CHAPTER - I

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INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly acknowledged that an organisation’s potential for long-term survival, growth and excellence will be largely depending upon its ability to continuously create, nurture, and sustain a positive learning environment (Brown, 1996; Senge, 1990). Organisational culture plays a key role in shaping and reshaping the learning environment, and the elements of cultural and environmental climate may support or hinder continuous individual, team and organisational learning process and outcomes (Nevis et al., 1995; Tjepkema et al., 2002). It needs to be appreciated that organisations do not perform the actions that produce the learning; it is individual members of the organisation who behave in ways that lead to it, although organisations can and should create conditions which facilitate such learning (Argyris, 1992; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Individual Learning

In the 1980s, Garratt (1987) said, ‘Learning has become the key developable and tradable commodity of an organisation’. This is probably even truer today, when knowledge management is seen as an important issue for many companies, and intellectual property is equally important for individuals and for organisations (Joy-Matthews et al., 2004).

Jaques (1989) has noted that most words in the field of organisational development are ill defined. Such is the case with the word “learning”, a term whose meaning varies widely depending on the context. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that the purpose of learning is to gain
knowledge or skill in a particular field. Thus learning encompasses two meanings: (1) the acquisition of skill or *know-how*, which implies the physical ability to produce some action and (2) the acquisition of *know-why*, which implies the ability to articulate a conceptual understanding of an experience. Kim (1993: 38) defines learning as “increasing one’s capacity to take effective action.” He studied the crucial issue of ‘how individual learning was transferred to the organisation’. He developed a model that linked individual and organisational learning through mental models, the thought constructs that affected how people and organisations operated in the world. His model could guide the search for new tools to help organisations learn. His discussion was more a ‘set of assertions’ based on anecdotal evidence and preliminary research than a set of facts that had been supported by extensive longitudinal studies and rigorous research.

A number of theories make this connection between thought and action (Schein, 1993). Argyris & Schön (1978) argue that learning takes place only when new knowledge is translated into different behaviour that is replicable. For Piaget (1970), the key to learning lies in the mutual interaction of accommodation (adapting our mental concepts based on our experience in the world) and assimilation (integrating our experience into existing mental concepts). As Kolb (1984: 38) states: “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” Argyris & Schön (1978) offer the concept of single-loop learning (the correction of error within a given set of governing variables) and double-loop learning (the process of changing the governing variables themselves).
The US writer Senge (1990: 14) is critical of the view that equates learning with the taking in of information, an act that he believes is only distantly related to real learning. In his opinion, real learning is closely related to what it means to be human. In an almost metaphysical way he believes that 'Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life'.

The situation in which certain authorities equate learning with the acquisition of factual information, while others, like Senge (1990) give it a somewhat 'mystical identity' makes it impossible to offer a simple, consistent and shared definition of what learning means. Moreover, it makes little sense to search for a meaning that is acceptable to all.

Learning can, perhaps, be best understood as a change in an individual’s range and repertoire of behaviour. It is the process by which behaviour is modified, either by the addition of new and different capabilities, or by the extension and enhancement of those that an individual already possesses (Joy-Matthews et al., 2004).

The pressure to change, to improve, to be more flexible and adaptive in each case assumes the need to learn, because these objectives are not going to be realised by wishful thinking or by edict. If people do not learn, then their capabilities will not change. Without this change, it will be impossible to achieve the levels of performance increasingly required for organisation to perform effectively.
Contu et al., (2003) criticised the broad ensemble which they identified as ‘learning discourse’ and its pervasive ideological content which determined learning as a ‘good thing for all’. They considered how the signifier ‘learning’ works as a nodal point which constituted (legitimises and sustains), yet glosses over, antagonistic and contradictory organisational and social practices. With their critique, they endeavoured to go beyond a simple rebuke or rebuttal. They rather pointed out the problematic nature of the truths engendered in ‘making the social’ and constituting the promise of a ‘learning society’ whose ambit encompasses learning in general, the learning organisation and the political economy of the ‘knowledge economy’. By doing so, they exposed the political character of the learning discourse which, they argued, worked as the surface of intelligibility proposing the reality of work, self-hood, citizenship and society. They antagonised its ‘no alternative’ trope by questioning the equivalence it created between social inclusion, competitiveness, employability, empowerment and personal development. Their critique made explicit how it was possible, and why it was important, to be ‘against learning’.

Learning has a number of key features as described in ‘A declaration on learning’ produced by a number of leading authorities on learning in organisations (Honey, 1998: 28-29).

- Learning is complex and various, covering all sorts of things such as knowledge, skills, insights, beliefs, values, attitudes and habits.
- Learning is individual and can also be collectively generated in groups and organisations.
- Learning can be triggered by any experience – failures, successes and anything in between.
• Learning is both a process and an outcome.
• Learning may be incremental or it can be transformational.
• Learning can be conscious or unconscious.
• Learning can be both planned and unplanned.
• Learning outcomes may be desirable as well as undesirable.
• There can be no learning without change.
• Learning can be both the cause and the consequence of change.
• Learning has a moral dimension.

Organisations ultimately learn via their individual members. Hence, theories of individual learning are crucial for understanding organisational learning. Psychologists have studied individual learning for decades, but they are still far from fully understanding the workings of the human mind. (Sims et al., 1986; Huber, 1991). Psychologists, linguists, educators and others have heavily researched the topic of learning at the individual level. They have made discoveries about cognitive limitations (Simon, 1957) as well as the seemingly infinite capacity of the human mind to learn new things (Restak, 1988).

**Team Learning**

Team Learning is fundamental to the performance of a team. Without it, a team can never achieve its potential. Team members can attend strategic planning sessions, learn techniques of quality assurance or learn how to run a meeting, but unless the principles of team learning are fully implemented, improvements will be short-lived. Senge (1990) considers the team to be a key learning unit in the organisation.
Team learning is an adaptation of ‘action learning’ originally proposed in the UK by Revans (1980) many years ago and recently rediscovered by organisational development consultants in the USA. It focuses on providing solutions to business problems by developing an open approach to questioning. As Revans (1980) himself once said, "The mark of a leader is not the answers he gives but the questions he asks". The business world is changing at such a pace that the solutions to problems are not found in books or journals, nor in the mind of 'the expert'. They are found by team members themselves, who, through the process of team learning, identify the key questions to be addressed. They, then, seek to use their resources to find the answers, often through trial and error.

Team learning is a discipline that starts with "dialogue," the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine "thinking together". Team learning is the process by which teams gain clarity about purpose, develop good working relationships, and effectively accomplish their goals. It involves valuing individual differences, learning how to focus on a common purpose, and sharing responsibility for getting work done (Kolb, 1984).

Organisational Learning

Organisational learning is increasingly becoming popular among organisations which are interested in increasing competitive advantage, innovativeness, and effectiveness. Dodgson (1993: 377) describes organisational learning as "the way firms build, supplement, and organise knowledge and routines around their activities and within their cultures and adapt and develop organisational efficiency by improving the use of the
broad skills of their workforces.” Huber (1991: 89) states that learning occurs in an organisation “if through its processing of information, the range of its [organisation's] potential behaviour is changed.”

Easterby-Smith (1997) argued against attempts to create a single framework for understanding organisational learning. He reviewed relevant literature from six disciplinary perspectives: psychology and organisational development (OD), management science, sociology and organisational theory, strategy, production management, and cultural anthropology. He argued that each discipline provided distinct contributions and conceptions of problems. A basic distinction between organisational learning and the new idea of the learning organisation was noted, the former was ‘discipline based and analytic’, and the latter was multidisciplinary and emphasised action and the creation of an ‘ideal-type’ of organisation. Due to the diversity of purpose and perspective, he suggested that it was better to consider ‘organisational learning’ as a ‘multidisciplinary field’ containing ‘complementary contributions and research agendas.’

Akgiin et al., (2003) examined organisational learning from the perspective of social cognition, and it was argued that social cognition explained the organisational learning process by integrating social and cognitive constructs of learning, and by merging the fragmented studies that existed on the processes of learning. The study had also indicated that organisational learning was an outcome of reciprocal interactions of social and cognitive processes embedded in organisational structures, cultures, and interactions. Organisational learning was, thus, treated as consisting of learning processes of supraindividual collectives (groups and organisations),
rather than as an entity (like individual learning itself). The socio-cognitive view of learning therefore generated more desirable outcomes for understanding organisational learning, and promised fruitful research agendas in the organisational learning literature.

