

## **PROMOTING ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CULTURE THROUGH WORK-BASED-LEARNING**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the strategies of personnel development activities to establish the concept of learning organisation in the company through the connection of learning and working. The introductory section of the paper describes the theoretical perspectives and the occasions of the concept of learning organisation as well as the perspectives of the workplace-related learning. The central thesis of this paper provides an overview and critical discussion of learning and working as a component of the organisational learning and the meaning of learning organisation for the company. Besides, the significance of the learning organisation in educational work in companies will also be investigated. Finally, there will be a short identification analysis on the problems and difficulties of integrating learning and working within the workplaces by using the example of Indonesian companies.

**Keywords:** *Learning, Working, Workplace, Work-Based-Learning, Organizational Learning, Company*

### **1. Introduction**

The workplace learning as learning strategy to develop working knowledge and skills is not new (Lee, et al 2004). In recent years, again and again, the conceptual pair of "learning and work" has been mentioned in relation with catchwords like "new learning culture", "new learning tendencies" or "new learning dimensions" within work-related training activities in a range of institutions, such as in vocational education, business and industries. There are multiple synonyms to explain this conceptual pair, i.e. "workplace learning", "learning through work", "learning through work experience", "learning from work", "workplace pedagogic practices", "workplace-based experiential learning", "work-related learning", "learning at the workplace", "work based learning" existed in numerous literatures in the

context of national and international interests (Magoni and Vögtli-Bossart, 2007; Bender, 2004; Dehnbostel, 2002; Trier, 1999; Sroka, 2004).

Principally, in theory and practice, learning and working are like two sides of a coin or medal. Learning in the work process and work in connection with learning strategies contain an expansion, differentiation and organisation of performance prerequisites as well as the activation of memory capacity so that unlearning or forgetting can be avoided (Hacker and Skell, 1993; Frieling, 2006). With regard to the necessities of qualification contents and flexible scope of action at or near the workplace, Severing (1996) described that at least two demands of new work structures that can be imparted. They are (1) the content-related qualification demands expand themselves within the function of enhancement of work places; and (2) higher independence of the working population also brings higher learning potentials at the workplace (Severing 1996).

In practice, there is a gap in the design or implementation of work-related learning with reference to work, both from a didactic-methodological and organisational learning perspective. Dehnbostel (2002) mentioned that based on the category of the methods; there are at least five models of work-related learning. A short summary of the five models of work-related learning will be shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 Models of work-related learning (Source: Dehnbostel 2002)

<b>Models of work-related learning</b>	<b>Concepts, forms of learning</b>
Learning through day-to-day work in the real work process	Learning in the process of work, communities of practices
Learning through instruction, systematic briefing at the workplace	Methods and types of adaptation qualification; Cognitive Apprenticeship
Learning through integration of informal learning and formal learning	Quality circle; learning centre, learning island, structured learning on the job
Learning through sitting in on classes and company investigations	Work placements; work rotation; benchmarking
Learning through simulation of work processes	Learning offices, order-oriented working in seminars

There are a variety of forms with regard to the processes of work-related trainings near the workplace. Different methods and media can be used by applying different models. Severing (1996) summarized processes of work-related courses near the workplace in four forms: (1) conventional or traditional methods of job instruction at the workplace, (2) action-oriented forms of work-related learning, (3) group-oriented, decentralized further training concepts and (4) individual work-place integrated further training

The following Table highlights these four forms:

Table 2 Procedure job-related further training (Source: Severing 1996)

<b>Procedure job-related further training</b>	
Traditional methods of job instruction at the workplace	<i>“Beistellehre”</i> , (Apprentice) 4-level method; showing/imitating, analytical job instruction
Action-oriented forms of work-related learning	Project learning, motif method
Group-oriented, decentralized further training concepts	Quality circle, learning centre, learning islands, investigation and presentation, job-rotation
Individual workplace-integrated further training	...with conventional methods: introductory training, training at the workplace, self-qualification at the workplace with computer-supported learning technologies, <i>distance learning</i> at the workplace

Furthermore, Severing (1996) distinguished the methods of work-related training courses into two basic types. The first type comes from the work-related initial training which is practiced mainly in work place. The second type tries to lead company problem solution processes closer to the employees affected by the problems. Moreover, the methods of job-related training courses have at least two important functions: for one thing, the working process can be adjusted and simplified. For another, the method serves as a “bridge” between the individual, personnel learning preconditions on the one hand and the learning possibilities given in the working process on the other hand.

