As for the cultural heritage, native artifacts such as antique beads, traditional costumes and native tattoo are popular and well captured and documented. The comments by Sarawak Tourism Board (STB) CEO, Datuk Rahid Khan reported in the Star News Online (2011) can further elaborate the efforts undertaken at the state level to transform the local tourism and cultural related organizations and to play more active role in the sector. According to him, a change management program was put in place to ensure the right capability within the organization besides putting priorities on talent management, human capital and development so that the staff able to undertake the responsibilities assigned to them. He further stressed that:

“going forward we need to take into account that a great competitive edge that Sarawak has is its tremendous natural assets such as forests, mountains, hills and rivers. That being done, the next step is to promote a unique Sarawak experience to tourists, that will provide them with a lifetime of memories. There are a lot of things that we have not capitalized on, we need to identify areas and transform them into viable products.”

---

2 STB promotes unique Sarawak experience. Sarawak Spotlight by Jonathan Chia (Thursday, 2011 – The Star News Online
In order for Sarawak to gain the world attention, the local tourism and cultural related organisations must continue to be more competitive to operate in the present business environment. The organisations have to constantly learn.

In this study, the participated organizations are shown in Table 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participated Organization</th>
<th>Type of Business</th>
<th>Level of Participation [survey and interview]</th>
<th>Estimate employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pustaka Negeri Sarawak (Sarawakiana Department)</td>
<td>This is a public organization. The core business of this organization is to become an information hub and provide knowledge resources and services to cater the needs of the population.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Convention Bureau</td>
<td>This is a non-profit organization. Its primary objective is to promote Sarawak as an attractive destination for international meetings and events.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA)</td>
<td>This is a non-profit organization. Its main objective is to serve the needs of its members and the community as a whole.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Museum (Ethnology Department)</td>
<td>This is a public museum. The department aims to enhance societal awareness and learning about Sarawak and the local population.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysian Handicraft National Corporation</td>
<td>This is a public organization. It promotes Malaysian handicraft and provides opportunities to local entrepreneurs in this area of business.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Forestry Corporation</td>
<td>This is a government-linked company (GLC) that has been formed to manage the biodiversity resources in Sarawak.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanah Khairat Yayasan Budaya Melayu Sarawak</td>
<td>This is a non-government organization (NGO) that specializes in promoting the understanding about the Malay culture in Sarawak.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Tourism Board</td>
<td>This organization has been established and monitored under the Sarawak Tourism Board (Incorporation) Ordinance. It primary objectives is to stimulate and promote tourism to generate economics value to Sarawak.</td>
<td>Survey and interview</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borneo Highlands Resort</td>
<td>This is a private resort organization. The organization promotes the concept or theme of “Back to Nature, Back to Basics”.</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Craft Council</td>
<td>This is a public organization. It specializes in promoting all kinds of local made handicrafts.</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Lists of Organization Participated in the Study
1.4 Research Framework

The research framework of this study is based on a social learning theory. The theory, in general, asserts that learning occurs not solely in the individual learners' mind but in the context of social context, activity, practice and shared experience of the learners. In this view, learning is not limited to individual perspectives but also can occur as a result from the social participation and interaction among organizational members.

Two methods were deployed to undertake this research, namely quantitative and qualitative approach. As for the quantitative method, this study utilizes survey obtain feedback from the employees of the participated organizations. Questionnaires were distributed after obtaining formal approval from the top management of the participated organizations. The survey is divided into three (3) sections as follows: Section A: Personal Information; Section B: ICT Usage in the Organization; and Section C: Learning Effort. There is also one (1) open-ended question in the survey. The purpose of this question is to gather comments and opinions from the employees with regard learning efforts and activities in their organization. Another approach that was deployed is qualitative method. Explicitly, an in-depth interview method was used to gain views from the top management of the participated organizations. The qualitative method is deemed appropriate for this study because it permits insights and provide data about the perception, opinion and the commitment of the top management with regard to creating a learning organisation. Through this method, the research was able to understand with how the top management interprets the meaning of a learning organization, and their experience and social interaction can shape their approaches in promoting learning in their organization.
Figure 1.1 shows the conceptual model that guides this research. As elaborated before, two approaches are being used to gather data. This study has identified five (5) variables (ICT usage, creativity, peer influence, management and training) and further constructed pertinent hypotheses. The dependent variable in this study is employee efforts to learn. More details can be read in the subsequent chapters.
1.5 Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides the overview, purpose and rationale of the study. It also briefly presents the conceptual framework of the research, together with some important terminologies to set the context of for this research.

Chapter 2 reviews the related literature. The review includes the literature about the social learning theory, and other related areas that are pertinent to this research.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and discusses the chosen research methods. It further elaborates issues related to the research sampling and selection and recruitment of participants from the survey and interview. It also describes the data analysis and techniques.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research. The details about the research outcomes from the survey and the interview are further discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses further the research findings.

Chapter 6 provides a conclusion for this research and highlights the research contributions. It also outlines the limitations of the study and the possible future research.
### 1.6 Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Manpower resources</strong></th>
<th>The individuals who make up a workforce in an organization and who are given a set of responsibility or work tasks to perform in organization.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning organization</strong></td>
<td>A learning organization promotes various forms of learning activities to encourage employees' learning initiatives. The organization emphasizes on creativity and innovation through the acquisition and production of knowledge. Their employees are being oriented towards the organisational environment that supports long-life learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Tourism</strong></td>
<td>The American chapter of ICOMOS, the International Council on Monument and Sites, observed that “cultural tourism as a name means many things to many people and herein lies its strengths and its weaknesses” (USICOMOS, 1996). It involves experiencing or having contact of differing intensity with the unique social fabric, heritage, and special character of places (TC 1991; Blackwell 1997; Schweitzer, 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information and Communication Technology (ICT)</strong></td>
<td>ICT consists of all technical elements that are being used to handle information and aid communication, including computer and network hardware, communication middleware as well as necessary</td>
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