Argyris & Schön (1974) argued that people have mental maps with regard to how to act in situations. Fewer people are aware of the maps or theories they do use. There is split between theory and action. However, Argyris & Schön suggest that two theories of action are involved – theories that are implicit in what we do as practitioners and managers (theories-in-use), and those on which we call to speak of our actions to others (espoused theory). To fully appreciate theory-in-use, Argyris & Schön (1974) initially looked to three elements: governing variables, action strategies, consequences.

Where the consequences of the strategy used are what the person wanted, then the theory-in-use is confirmed. This is because there is a match between intention and outcome. There may be a mismatch between intention and outcome. In other words, the consequences may be unintended. They may also not match, or work against, the person’s governing values. Argyris & Schön suggest two responses to this mismatch, and these are can be seen in the notion of single and double-loop learning (Smith, 2001).

For Argyris & Schön (1978: 2) learning involves the detection and correction of error. Where something goes wrong, it is suggested, an initial port of call for many people is to look for another strategy that will address and work within the governing variables. In other words, given or chosen
goals, values, plans and rules are operationalised rather than questioned. According to Argyris & Schön (1974), this is *single-loop learning*. An alternative response is to question to governing variables themselves, to subject them to critical scrutiny. This they describe as *double-loop learning*.

**Individual, Team and Organisational Learning: Linkages**

An organisation with positive learning culture and healthy learning environment promotes *Individual Learning* (IL). It is not enough if the IL takes place. Such learning should be applied in the workplace, i.e. there should be proper scope for practicing what is learnt. Most of the work in the modern organisations is done not individually, but in teams. *Team Learning* (TL) is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations (Larsen *et al.*, 1996). Here again, whatever the team learns, it should be transferred to the workplace. Both IL and TL will lead to *Organisational Learning* (OL).

When OL is applied in the organisation, it will lead to organisational effectiveness. Encouraged by the organisational effectiveness, the organisation witnesses the reinforcement of the positive learning culture and learning environment and the chain continues (see figure 1.1)
Figure - 1.1: Individual, Team and Organisational Learning: Linkages

Lifelong Learning

Currently, lifelong learning is an important topic on the European agenda. The idea of lifelong education was first fully articulated in this century by Yeaxlee (1929). He provided an intellectual basis for a comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life. The idea of learning throughout the whole lifespan is not new. The notion has already been in the spotlight during the 1970s, when concepts such as ‘lifelong learning’, ‘recurrent education’ and ‘education permanente’, were coined. During the 1980s, the discussion was continued on a smaller scale. Recently, the theme of lifelong learning has gained renewed attention (Brandsma, 1997). The most visible manifestation of this attention is the fact that the year 1996 was proclaimed as the official ‘European Year of Lifelong Learning’. This has rekindled previous discussions and instigated a new flood of publications, conferences and public debates. In February 1998 the British Government published a Green Paper on lifelong learning. The concept is that individuals will ‘continually seek to acquire new skills and update old ones with the active help of the State and employers’ (MacLachan, 1998: 43). Thought is being given to encouraging ‘everyone to invest more in human capital and to recognise that we are moving towards a knowledge-based economy’: it is not appropriate to train people for jobs that no longer exist (David Blunkett, quoted in MacLachan, 1998).

With the decline of lifetime employment and the rapid speed of change, it is necessary for individual workers to learn continuously throughout their working lives in order to keep up with changes and to remain attractive for employers. So, lifelong learning has become a challenge at the individual level too. (Tjepkema et al, 2002).
Lifelong learning is a process with many objectives, which the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) describes as follows: It is geared to serve several objectives: to foster personal development, including the use of time outside work (including in retirement); to strengthen democratic values; to cultivate community life; to maintain social cohesion; and to promote innovation, productivity and economic growth.

The significance of lifelong learning gives rise to the need to develop a so-called 'learning society', which provides an infrastructure that supports learning throughout the whole lifespan. A learning society refers to mobilisation of not only the public education and training systems, but also of all sectors in society, such as public authorities and individuals in creating opportunities for learning (Gass, 1996). Companies also play an important role in creating a learning society, as work grows to become an important source of learning (Pawlowsky & Baumer, 1996). To an increasing degree, organisations deliberately set out to create learning opportunities for employees, believing that they need 'learning individuals' in order to realise 'organisational learning'.

Field (2000: 35) has argued that there has been a fundamental shift in the behaviour of 'ordinary citizens', 'who increasingly regard the day-to-day practice of adult learning as routine, perhaps so routine that they give it little explicit attention'. Economic, social and cultural changes mean that many now live in 'knowledge' or 'informational societies' that have strong individualising tendencies and a requirement for permanent learning.
Changes in work organisation and management married to a focus on markets, consumption and lifestyle, have certainly drawn policy makers to the rhetoric of lifelong learning. Government reports in Britain, such as *The Learning Age* (DFEE 1998), demonstrate how far this movement has occurred. Initiatives like the University for Industry (Ufi) have signalled a shift away from traditional classrooms into 'learning centres' (often situated in supermarkets and community projects) and more intensive use of distance and web-based learning (Smith, 2001).

Lifelong learning encompasses learning for personal, civic and social purposes as well as for employment-related purposes. It takes place in a variety of environments in and outside the formal education and training systems. Lifelong learning implies raising investment in people and knowledge; promoting the acquisition of basic skills, including digital literacy; and broadening opportunities for innovative, more flexible forms of learning. The aim is to provide people of all ages with equal and open access to high-quality learning opportunities, and to a variety of learning experiences (European Council, Lisbon, March 2000).

Tight (1996:36), brings out the three key features of lifelong learning:

First, lifelong education is seen as building upon and affecting all existing educational providers, including both schools and institutions of higher education... Second, it extends beyond the formal educational providers to encompass all agencies, groups and individuals involved in any kind of learning activity... Third, it rests on the belief that individuals are, or can become, self-directing, and that they will see the value in engaging in lifelong education. (Tight 1996: 36)
TABLE – 1.1: TYPES OF LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Types of Learning</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Individual Learning</td>
<td>“Relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience”. (Weiss, 1990: 172-73)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Team Learning</td>
<td>… the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire. It builds on the discipline of developing shared vision. It also builds on personal mastery, for talented teams are made up of talented individuals. (Senge, 1990: 236).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Organisational Learning</td>
<td>Organisational learning is a process in which members of an organisation detect error or anomaly and correct it by restructuring organisational theory of action, embedding the results of their inquiry in organisational maps and images. (Argyris &amp; Schön, 1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Formal Learning</td>
<td>Learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective. (E C, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Informal Learning</td>
<td>A life-long process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment, from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media. (Conner, 2004)</td>
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Research tells us that we undertake learning activities “not merely as ends in themselves, but as means for achieving larger objectives and goals that have meaning in the community”.

Happens when in everyday activities an individual learns something that he or she had not intended or expected.

Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured.

"Education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience: ..... the process and goal of education are one and the same thing".

Whenever an error is detected and corrected without questioning or altering the underlying values of the system (be it individual, group, intergroup, organisational or inter-organisational), the learning is single-loop. Single-loop learning occurs when mismatches are created, or when mismatches are corrected by changing actions.

Double-loop learning occurs when mismatches are corrected by first examining and altering the governing variables and then the actions. Learning how to learn. Learning is directed at the learning process itself and seeks to improve both single- and double-loop learning.