Provided work-related learning is regarded as one “process”, it can be summarized in the following way:

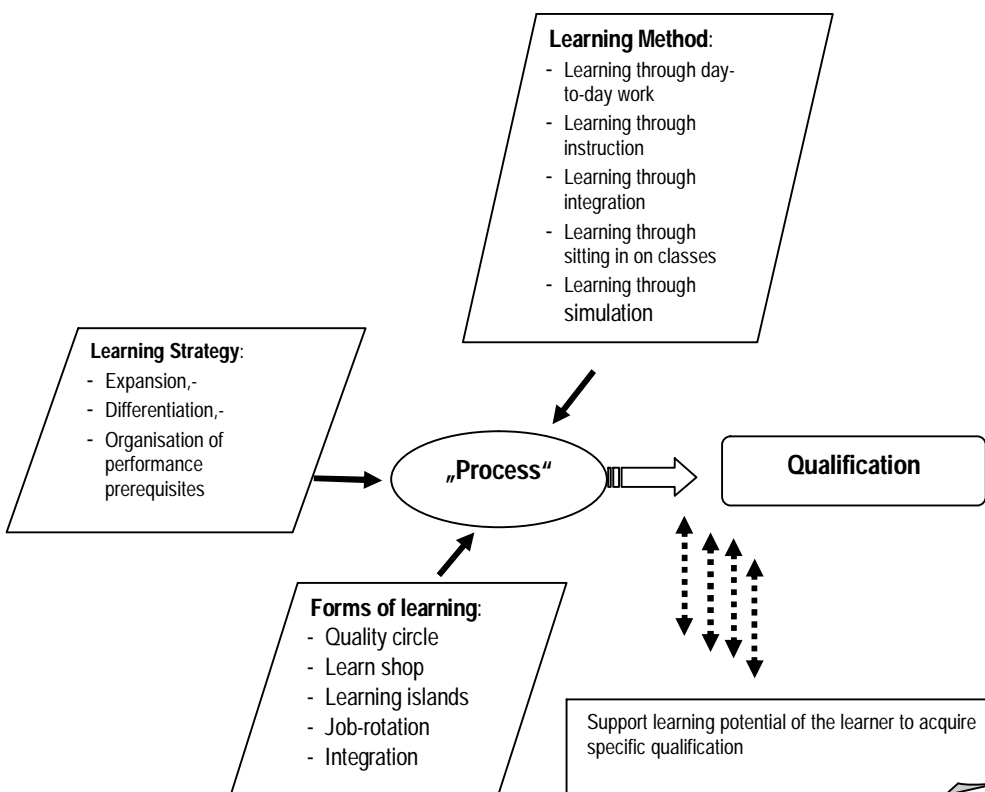


Figure 1 Approach of the work-related learning as one “process”

## 2. Occasions and Perspectives of Work-Related Learning

There are different occasions or reasons why companies or enterprises have an interest in linking work and learning. One important occasion will primarily refer to educational and economic factors. Severing (1996); Barth (2005); Rausch (2009) Weiss (1990); Buehner (1993); Bergmann (1999) identify these aspects as benefit calculations of companies. Those aspects are as follow: (1) aspect of costs, (2) aspect of organisation, (3) aspect of working process, (4) aspect of quality management and (5) aspect of motivation

As a tendency in work-related training courses, there is a wide range of the learning connection and work or work-related learning in the context of a company educational system. Proß (2007) summarizes the range of work-related learning as follows:

- Work-related learning is a hardly doubted necessity for both the economic development of companies and the individual professional development of employees.

