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Learning Organizations, the American Employee and Manager, and the Developmental Role of the Social Sciences

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I. INTRODUCTION

Learning organizations are viable and vital means for developing a corporate culture of high performance learners who become transformed people much better adapted to get results that affect the bottom line and the quality of life in their organizations (Kline & Saunders, 1998). Learning organizations are of tremendous importance in nations with advanced social, technological, and economic systems because they possess all the factors of production in abundance and thus operate under economies of scale. This is especially true for American organizations that play a paramount economic and business role in today's global economy. Laconically stated, learning organizations are the most advanced structures because they learn and practice continuous organizational development on an action orientation basis.

II. LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

Learning organizations are entities where people continually expand their capacities to create the

results they truly desire, environments where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, entities designed to set free collective aspirations and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (Senge, 1990). Learning organizations are characterized by total employee involvement in a process of collaboratively conducted, collectively accountable, and a planned and meaningful change is directed towards shared values or principles (Watkins & Marsick, 1992). A distinction needs to be made between learning organizations and organizational learning. Organizational learning indicates that organizations learn through employees' learning and knowledge and sharing that knowledge; organizations learn and learning takes place at an organizational level (Rebelo & Gomez, 2008). Furthermore, organizational learning is not the same as individual learning, even when the individuals who learn are members of the organization (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Organizational learning is not merely individual learning, yet organizations learn only through the experience and actions of individuals (Argyris & Schon, 1978). The importance of individual learning for organizational learning is widely recognized by management and organization behavior and also by development professors and consultants. Organizational learning cannot occur without individual learning (Seezik, Poel & Kirscher, 2010). The main difference between organizational and individual learning is the information storage process. Individuals store their learning in their memories, augmented by libraries, notes, and other aids to memory. Organizations store learning primarily in their cultures with a secondary backup in documentation (Kline & Saunders, 1998).

III. WHAT ORGANIZATIONS LEARN

The basic functional units of organizations are production and operations, finance and accounting, marketing and sales, and human resources. From these basic functional units numerous ramifications can be created based about the nature of the organization and the industry in which it belongs.

In addition, organizations have top, middle, and operational levels; therefore, the nature and purpose of learning has to do with increasing the performance of the functional units and hierarchical levels of the

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organization which then results in organizational development (Theodore, 2003) conducive to a more open and more adaptive organization through increases in capability and potential for it to continue planned change efforts on an action orientation basis (Schein, 1985). Therefore, learning is the result of training the managerial and non-managerial personnel in their functional units and in the three levels of the hierarchy in order to perform their tasks-- as specified in their respective job descriptions--more effectively and efficiently and to continue to improve their performance on an action orientations basis (Lewin, 1951). Learning that enhances the knowledge of the human factor to better understand the firm's external environment of the organization and how such organization is functioning within the micro and macro external environment on a domestic and global basis is rarely provided.

IV. THE AMERICAN EMPLOYEE AND MANAGER

Americans do not have sufficient knowledge about the social sciences because of their historic isolation from the rest of the world. King George III noticed that his subjects in the American colonies knew very little about civics and the social sciences in general because they had become Americans. Isolation from home, adaptation of a new environment, learning to cope with "native Indian peoples, exploitation of different resources, and the invention of new modes of travel and communication had made them so. Virginia was not the Netherlands or Ireland, and the Atlantic was not the English Channel" (Grosvernor, 1985, p. 533).

Today, the overall achievement of upper level high school students in the core subjects of the social sciences is dismal; "less than half of these students graduate from high school with in-depth knowledge and understanding of these core subjects—history, geography, civics, and economics" (Patrick, 1991, p. 5). Youths in the United States today "are less geographical culturally literate than are youths in many other industrialized countries" (Carano & Berson, 2007, p.65). Today's college graduates "know no more about politics than did high school graduates in 1950. Recent research indicated that levels of political sciences knowledge affect the acceptance of democratic principles, attitudes toward specific issues, and political participation" (Galston, 2001, p. 217).

V. LEARNING SOCIAL SCIENCES

By providing social sciences learning, which is intertwined with the learning emanating from the training of the functional units and the three levels of the hierarchy, the organization will acquire holistic learning that will satisfy both its internal and external environmental learning demands. For example, the enterprise will acquire basic knowledge of the world economy; global affairs like recession, inflation,

unemployment, taxation, investments and labor force; knowledge of the political systems, public policies, and domestic and international political affairs; and much more educational information which will elevate the organization's overall level of knowledge.