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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Intentional/Purposeful Learning</td>
<td>Happens when in everyday activities an individual learns something that he or she had not intended or expected. (Conner, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Accidental Learning</td>
<td>Learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured. (EC, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Non-formal learning</td>
<td>“Education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience: ..... the process and goal of education are one and the same thing”. (Dewey, 1897: 79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Experiential learning</td>
<td>Whenever an error is detected and corrected without questioning or altering the underlying values of the system (be it individual, group, intergroup, organisational or inter-organisational), the learning is single-loop. Single-loop learning occurs when mismatches are created, or when mismatches are corrected by changing actions. (Argyris &amp; Schön, 1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Single-loop Learning</td>
<td>Double-loop learning occurs when mismatches are corrected by first examining and altering the governing variables and then the actions. Learning how to learn. Learning is directed at the learning process itself and seeks to improve both single- and double-loop learning. (Argyris &amp; Schön, 1978).</td>
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Table 1.1 (Contd.)

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<th>Types of Learning</th>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Workplace learning</td>
<td>‘a set of processes which occur within specific organisational contexts and focus on acquiring and assimilating an integrated cluster of knowledge, skills, values and feelings that results in individuals and teams refocusing and fundamentally changing their behaviour. (Garavan et al., 2002: 61).</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Self-regulated learning</td>
<td>In the broadest meaning (...) as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulation learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1975: 18)</td>
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</table>
| 15.    | Lifelong learning           | • A process of personal development from employed and unemployed people that takes place continuously;  
                                 • A process that can contain both informal and formal activities;  
                                 • A process that makes demands upon structures in which lifelong learning takes place/can take place in creating the conditions that facilitate learning and learning to learn. (Brandsma, 1997: 10) |
| 16.    | E-Learning                  | The use of computer network technology, primarily over an intranet or through the internet, to deliver information and instruction to individuals. (Welsh et al., 2003) |
| 17.    | Action learning             | Is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problems, to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field. (Revans, 1982: 626 – 7) |

Source: Various sources as mentioned under each description.
Methods of Learning

The key to understanding the difference between learning that occurs naturally and spontaneously, and that which has a particular rationale and intent, is whether the process is managed, be this by specialists, line managers or individuals (Joy-Matthews et al., 2004).

People can learn in different ways:

- **They can be taught**: A narrow range of stimuli under the control of the teacher.
- **They can be instructed**: This is used for physical rather than cognitive skills, and often involves demonstration with supporting explanations.
- **They can have an experience**: This is often seen as necessary to provide fresh stimulation for continuing learning. The experience can be planned or random.
- **People learn from the well-known process of trial and error, and trial and success**: Through experimentation with various responses, the person learns the one(s) that seem to be most appropriate to the situation.
- **Learning can be based on observation and perception**: It involves the process of making sense of the world we live in, through ‘seeing’ it and giving meanings to what is ‘seen’.
- **Learning can be an individual activity** or can involve dialogue and participation with others.
Learning can follow thinking and reflecting: This involves using cognitive powers, such as reasoning and analysing, to make sense of things that we do or are required to do.

As learning can be neither observed nor measured, it is difficult to relate specific example of learning to particular methods. In other words, one cannot isolate the contribution one method of learning makes to a discrete 'element of behaviour'. It is reasonable to assume that learning job-related capabilities involve several different methods, in combination or sequence, that have a complementary and cumulative effect. Eitington (2001) lists over 200 different training and learning methods, so the choice is virtually endless!

Other factors that influence the choice and mix of learning methods include:

1. The experience and skills of the developer/trainer/instructor.
2. Learner preferences.
3. Facilities and resources, including time, location of learning, existing capabilities and familiarity with learning process, technology.
4. The nature of what is to be learned, whether this is simple or complex, abstract or applied, and so on.

Different methods and approaches have their distinctive characteristics and limitations, in addition to adherents and supporters. In deciding which to use, the question to consider is not which is the 'best' in any absolute sense, but which one(s) are appropriate and relevant to any given situation (Eitington, 2001).
Learning Cycles

The idea that learning is a circular process with a distinctive number of stages and activities is attributed to Kolb (1984). His work has been particularly influential with contemporary trainers and academics, who either implicitly or explicitly incorporate his ideas in their own activities and writings (Honey, 1990). The concept of a ‘learning cycle’ is based on the belief that there are four critical behaviours that learners themselves need to engage in, behaviours that are not the intended outcome of any particular learning event or activity. In other words, for learning to take place – or, more precisely, for the learning process to be more effective – certain activities must be built into the learning process. These represent examples of what Argyris & Schön (1978) call ‘deutero-learning’, or ‘learning how to learn’.

The following figure represents a simplified version of the Kolb learning cycle.

**Figure 1.2: Kolb learning cycle**

![Kolb learning cycle diagram](image)

- **Concrete experience**
- **Testing implications of concepts in new situations** (Active Experimentation)
- **Formation of abstract concepts and generalisation** (Abstract Conceptualisation)
- **Observations and reflections** (Reflective Observations)

Each stage requires the learner to engage actively in a particular type of behaviour that relates to the cycle’s four stages. Knowing them and their significance is not in itself sufficient; the learner must carry out the activities specified.

It is the learner (not the developer/trainer) who needs to engage in these four activities, which can be summarised as follows:

1. **Concrete experience** – this can be planned or accidental.
2. **Reflective observations** – this involves actively thinking about the experience and its significance.
3. **Abstract conceptualisation** (theorising) – generalising from experience in order to develop various concepts and ideas which can be applied when similar situations are encountered.
4. **Active experimentation** – testing the concepts or ideas in new situations. This gives rise to a new concrete experience and the cycle begins again.

The role of the developer/trainer should be to help the learner learn how to carry out these activities so that they become part of the individual’s internalised, learned behaviours, available for use in any future learning situation. The learning cycle usually takes as its starting point the existence of some activity or experience that is relevant to a person’s work or non-work life and that provides the material and opportunity to reflect, conceptualise, plan and test out. Accordingly, it sees learning as being founded on some initial experience or activity, which can then be subject to certain cognitive processes to help make sense of the experience. The cycle
requires people to consider what they intend to do the same, differently or better, or perhaps not do the next time they are required to undertake certain tasks. Not all learners use all four stages, which is why some people never seem to learn from their experiences!

Learning Organisation

The concept of learning organisation emerged around 1990, influenced by writers such as Pedler et al., (1991) in the UK and Senge (1990) in the USA (Walton 1999). The core idea behind ‘learning organisation’ is that organisations of all kinds will not survive, let alone thrive, if they do not acquire an ability to adapt continuously to an increasingly unpredictable future (Pearn et al., 1995). Indeed, in a fast-paced, competitive and unpredictable world, organisations need not only to be highly adaptable and continue to improve but also – may be even more – to strive to take the lead and constantly stay ahead if they want to prosper in such ‘permanent white water’, a metaphor first used by Vaill (1989) to express the idea of continuous environmental turbulence. Therefore, one of the major recommendations concerns ‘organisational learning’ and ‘learning organisation’. Through learning, organisations may be better equipped to meet the challenges caused by such ‘permanent white water’. It is those organisations which understand how to adapt themselves to change, how to strive to take the lead and who willingly learn and implement new ideas that will triumph.

Bold statements such as “the rate at which individuals and organisations learn may become the only sustainable competitive advantage, especially in knowledge-intensive industries” (Stata, 1989, p.64) and “a
consensus is emerging that the hallmark of tomorrow’s most effective organisations will be their capacity to learn” (Adler & Cole, 1993, p.85) are difficult to disagree with. It was predicted that “learning capability” and “learning organisation” would become two key concepts of management thinking in the 1990s (Ulrich et al., 1993).

The notion of the learning organisation is becoming “a very big conceptual catchall to help us make sense of a set of values and ideas we have been wrestling with, everything from customer service to corporate responsiveness and speed” (Kiechel, 1990: 133). Inspired by the success of Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), many management consultants and researchers have jumped on the bandwagon. A number of books on how to develop a learning organisation have come out during the past few years. These books adopt a prescriptive stance and teach managers the way that a company should learn (Tsang, 1997: 73-74).

The high current rate of change in the economic and technological environment of many organisations has given rise to the development of a new managerial concept: that of the learning organisation. This concept provides general ideas on how to design and manage organisations in order to survive in a highly changing environment (Tjepkema, et al. 2002).

Senge (1990), who first popularised the term, described a learning organisation as one ‘where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together’.
There have been many other definitions of a learning organisation, all of which are aspirational in the vein of Senge. Pedler et al., (1991) state that a learning organisation is one ‘which facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself’. Wick & Leon (1995) refer to a learning organisation as one that ‘continually improves by rapidly creating and refining the capabilities required for future success’.