- The learning in work stems from the debate about the humanisation of work and establishes itself as economically sustainable form of company learning, however under the circumstances of a high cost and performance pressure in enterprises, which is why the economical threatens to dominate over educational targets.
- Learning in the work process contains a potential, which enables the pursuit of economic, education-policy and subjective educational and learning objectives.
- Learning processes in work are subject to tensions and contradictions of business calculations and personal development needs in work (Proß 2007).

### **3. Learning and Working as a Component of the Organisational Learning**

As a result of growing interest in organizational learning, since 1960s, the conceptions and approaches of organizational learning have been discussed and reviewed in various contexts (Arnold and Weber, 1995). For instance, Argyris/Schön has introduced the first model to facilitate organizational learning through their book "What is an Organization that it may learn".

Basically, the ideas of learning organization arise from two mutually influencing contexts of the reflection of Entrepreneurial action (Bertelsmann, 1996; Große-Oetringhaus, 1994; Hoffman and Golnick, 1993; Pawlik, 1992; Posth, 1992) and the results of scientific discourses in Business Administration and Business Education field (Nagel, 1997; Pawlowsky, 1994; Reinhard, 1995; Weiegend, 1996; Dietrich, 2000).

Although the topic of organisational learning had originally been a business-management oriented topic, it is intensively discussed in the area of education. The discussions within the area of education concentrate on:

- a. the critical takeover of economic positions or basic criticisms on the context of vocational and economic education or in-company education and on the approaches of the learning organisation in the didactic analysis (Euler and Sloane, 2000).
- b. the theory of knowledge or knowledge acquisition that deal with the topic of organisational learning, both explicit (competence knowledge) and implicit knowledge, in this context, practical knowledge (Arnold 2000)
- c. company learning strategy with reference to pedagogical approaches, (Dietrich, 2000).
- d. "single-loop learning" and "double-loop learning" methods (Argyris and Schön, 2000).
- e. Organisation learning as a means of enabling attractive learning by organisational learning processes or knowledge generation and knowledge transfer.

A summary on the development of the concept of organisational learning in different faculties is depicted in the following illustration:

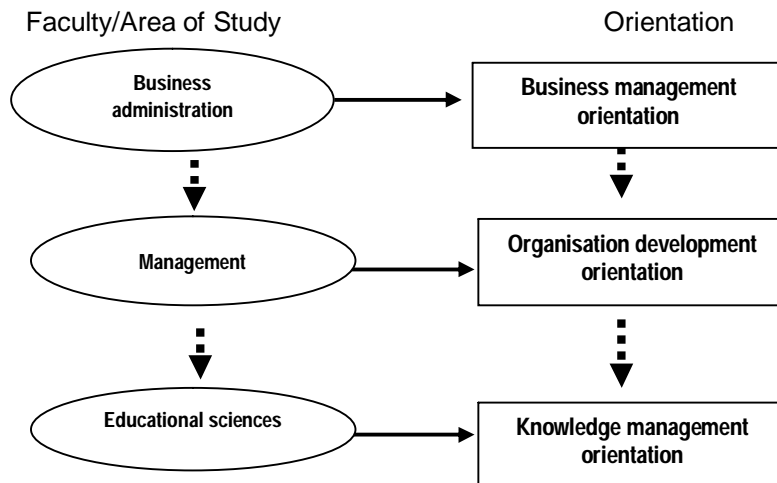


Figure 2 The development of the concept of learning organization in different faculties (Euler and Sloane, 2000)

The interest in the learning organisation in the business practice is based on different reasons or occasions. The increasing pressure for adapting and changing on organisations to cope with a rapid and dynamizing global economy is considered as an important occasions. The question resulting from it is how organisations will be able to learn the necessary changes in this changing environment (Scherf-Braune, 2000). Besides, the social value change, the socio-demographic changes and the development on the job markets, the technological progress and the increasing knowledge dynamics are considered as additional reasons for the popularity of organisation learning concept by Nagl (1997).