The primary focus of the social sciences is the study dedicated to investigating the social activities of individuals and groups. The social sciences include a wide variety of branches, such as history, anthropology, and related areas. For the purpose of this study the following branches of the social sciences will be utilized:

Cultural anthropology is the study of humankind everywhere throughout time, which produces knowledge about what makes people different from one another and what we all have in common (Haviland, Prins, Walrath, & McBride, 2011). The organization will learn why people are different around the world and how it can bridge such differences in order to interact harmoniously with them.

Economics is the study of how society manages its scarce resources (Mankiw, 2007). The organization will learn about the various economic systems and how they operate. For example, employees and managers will be able to understand how the economies of China and the European Union operate in comparison to the American economy; the causes of economic crises and prosperity around the world; and the meaning, benefits, and threats of globalization.

History is dedicated to describing and explaining past events. Herodotus, the Father of History, considered history as the discipline that described past events caused by humans, such as wars or expeditions, and that the knowledge of such events benefited humanity (Dewald & Waterfield, 2008). The organization will learn the history of nations and regions of the world and will be able to understand why social, political, and economic events are taking place, such as the revolts in the Arab World today.

Communication is the process by which people try to establish a common understanding between or among themselves (Krizan, Merrier, Logan, & Williams, 2008). This branch of the social sciences will enable the organization to communicate better with both the domestic external environment and its global counterpart. When communication knowledge is intertwined with the knowledge received from the other branches of the social sciences, the organization will communicate from the point of knowledge, not ignorance, about its operations that are impacted by national and international affairs.

Psychology is the study of the human mind. Psychology also inquires about how people use their mental abilities, or minds, to operate in the world around them (Butler & McManus, 2000). Education received from this branch of the social sciences will enable the organization to understand how people in the domestic

external environment (a competitor, for example) and the global counterpart (negotiating a business contract with a foreign firm) think, act, and react. Therefore, the organization will have the knowledge of interacting with the external environment from a position of knowledge and strength.

Political Sciences is the discipline dedicated to the examination of the study of politics within the political systems of the world (Heineman, 1996). The organization will learn how political systems under democracy, socialism, and communism operate and will be able to build bridges of understanding and interaction with them.

Geography. Ancient geography was often characterized as descriptions of faraway places, but modern geography has become much more than writing about the earth. Many scientists describe geography as the bridge between the human and the natural sciences (Tucci & Rosenberg, 2009). The organization will learn where countries and regions are located around the world, the name of the countries and continents, climatic conditions, and related information that will enable the organization to act in a geopolitical and geo-economic environment. Not knowing that June is a winter month in the Southern Hemisphere, the organization would be embarrassed when interacting with Australian or Chilean customers.

Law is the body of enforceable rules governing relationships among individuals and between individuals and their society (Miller & Jentz, 2003). Here the organization will learn about the Common Law and the Civil Law in the Western World, Sharia in the Muslim World, and International Law that governs international economic, political and business transactions.

Sociology is the science dedicated to human association, its origin, development, forms, and functions (Ellwood, 2006). From this branch of the social sciences, the organization will learn how people live, act, and interact with persons in other countries and regions. They will learn about world religions, beliefs, customs, and related topics. The organization will be able to understand critical issues in sociology such as bribing, for example, which is an accepted and socially required practice in the Middle East due to the region's culture, but it is an unethical and illegal practice in the United States.

VI. THE WAY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES LEARNING

Well planned social studies learning will assist the organization to develop long-term understanding in the core content areas of the branches of the social sciences specified above.

The author of this work, who is profoundly aware of the time and money restrictions organizations have for training programs, advises his consulting

clients to divide social sciences learning into two parts. The first part is instruction by either internal or external specialists who insert such instruction in the training programs in the functional areas and the organizational hierarchy. Once this part is completed, then the trainees are requested to acquire printed and/or electronic current events information in the assigned social sciences branches and discuss such information in the training sessions.

There is a similar way of blended learning which is not related to this article but it is interesting to mention – *service learning*. Recently, the most rapid growth has occurred in a different form of civic education called *service learning* “which is a curriculum-based community service that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities” (Galston, 2001, p.229)

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A well planned infusion of social sciences learning into the learning emanating from the training of the functional units and the three levels of the hierarchy in learning organizations, such organizations will acquire holistic learning that will satisfy both their internal and external environmental learning demands.

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