Organisational Learning Vs. Learning Organisations

When one looks at the literature on organisational learning and learning organisation, a wide variety of definitions exist. Unfortunately, in theory as well as in practice, some people, particularly among non-native English speakers, are rather careless in using the concepts of ‘organisational learning’ and ‘learning organisation’ (Sun, 2003).

Schein (1997), Nicolini & Menzar (1995) have pointed out that there is a particular fuzziness around the use of these terms. Some people have considered these terms to be interchangeable. Some researchers have grouped all the definitions of these concepts under one title: ‘organisational learning’.

Organisational learning is a concept used to describe certain types of activity that take place in an organisation while learning organisation refers to a particular type of organisation in and of itself. Nevertheless, there is a simple relationship between the two — a learning organisation is one which is good at organisational learning (Tsang, 1997). Tsang examined the dichotomy between two main streams of theorising in the field. The first stream, ‘prescriptive writings’ on the learning organisation is concerned with the question ‘How should an organisation learn?’ Targeting practitioners,
these studies were usually based on Tsang’s consulting experience and seldom followed rigorous research methodologies. ‘Descriptive researches’ on organisational learning fell in the second stream which tackled the question, ‘How does an organisation learn?’ These were academic studies striving for scientific rigour. Nevertheless, they often failed to generate useful implications for practitioners.

Sun (2003) tried to distinguish between the important concepts such as ‘organisational learning’, and the concept of ‘learning organisation’; between ‘learning organisation’ and ‘a learning organisation’ from a linguistic point of view. His findings included: ‘organisational learning’ was generally defined as ‘a process’ by most of the authors. It was a ‘collective learning and improving process’ aiming to build up a learning organisation. The term ‘learning organisation’ was a concept and a subject for study and research. Meanwhile, it functioned as a ‘guiding vision’ that pictures an organisation as a living organism with an open, powerful learning environment which inspires, facilitates and empowers the learning of its members so as to enhance its capacity for change, adaptability, improvement and competition. While the term ‘a learning organisation’ is a ‘living’ representative of the image of ‘learning organisation, it possesses, not necessarily of all but, some major characteristics of ‘learning organisation’, or even what might be possible in an organisation.

From a linguistic point of view, the word ‘learning’ can function as a noun, an adjective, a present participle or a gerund, depending on different contexts and its different positions. In the term ‘organisational learning’, the main word is ‘learning’. ‘Learning’ functions as a noun in this term, while
'organisational' is an adjective (or pre-modifier) to modify 'learning'. Since learning has been defined as a process, the term 'organisational learning' refers to the learning process of an organisation and by the organisation in a collective (organisational) way (Sun, 2003).

On the contrary, in the term 'learning organisation', the head word is 'organisation', Organisation is a noun and 'learning 'is used to modify' organisation'. In addition, 'learning' has two grammatical functions in this term. First, it can be regarded as a present participle. When learning is regarded as a present participle, it functions as an adjective to modify 'organisation' and here the basic and essential meaning of the term 'learning organisation' becomes 'an organisation which is learning or in the process of learning'.

The second grammatical function of 'learning' in this term can be regarded as a gerund (verbal noun). It serves in a sentence like a noun. In this sense, a 'learning organisation' is an organisation, which is for learning.

Sun, (2003) stated in his findings that 'organisational learning' is generally defined as 'a process' by most of the authors. It is a collective learning and improving process aiming to build up a learning organisation. The term 'learning organisation' is a concept and a subject for study and research. Meanwhile, it functions as a guiding vision that pictures an organisation as a living organism with an open, powerful learning environment which inspires, facilitates and empowers the learning of its members so as to enhance its capacity for change, adaptability, improvement and competition (Sun, 2003).
Although no blueprint is available by which to design a learning organisation, there are five key disciplines, as identified by Senge (DeVito & James, 1996).

- An organisation must be committed to lifelong learning in order to develop the skills and expertise necessary to the organisation. This **personal mastery** brings together both individual learning and organisational learning.

- Individuals have deeply ingrained images of how they understand the world. **Mental models** direct responses to events and situations. Until individuals recognise these models, they are inhibited from making progress in learning.

- When individuals’ vision and goals are tied to the vision and goals of the organisation, the **shared vision** creates a committed organisation. In organisations today, teams, rather than individuals, are the learning units.

- When teams are free of inhibitions, genuine dialogue can begin. This **team learning** allows members to create the learning with which to accomplish the desired results.

- The final discipline, **systems thinking**, brings together the previous four disciplines to create a whole. Systems thinking bring the entire perspective into view. Systems thinking is the cornerstone principle of the learning organisation.
Watkins & Marsick (1993, 1996) indicate that the design of a learning organisation depends on the following seven imperatives:

1. **Create continuous learning opportunities**: Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job; opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth.

2. **Promote inquiry and dialogue**: People gain productive reasoning skills to express their views, and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others; the culture is changed to support questioning, feedback and experimentation.

3. **Encourage collaboration and team learning**: Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking; groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded.

4. **Establish systems to capture and share learning**: Both high-and low-technology systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided; and systems are maintained.

5. **Empower people towards a collective vision**: People are involved in setting, owning and implementing a joint vision; responsibility is distributed close to decision making so that people are motivated to learn what they are held accountable for.

6. **Connect the organisation to its environment**: People are helped to see the impact of their work on the entire enterprise; people scan the environment and use information to adjust work practices; organisation is linked to community.

7. **Leaders model and support learning**: Leaders model, champion and support learning; leadership uses learning strategically for business results.
Characteristics of the Learning Organisations

Along with the five key disciplines identified by Senge (1990), current learning organisations have many different characteristics (Longworth & Davies, 1996). These characteristics include the following:

- **Opportunities for continuous learning**: This includes a plan for approaches to learning. These approaches can include work assignments, formal training, mentoring, and individual self-development. Managers have the responsibility of recognising what learners need to know and assessing their desire to learn.

- **Interaction between individuals and change**: Although the flow of information is available to all members of an organisation, individuals are encouraged to question and challenge information, as well as share personal viewpoints. The climate required to allow such dialogue is one in which mistakes and failures are rewarded, and individuals must be encouraged to use their mistakes as developmental opportunities. This climate offers opportunities for candid communication.

- **Responsiveness to organisation members**: Information must be readily available and accessible to members of the organisation while transferred knowledge must be expedited from one part of the organisation to another.

- **Investment in training and development for all employees**: Employees and customers consider learning to be an investment in the future credibility of the organisation, the future integrity of the organisation, and future satisfaction in the stability of the organisation. To ensure these things, learning opportunities should
be available to everyone, regardless of position or level within an organisation.

- **Shared vision of the future with all employees:** The culture allows employees the right to say how the vision will develop.

- **Integration of work and learning:** Both work and learning share the same objectives, and all employees are encouraged to achieve those objectives. Learning organisations invite employees to enhance their knowledge in whatever their preferred learning styles. Some employees enjoy traditional classroom learning while others enjoy the autonomy of individual learning. Learning organisations enable people to choose their learning styles and the speed at which they learn. Learning organisations use current, new technologies of delivery. These delivery techniques are made available to individuals throughout the organisation.

- **Encouragement to continuously learn:** The learning organisation encourages employees to think and contribute, whether through classrooms, book groups, or candid conversations.

**Organisational Learning Context**

Cultural discussions begin with a simple premise: organisations don’t act, people do. Therefore, understanding organisational culture requires discerning the shared mind-set – or “automatic thoughts” – that individuals within the organisation share (Brockbank & Ulrich, 1988; Ulrich & Lake, 1990). Automatic thoughts represent the unconscious ways individuals in organisations act and think. Simply put, they are a reflection of “the way things are done”. Automatic thoughts may be embedded in four
organisational processes: work flow, communication/information flow, authority/decision-making flow, and human resources flow.

(a) Work Flow

Work flow refers to how work is distributed and performed within the organisation. Automatic thoughts about work flow can be understood by considering the following questions:

1. Does the organisation encourage work to be done by individuals or by teams? Some organisations instill automatic thoughts about individuals working independently; others attempt to build teams within divisions, across units, and across boundaries.