#### 4. The Meaning of Learning Organisation for the Company

It should be noted that there are growing complexity and constant changes of the environment. To be able to survive and compete, there is a necessity for an organisation to develop further to become learning organisations.

For an organisation to become a learning organisation, it must fulfil the following conditions: (1) establishing sensitivity and open, flexible organisational structures to constantly observe changes both in their environment and within their own condition; dealing with them and implementing them in adequate internal changes; (2) developing or externally procuring and institutionalizing the necessary problem solutions to be able to continuously improve themselves in a constant process of trials and errors based on

permanent feedback loops of observers – forming of hypothesis – acting; and (3) developing the key qualifications, promoting learning and development ability of their employees who need it (Chromecek, et al 2011).

According to Scherf-Braune (2000), there are two important components of the process of organisational learning that should be taken into account. These components are: agents and the objects of organisational learning. The agent of organisational learning is about the “actor” or players of organisational learning. They can be individuals (March and Olsen, 1990; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Hedberg, 1981; and Kim, 1983), groups and social systems or the organisation itself (Pautzke, 1981; Klimecki. et. al., 1998 and Nonaka, 1994). Meanwhile the objects of organisational learning is related to the learning processes occur within the organisation that take place on two levels, with the change of individual’s behaviour (March and Olsen, 1990; Kim, 1993) or with the cognitive structures of organisations (Pautzke, 1989 and Kim, 1993).

When observing the processes of organisational learning, however, it is apparent that there is a correlation among the different theories, perspectives and models. In summary, one model is depicted from other models:

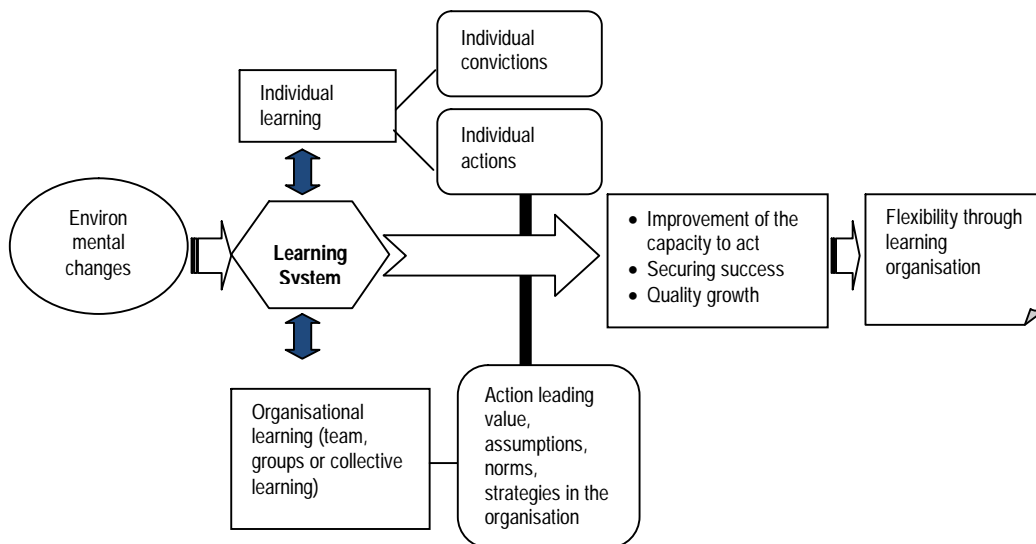


Figure 3 Model of the learning system processes of organisational learning

Flexibility is an important feature of the learning organisation. The learning organisation serves the improvement of flexibility of the organisation or company. At the same time, it also considers the Human Resource factors in the company. Frieling, et al (2006) mentioned the following forms of flexibility in learning organisations:

- Internal flexibility: changes within the internal company structure and labour organisation
- External flexibility: contacts to other markets and companies
- Numerical flexibility: according to the work load varying number of employees, flexible working time models, part time employment, outsourcing, cooperation with temporary employment agencies
- Functional flexibility: scope and intensity of seminar-like further trainings.