2. To what extent does the organisation have the capacity to change? Some organisations respond quickly to change; some try to buffer themselves from it. Employees within the organisation tend to evolve a set of automatic thoughts about how quickly changes are made. Changes may be in organisation structures, reporting relationships, product developments, technologies, or working patterns. The issue is the capacity of an organisation to adapt to change.

3. How does the organisation deal with waste and productivity? Some organisations create automatic thoughts that accept waste and current standards of productivity as givens; others become obsessed with eliminating waste and continuously improving productivity.

4. How does the organisation deal with work priorities? Some organisations try to be all things to all people for fear of excluding an individual or division. Other organisations’ work processes encourage public prioritisation of projects and activities.
(b) Communication/Information Flow

Communication/information flow refers to how information is created and shared within the organisation. It can be understood by asking the following questions:

1. **How much information is shared in the organisation?** Some organisations are very open about their plans, directions, and processes. Other organisations keep plans numbered so no one without authorisation will see them.

2. **What are the information-sharing patterns within the organisation?** Some organisations share information one-way - from top to bottom; others develop accepted ways of sharing information that move in all directions: side to side, top to bottom, and bottom to top. The information-sharing pattern of an organisation may reflect the automatic thoughts about how work gets done.

3. **What is the means of communication flow?** Some organisations share information primarily face to face; others use electronic mail, memos, or other secondary means. The means of information sharing often communicates how the organisation gets work done.

(c) Authority/Decision-making Flow

Authority/decision-making flow deals with how decisions are made and where authority resides in the organisation. It can be discerned with the following questions:

1. **Where are critical decisions made in the organisation - at the top or bottom levels?** The location of decisions about resource allocation, strategic direction, hiring, budgets, firing, and other critical decisions
are indicators of an organisation’s shared means for doing work. Some organisations have automatic thoughts that most, if not all, decisions are entrusted to top managers and middle managers, whereas employees are primarily responsible for making recommendations and carrying out plans. Other organisations have more distributed authority and decisions making, with employees carrying more responsibility and ownership for decisions. The extent of employee participation and involvement in formulating decisions may become an automatic thought process among organisational employees.

2. What is the speed of decision making? Some organisations have automatic thoughts and accepted norms that allow decisions, once identified, to be made quickly; others take months of debate, discussion, and dialogue before arriving at a decision. Organisations are often characterised as bureaucratic or open, based on this dimension.

3. How does the organisation balance short-and long-term implications of decisions? Some organisations focus exclusively on short-term decisions and consequences; others primarily on the long-term. Most organisations, however, find some balance between the two.

4. How does the organisation ensure accountability for decision making? Over time, an organisation develops expectations for how accountable individuals are for decisions made. Some organisations absolve individuals of accountability; others emphasise it. Employees are likely to develop a set of automatic thoughts about the extent of accountability.
(d) Human Resources Flow

Human resources flow deals with how people are treated within the organisation as suggested by the following questions:

1. **How does the organisation deal with managerial or employee failure?** Does it allow for employees to take risks and fail or does it punish failure and limit risk taking? Ulrich & LaFasto (1998) argued convincingly that how an organisation deals with managers who fail is a critical indicator of the “culture” of the organisation. They contended that an organisation can be too lenient and not have any consequences for failure; or be too strict and, in effect, “kill the messenger.” They argued that either extreme is a strong indicator of the company’s overall willingness to change and adapt to new ideas. A parallel issue to failure is success. How does an organisation manage an employee’s success? Does the organisation reward the individual or the team? Does the organisation publicise and laud success or quietly accept it as part of business practice?

2. **What is the source of the organisation’s employee competence?** Some organisations generate competence primarily by buying talent from other firms; others generate competence through training and development of their employees. The means of generating competence is often an indicator of an organisation’s people flow.

3. **How effectively does the organisation encourage and manage diversity?** One critical people flow issue relates to the ways in which the organisation encourages diversity. Diversity may occur in obvious areas such as race or gender, but it also may occur in issues such as cultural, global, and philosophical diversity. Some organisations try to
identify diversity, then quickly eliminate it; others encourage diversity.

4. **How does the organisation treat individuals?** Some organisations tend to treat individuals as replaceable parts, which can and should be bought or sold as commodities. Other organisations treat individuals as long-term critical investments, which should be nurtured and maintained.

5. **What is the commitment of the employee to the organisation and the organisation to the employee?** Employees have choices about what firm they join and stay with. Employee commitment to a firm may be based on some combination of economics ("this organisation pays more"), relationships ("this organisation is an enjoyable place to work, and I like my colleagues"), or vision ("this organisation is an exciting place to be"). The basis of employee commitment indicates an underlying sense of the processes used for getting work done within the organisation.

**Shared Mindset and Organisational Culture**

Shared mind-set about each of these four processes (and others) comes from information and behaviour. Information provides employees data on what automatic thoughts are expected. The more information employees have, the more likely they are to have a shared mind-set. Information may come from a variety of sources ranging from ‘formal HR systems to informal discussions’ among employees. The more credible and consistent the information, the more likely the mind-set is to be shared. Behaviour provides employees with signals as to what actions are expected.
Behaviour develops as employees act consistently within the shared mind-set. Action can occur through formal HR practices or informal meetings.

Shared mind-set may occur either inside the organisation, among employees, or outside the organisation, between employees and customers or suppliers. A fully shared mind-set exists when employees inside and customers or suppliers outside the organisation have similar automatic thoughts about the above organisational processes. Shared mind-set may also exist at different levels of an organisation. It may exist for an overall organisation or for an entity within the organisation (e.g., a division, business, function, etc.)

Although difficult, a shared mind-set may be changed through the use of information and behaviour. The outcome of a shared mind-set is to 'change how people think and act' within an organisation. To change a shared mind-set, executives must send new information signals and/or change employee behaviour.

Learning Culture

Elements of an organisation's culture may facilitate or inhibit the process of continuous learning and development at all levels of learning - individual, team, and organisation. Culture is a learned way of perceiving, thinking, and feeling about problems that is transmitted to members of the organisation both purposefully and unintentionally (Dixon, 1990). The basic assumptions underpinning a culture may act as a filter for perceiving and making sense of the information in and around an organisation.

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Culture may create several barriers for individual, team and organisational learning such as the inability to discard established mental models (Hedberg, 1981:3), defensive routines that individuals develop to protect themselves from threatening situations (Argyris, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993; Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1996), tendency to 'externalise blame and generate a sense of hopelessness and cynicism' (Argyris, 1990:45). From this it follows that the capacity of an organisation to gain insight from its own experience, the experience of others, and to modify the way it functions according to such insight is strengthened in a positive learning culture and weakened in a negative learning culture.

Dumaine (1994:148) acknowledged the value of a positive learning culture while defining a learning organisation as 'an organisation where people put aside their old ways of thinking, learn to be open with each other, understand how their organisation really works, form a plan or vision that everyone can agree upon, and then work together to achieve that vision.

'A positive learning culture is characterised by 'its clear and consistent openness to experience, encouragement of responsible risk-taking, willingness to acknowledge failures and learn from them' (McGill & Slocum, 1993:76), and a climate that fosters inquiry and trust (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Beer & Spector, 1993; DiBella et al., 1996).

In essence, the core values and beliefs shaping an organisation's culture provide ideological underpinnings and a holistic context. The fundamental character or spirit of a learning culture can be encapsulated in a set of eight core values (OCTAPACE) as suggested by Pareek (1997):
openness, confrontation, trust, authenticity, proaction, autonomy, collaboration, and experimentation. Besides being an acronym for these values, OCTAPACE is a meaningful term, indicating eight (octa) steps (pace) to create develop and sustain positive learning culture. Each of these eight core values is briefly explained below.

**Openness:** This refers to the spontaneous expression of feelings and thoughts without a pre-set closed-mind and the sharing of these without defensiveness across horizontal and vertical organisational boundaries. Individuals, teams and organisations demonstrate a genuine willingness to examine and learn from both successes and failures or anything in between with an open mind and a positive mental attitude.

**Confrontation:** This element of learning culture focuses on facing rather than shying away from problems and working jointly with others to find a pragmatic solution to the problem. Organisational members tend to be highly sensitive to problems, free from any fear of criticism or committing mistakes or failure. With its positive connotation, confrontation promotes functional or constructive conflict and 'improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation, encourages interest and curiosity among group members, provides the medium through which problems can be aired and tensions released, and fosters an environment of self-evaluation and change.' (Robbins, 1998: 445)

**Trust:** In a trusting environment, people willingly share ideas and information across horizontal and vertical boundaries within the organisation without any fear of someone misusing them. It refers to the degree of
emotional or psychological safety that employees experience in their working relationships and a strong faith in others with regard to honouring mutual commitments and obligations (Edmondson, 1999). Psychological safety is essential to counterbalance the feelings of threat and anxiety that may be generated by uncertainty and doubt (Schein, 1969).

**Authenticity:** This refers to the congruence between what one feels, says and does reflecting transparency and accountability of the organisational members' actions, thoughts, and intentions, and of the reasoning behind their opinions and actions as explicitly, clearly, and honestly as possible (Popper & Lipshitz, 1997; Rayner, 1993). On the other hand, accountability is the process of holding oneself answerable for one's actions and their consequences, but it also implies taking corrective measures and implementing the lessons learned (Beer & Spector, 1993; March & Olsen, 1975; Shaw & Perkins, 1992). Together with a sense of transparency and accountability, employees will be authentic enough in owning one's ideas and mistakes, and in unreserved sharing of feelings without resorting to the game of 'hide and seek'.

**Proaction:** This refers to the process of taking preventive action, and calculating the pay-offs of an alternative course before taking action. People keep their eyes and ears open to anticipate problems before they occur based on the principle of 'prevention is better than cure'.

**Autonomy:** Autonomy or freedom to act is the degree to which individuals are given latitude in defining and executing their own work.
**Collaboration:** In an atmosphere characterised by a spirit of collaboration, people sublimate their personal/self-interest and fragmented departmental interest to work together to achieve the organisations’ shared vision (Senge, 1990). Work activities will be organised around teams rather than individuals, and individuals and groups will be working together to solve problems by nurturing team spirit.

**Experimentation:** In an atmosphere fostering experimentation, people will be using and encouraging innovative approaches by taking a fresh look at things rather than adopting traditional ways of dealing with problems. All employees will be willing to question why things are being done the way they are. Individuals and teams demonstrate a willingness to take risks, high tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to fail.

The presence and cultural support of these eight core values and beliefs provide a strong organisational foundation to promote effective learning environment.

**Learning Environment**

The work environment- the physical, social, psychological conditions that individuals and teams experience at work- can either facilitate or retard continuous individual and team learning. A positive or strong learning environment fosters learning, while negative or weak learning environment inhibits learning and development. Tannenbaum (1997) suggested a set of eight elements determining the nature of a positive learning environment: awareness of 'big picture', availability of opportunities to learn, tolerating mistakes as part of learning, accountability or high
performance expectations, openness to new ideas and change, policies and practices supporting training, supervisors' and co-workers' support to transfer learning, and identification and minimisation of situational constraints hampering the application of learning. Each element of the learning environment is briefly explained below.

- **Individuals are aware of the “big picture”** (Senge, 1990). They have a shared understanding of what the organisation is trying to accomplish and how their unit and their job relates to others in the organisation. “Systemic thinking” is encouraged (McGill et al., 1992). An awareness of the big picture can help individuals align their personal goals and development with the organisation’s goals, enabling them to choose appropriate learning experiences for both personal and organisational success. It also improves the likelihood that the ideas and suggestions they generate will be organisationally relevant and hence, rewarded.

- **Individuals are assigned tasks where they can apply what they have learned and where they are stretched and challenged** (Dubin, 1990). Unfortunately, many individuals are assigned tasks that do not allow them to utilise newly acquired skills (Ford et al., 1992). Lack of opportunity to apply new skills not only reduces subsequent motivation to learn, it also leads to skill decay as trained skills can atrophy through disuse (Pentland, 1989).

- **Mistakes are tolerated during learning and early application, when individuals are trying new ideas and skills** (Gundry et al., 1994; Sitkin, 1991). In contrast, in some organisations tasks are assigned strictly to avoid the likelihood of mistakes and never to promote learning. This
organisational aversion to risk can send the message that mistakes are unacceptable and that learning on the job and trying new ideas can be a career-threatening alternative. Fear can inhibit learning, initiative, and innovation (Suarez, 1994). If handled properly, however, mistakes can provide valuable learning experience (Ivancic & Hesketh, 1995).

- **Individuals are accountable for learning, and performance expectations are high enough to necessitate continued personal growth** (Rosow & Zager, 1988). It is widely recognised that continuous improvement in performance can be achieved only through continuous learning and development at all levels in the organisation. Organisations expect and monitor high levels of employee performance at all times, and employees are accountable for continuous learning and development throughout their career (Rosow & Zager, 1988). Accountability and high performance expectations send the message that learning is an essential part of being successful. Accountability also implies that someone takes notice when individuals apply new skills and ideas to solve problems, service customers, etc.

- **Situational constraints to learning and performance are identified and minimised.** Constraints such as unclear task assignments, lack of tools and supplies, insufficient personnel, poorly skilled co-workers, and unrealistic time pressures can directly interfere with the ability to apply newly acquired skills (Schoorman & Schneider, 1988; Peters & O’Connor, 1980). They can disrupt the continuous learning cycle because trainees who perceive many situational constraints in their jobs enter training with lower motivation to learn and reduced self-efficacy.
(Mathieu, et al., 1992, 1993). There is little incentive to learn new skills if one believes those skills cannot be applied.

- **New ideas are valued and encouraged** (McGill et al., 1992). New ideas are genuinely encouraged and valued (McGill et al., 1992), and the tradition of challenging the conventional wisdom by questioning others about 'why things are done a certain way' is willingly accepted and practiced by all. Thinking, problem solving, and offering suggestions are not solely management's responsibility but are part of everyone's role. One organisational leader describes her company's culture as "benevolent anarchism," where everyone has been encouraged to "question what they were doing and how they were doing it in the hope of finding better working methods (Gundry et al., 1994:26)."

- **Supervisors and co-workers provide support allowing individuals to learn and attempt to implement new ideas** (Dubin, 1990; Tracey et al., 1995). 'Supervisor support' refers to the support by the focal employee's immediate supervisor, whereas 'co-worker support' refers to the support by colleagues or peer members in similar positions or ranks. Trainees' perceptions of supervisory support in terms of discussing course goals, listening to and backing new ideas, and allowing experimentation will increase the possibility of more effective transfer of learning (Huczynski & Lewis, 1980). Co-workers' support is received when team members are open to new ideas and suggestions, and provide needed social support to try something new. Hence, supervisors and co-workers allowing individuals to learn and attempt to implement new ideas will make the work environment more learner-friendly (Dubin, 1990; Tracey et al., 1995). Social support has been shown to be an extremely strong
influence on training effectiveness (Rouillier & Goldstein, 1993; Tracey et al., 1995).

- **Policies and practices support the effective use of training.** Coherent and well integrated policies and practices exist in the organisation, supporting the efficient and effective use of training such as conducting training needs analysis (Goldstein, 1993) and evaluation of training effectiveness, providing accurate information about training opportunities to the employees (Baldwin & Magjuka, 1991), and ensuring that trainees' expectations about training are met. Appropriate training policies and practices should enhance continuous learning. These practices help ensure that training opportunities are available, relevant, and applicable to the job. They also help ensure that trainees' expectations about training will be met which has been shown to enhance post-training commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation (Tannenbaum et al., 1991).

**Continuous Learning and Development**

The process of continuous learning and development encompasses a cycle of 'learning opportunities, learning experience, transfer of learning, recognition and reward, motivation to learn' (see Figure: 1.3).

Individuals acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits through education, experience or experimentation. Training and learning opportunities provided by the organisation should generate meaningful and relevant learning experience with substantial potential for transferring it to the workplace. A positive learning culture and a strong environment present in the work place can facilitate effective transfer and application of learning
to improve job performance. If this behaviour of individuals is timely and suitably recognised and rewarded, they will be motivated, involved and committed to seek future training and learning opportunities. This positive chain of events is as strong as its weakest link and a mere presence of positive learning culture and environment may not be sufficient to produce positive learning outcomes.

Figure – 1.3: Continuous learning and development cycle

Learning Outcomes

Both individuals and organisations are mainly concerned with three possible outcomes of learning: perceived competence/self-efficacy, attitude towards training and learning, and satisfaction with personal development.

**Perceived competence/self-efficacy:** It is widely acknowledged that individuals need to possess an appropriate mix of capabilities (up-to-date knowledge and skills), willingness (attitudes and values), and opportunities to continuously learn and improve their performance. The presence of a positive learning culture and environment on the one hand, and effective functioning of the learning process on the other hand should boost individuals’ competence or self-efficacy on a continuous basis. Self-efficacy is ‘people’s judgment of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances’ (Bandura, 1986: 391). A person’s perceived self-efficacy determines the goal level, the person’s commitment to the goal, the selection of strategies with which to attain the goal, and the degree of effort made in pursuit of it (Bandura, 1997: 136).

**Attitude towards training and learning:** Individuals hold positive attitude towards training and other learning opportunities in the organisation when they perceive the organisation’s commitment to training and development favourably. The learning culture, learning environment, and learning process need to be managed in such a way that they collectively impact the hearts and minds of the employees in respect of continuous learning and development.
Satisfaction with personal development: This refers to the degree of satisfaction with individuals’ personal and professional development since joining the organisation.

Figure – 1.4: Conceptual framework guiding the present study

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<th>Learning Culture</th>
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<td><strong>Key Elements</strong></td>
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Learning Environment

| **Key Elements** |
| • Awareness of ‘big picture’.
| • Availability of opportunities to learn.
| • Tolerating mistakes as part of learning.
| • Accountability or high performance expectation.
| • Open to new ideas and change.
| • Policies and practices supporting training.
| • Supervisors’ and co-workers’ support to transfer learning.
| • Identification and minimisation of situational constraints.

Continuous Learning and Development

| Learning Outcomes |
| • Perceived competence/self efficacy. |
| • Attitude towards training and learning. |
| • Satisfaction with personal development. |

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STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Learning is at the heart of training and development. Whether organisations adopt a formal and systematic approach, or are committed to the ongoing and long-term process of individual and organisational growth and development via a systemic approach, learning is the essential precondition for any change in performance at work (Joy-Matthews et al., 2004). Learning refers to the process of unlearning what has been wrongly (inappropriately) learnt over the years, relearning new things which are relevant for the current and future needs, and getting oneself committed to the continuous process of learning and development. Hence, learning involves change (Stewart, 1996).

Kirkwood & Pangarkar (2003) stated that whether an organisation is mainly engaged in the manufacturing process or provision of services, it requires a dynamic learning strategy that harnesses the knowledge of its people and is an integral component of the firm’s strategic plan. Now more than ever before, businesses must learn from their experiences and adapt to changes to survive and prosper. Kirkwood & Pangarkar (2003) stated that employees who received additional knowledge were only one part of a complete learning strategy. To gain employee commitment, managers must include and align their employee’s ‘personal goals’ with the ‘corporate vision’. They also need to develop the competencies and knowledge lacking in the team to attain their strategic objectives. As this learning culture is supported and fostered by management, employees seek out and solve problems, become more entrepreneurial, and more willing to take risks. A
well-developed and effective strategic and competitive advantage is an elusive objective for many businesses. It requires workers to be creative, knowledgeable, and innovative. They have to do this faster and more effectively than their competitors. More importantly, managers must begin to view 'knowledge' and 'human capital' as the organisation's most valuable and volatile resources. By continuously developing and leveraging employee's knowledge, the organisation will be capable of handling every situation that arises and be strategically equipped to become an industry leader.

Much is written about individual and organisational learning in learning organisations (e.g., Argyris & Schon, 1996; Easterby-Smith, 1997; Huber, 1991; Kim, 1993; Tsang, 1997), and various aspects relating to it such as barriers to organisational learning (Hedberg, 1981; Kim, 1993; March & Olsen, 1975), learning from experience (Torbert, 1973), learning space (Fulop & Rifkin, 1997), freedom to learn (Rogers, 1969), unlearning (Hedberg, 1981; McGill & Slocum, 1993), learning disabilities (Senge, 1990), building and diffusing learning capability (Ulrich et al., 1993), and work environment and transfer of training (e.g., Huezynski & Lewis, 1980; Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; and Tracey et al., 1995). Most of these studies are conceptual and prescriptive rather than empirical in nature. There are very few studies fully devoted to the understanding of nature of relationships between learning culture, learning environment and learning outcomes in real life organisational settings (Gardiner, 1999; Iles, 1994; Leitch et al., 1996). Ulrich et al. (1993: 59) rightly observed, “to date, there have been far more 'thought papers' on why learning matters than empirical research on how managers can build learning capabilities”. The present study titled “The
Impact of Learning Culture and Learning Environment on Learning Outcomes – A Study with Reference to Selected Industrial Units in Karnataka State” made an attempt to address this research gap.

This research study intended to answer the following four research questions:

RQ-1 Are there significant differences in learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes across organisations?

RQ-2 Are there any significant differences in the perception of learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes ‘within’ and ‘between’ managers and non-managers in organisations?

RQ-3 What is the nature of relationship among learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes?

RQ-4 What are the major factors determining the impact of learning culture and learning environment on learning outcomes in organisations?
OBJECTIVES

The central purpose of this study is to measure and assess the impact of learning culture and learning environment on learning outcomes at the individual and organisational levels. The specific objectives are:

(1) to highlight the learning profile and contextual setting of organisations;
(2) to measure and assess learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes in organisations;
(3) to examine the nature of relationship among learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes in organisations;
(4) to identify and discuss the key factors determining the impact of learning culture and learning environment on learning outcomes in organisations; and
(5) to raise major organisational and managerial implications for enhancing continuous learning and development at the individual and organisational levels based on the findings of this study.

HYPOTHESES

Based on an extensive review of earlier studies and critical assessment of learning theories, the following four research hypotheses have been formulated for further investigation in this study:

\( H_1 \) There exist significant differences in learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes across organisations.
There exist significant differences in the perception of learning culture, learning environment, and learning outcomes 'within' and 'between' managers and non-managers in organisations.

There exists significant positive correlation between learning culture and learning environment in organisations.

Positive learning culture and strong learning environment, individually and collectively, tend to have greater impact on the learning outcomes of the individuals in organisations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is partly explanatory and partly diagnostic in nature. This study aimed at evaluating the impact of learning culture and learning environment on learning outcomes, based on the perceptual data collected from employees in selected medium and large scale manufacturing and service organisations, representing public sector, private sector, and multinational corporations in Karnataka.

The researcher consulted secondary sources of data such as books and periodicals to understand the key concepts, learning theories and previous research studies pertaining to the current field of investigation. In addition, the researcher also collected the internal documents of the respondent case study organisations for becoming familiar with the organisational context.
Since there was no comprehensive, published database of industrial organisations in Karnataka, the researcher had to construct a database of 421 industrial units in Karnataka based on the already available Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Directory (2004) and Greater Bangalore Chamber of Industry (GBCI) Directory (2004). This database served as the sampling frame for choosing the potential case study research organisations. Accordingly, 44 case study organisations were initially short-listed based on the criteria such as: only medium and large-sized industrial units, aged more than ten years, fairly and adequately representing private, public, and multinational enterprises engaged in manufacturing and service operations, and geographically spread over Karnataka (Figure : 1.5).

**Figure – 1.5: Sampling Frame for Conducting Case Studies**

![Diagram showing sampling frame]

Note: (1) Mfg = Manufacturing
(2) Figures inside the box indicate the number of case study organisations in each category included in the sampling frame.

The researcher wrote official letters initially, and later, by telephonic request to all the 44 short-listed potential case study organisations seeking their permission to carry out detailed case study investigations in their respective organisations. However, only 10 organisations permitted to conduct diagnostic evaluations of learning culture, learning environment and learning outcomes (Figure: 1.6).

**Figure – 1.6: Case Study Organisations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisations</th>
<th>Manufacturing</th>
<th>Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1.                  | Kaytee Switchgear P. Ltd.  
Unit–III, Plot No.6, Hirehalli Industrial Area, Hirehalli, Tumkur-572168.  |                                              |
| 2.                  | Precision Sheet Metal Works P. Ltd.  
18/A, KIADB Industrial Area, Hirehalli, Tumkur-572168 |                                              |
| 3.                  | Suprajit Engineering Ltd  
# 100, Bommasandra Industrial Area, Bangalore- 560099 |                                              |
| 4.                  | Wipro Ltd (Consumer Care),  
Plot # 4, Antharasanahalli Industrial Area, Tumkur – 572 106 |                                              |
| Public Sector       |                                                                              |                                              |
| 5.                  | HMT Limited  
Watch Factory–IV, Tumkur- 572 103 | Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC)  
Sarige Bhavan, K. H. Road, Bangalore |
| 7.                  | ITI Limited  
No.45/1, Magrath Road, Bangalore–560025 | Syndicate Bank, Manipal Udupi Dist. |
| MNC                 |                                                                              |                                              |
| 9.                  | AUMA (India) Ltd.  
Plot No.39, BII Phase, Peenya Industrial Area  
Bangalore– 560058 |                                              |
| 10.                 | (SKF) India Limited  
Bommasandra, Bangalore 560 099 |                                              |
The researcher visited each case study organisation and held discussions with the HR\HRD manager to become familiar with the organisational context and learning profile.

A 40-item instrument consisting of eight scales, originally developed by Pareek (1997) was used to measure and assess the learning culture of the respondent organisations. These scales captured the respondents' perceptions of eight core values (OCTAPACE): openness, confrontation, trust, authenticity, proaction, autonomy, collaboration, and experimentation. The respondents were asked to indicate 'how much the spirit contained in each statement was valued/believed in their organisations' on a four-point scale, ranging from very little (1) to a very great deal (4).

A 66-item instrument comprising thirteen scales (Tannenbaum, 1997) was used to diagnose the nature of learning environment (10 scales) and learning outcomes (3 scales). Most items were based on a five-point response format with scores ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All 21 scales revealed significant internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) ranging from 0.71 to 0.91 (Table 1.2).
Table - 1.2: Internal Reliability Coefficients (α) of all Scale Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha (α)</th>
<th>Sample items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Free interaction among employees, each respecting others' feelings, competence and sense of judgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Facing and not shying away from problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Offering moral support and help to employees and colleagues in a crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Congruity between feelings and expressed behaviour (minimum gap between what people say and do).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Proaction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>Preventive action on most matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>Taking independent action relating to their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>Team work and team spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Experimentation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>Trying out innovative ways of solving problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Availability of opportunities to learn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>My organisation typically: Assigns people to positions that stretch them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tolerating mistakes as part of learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>My organisation typically: Believes that people can learn from their mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Assigns to avoid errors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>My organisation typically: Assigns people to positions they can perform without error.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>High performance expectations/ Accountability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>My organisation typically: Monitors to see that people are performing at high levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Open to new ideas and change</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>New ideas are highly valued at my company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Policies and practices support training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>I have some input into the type of training I attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Supervisors support training</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>My supervisor encourages us to attend training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Co-workers' support new ideas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>People in my workgroup are open to new ideas and suggestions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Awareness of 'big picture'</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>I am clear about the goals of our organisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Identification and Minimisation of situational constraints</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>Unclear task assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>perceived competence/self-efficacy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>I am quite proficient at my job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Attitude towards training and learning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Training matters at my company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Satisfaction with personal development.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>I am satisfied with what I have learned since joining the company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire consisting of twenty one scales – eight scales for learning culture, ten scales for learning environment and three scales for learning outcomes – was personally delivered to 500 employees (on an average 50 employees in each of the chosen 10 respondent organisations) during October 2005 – March 2006. The questionnaires were administered to the employees during their non-working time at organisational premises. A disproportionate stratified random sampling technique ensured the representative character of the total samples, and enabled the researcher to capture varying perspectives of employees at different levels (managers and non-managers) within each organisation. The case study was also
supplemented by diagnostic interviews with senior managers, line managers, and human resource/training and development staff at each respondent organisation. These interviews corroborated and helped to explain the case study findings.

Out of 500 questionnaires distributed, the researcher could collect back only 371 filled-in questionnaires. Hence, the gross response rate was 74.2 per cent. After carefully going through and editing the filled-in questionnaires, the researcher eliminated 37 incomplete questionnaires for further analysis. Hence, the effective response rate was 66.8 per cent (334x100/500).

334 questionnaires were processed using the SPSS–Version 13.0. Statistical tools and techniques such as descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), chi-square test of significance, ANOVA, multiple correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were used to analyse and interpret the self-reported perceptual data.

**SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

The results and discussions of this study are based on multiple case study qualitative research. Self-reported perceptual data and information pertaining to the presence of positive learning culture, sound learning environment and the realisation of intended learning outcomes constituted the framework for analysis and interpretation. The 334 respondents representing managers and non-managers from only 10 industrial organisations served as sample units. Since it is a case study research, the conclusions and inferences drawn from this study cannot be made applicable
to other organisations in other States due to cross-regional, cross-cultural and industry differences. The general limitations applicable to a multiple case study research are also found in the present study. However, a clear discussion of the nature of relationship among learning culture, learning environment and learning outcomes and the key factors determining the impact of learning culture and environment on learning outcomes contain definite implications for human resource development research and practice. In addition to substantially contributing to the existing literature on individual and organisational learning, the present study raises important organisational and managerial implications for enhancing continuous learning and development both at individual and organisational levels.

CHAPTER CLASSIFICATION

The present study titled “The Impact of Learning Culture and Learning Environment on Learning Outcomes – A Study with Reference to Selected Industrial Units in Karnataka State” is coordinated in seven chapters as briefly outlined below:

Chapter 1: “INTRODUCTION” is devoted to describe the conceptual framework guiding the study, key research questions, hypotheses and objectives. Methodological issues pertaining to the sources of data, data collection instruments and techniques, tools of data analysis are also given in this chapter. Finally, the chapter highlights the scope and limitations of the present study along with the chapter outline.
Chapter 2: "THEORETICAL BACKGROUND" provides a thumb-nail sketch of learning theories based on ideological underpinnings and a holistic context. Each theory is critically assessed under three phases: description, principles and implications for research and practice. In this sense, this chapter serves as a useful background for positioning the results and discussions of the present 'qualitative-empirical' study.

Chapter 3: "REVIEW OF LITERATURE" offers an overview of previous research studies pertaining to the current field of investigation. A critical review of earlier studies makes an attempt to identify and define the research gap which will be addressed in this study.

Chapter 4: "PROFILE OF CASE STUDY ORGANISATIONS" presents the basic organisational characteristics, learning profile and the cultural context of ten respondent case study organisations. The contextual setting described in this chapter provides a clear foundation for discussing the impact of learning culture and learning environment on learning outcomes in the next chapter with a proper perspective.

Chapter 5: "LEARNING CULTURE, LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES: MEASUREMENT AND ASSESSMENT" gives a detailed analysis of the perceptions of learning culture, environment and outcomes reported by 334 employees (managers and non-managers) in 10 case study organisations.
Chapter 6: "LEARNING CULTURE, LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES: KEY DETERMINANTS" addresses the central theme of the study. Being a core chapter, all the four research questions and four research hypotheses have been discussed and the major factors determining the impact of learning culture and environment on learning outcomes have been clearly identified and statistically validated.

Chapter 7: "SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION" presents a capsule summary of the results and discussions presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6, and raises major organisational and managerial implications for human resource development research and practice in general, and enhancing continuous learning and development at individual and organisational levels in particular.
References


Brandsma, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Lifelong Learning: (Im) possibilities and Perspectives*, Enschede: University of Twente, OCTO.