Due to the wide range of organizational learning, it should be considered as a systematic process of the organizational learning. In the process of organisational learning, a demand analysis as well as the aptitude of the concept of learning company can be used as a reference system for further training market analyses. According to Röben (2006), this aptitude is structured into four important approaches:

- The concept of the learning organisation is suitable to analyse a company with reference to structural learning barriers.
- To give learning projects an optimal learning environment, structural learning barriers must be removed.
- The organisational demand for further training can be determined by the comparison of a company with the ideal of the learning company.
- The individual demand for further training can be gained from the analysis of learning barriers and the change of work tasks (Röben 2006)

Organizational learning is being reviewed for example by Dietrich (2000), and he suggested various perspective of organizational learning in numerous contexts as follows:

- Organizational learning as the sum of individual learning processes.
- Organizational learning as learning by “elites”.
- Organizational learning as a learning system, which occur in all level of the organization (individual, group and organization)
- Organizational Learning as a cultural learning.
- Knowledge-based approaches to organizational learning (Diettrich, 2000).

## **5. Overview about Work-Based-Learning in Indonesian Companies**

Learning organisation is the development of organisational capacities and a continuous learning, in the interplay of adaptation and change. Indonesian companies are aware that the company success is depended on a lot of factors, such as the organisation’s ability to learn and react quickly to changes.

The willingness and sensitised of employees for continuous learning and the establishment of learning processes in the organisational structure and at the workplace



rank among the big problems in most Indonesian companies and they do not constitute an easy task. Moreover, for the development of learning organisation, there are three factors that must be considered to implement the link between learning and working within the company in Indonesia, namely the local context, the situation of educational and economical system and the cultural aspects.

Regarding the educational system, the concept of personnel development (including the link between learning and working) is mostly based on the academic career of employees in Indonesian companies. Normally, this workspace is connected with administrative works and services. Provided the academic career is observed from a close distance, it should be noted that this model aims more at *soft-skill* abilities in practice. Thus, as we compared to the administrative work, the term job qualification level is more about the working area, which is connected with abilities and skills.

In terms of cultural aspects, it must be noted that most Indonesian companies still pay little attention to further training activities in general as for the implementation of the concept of the learning organisation. As a consequence, companies provide and invest only little time and budget for further trainings activities. Likewise, further training activities in companies in Indonesia are generally not sufficiently well developed to face the current condition.

Although there are already some of companies struggling to invest in the training and further training activities for their employees, the majority of companies or industries only marginally take part. Further training activities is too expensive for employees since production and daily work cannot be carried out during the time of the further training activities become one of the reasons. Some companies think that the productive time decrease due to further trainings activities. Other companies also think that due to further training activities of their employees, there are already other companies waiting at "their door" alienating the trained employees for new working possibilities. These estimations are very spread widely among Indonesian companies.

The thought that further training activities must be regarded as a long-term investment is still not prevalent in most companies in Indonesia. Unfortunately, most companies consider further training activities according to the "business principle", i.e. they expect a short-term/prompt result to their investment. This thought must be changed so that further trainings activities of companies will rather come to be regarded as a long-term or future-oriented investment. Only with this principle, sufficient financial resources for financing further trainings activities in companies can be improved. The commitment and the willingness of companies to invest, to finance or to put budget in further trainings activities plays an important role since without the commitment and willingness of companies, the

establishment of the concept of the learning organisation in companies in Indonesia will remain not more than a utopia.

### **Conclusion**

Learning and work have always been practicing for several years. The workplace-based learning as a method of personal development has also been implemented in many large companies. The relationship between learning and work is given as a high priority not only in education policy, but also in educational practice

Since workplaces can provide a potential opportunity and challenge for learners to improve their appropriate knowledge which connects theory to practice in a realistic worksite and an efficient way, the workplace learning could be used as strategies of human resources development activities to establish the learning organisation in the company.

Rapid business environment change, organizational competition as well as increasing pressure for adaptation in dynamic global economy are important reason factors for companies or enterprises to have an interest in linking work and learning. Another additional reason is for the popularity and increased interest in organisation learning concepts are the changing of social value, the socio-demographic change and the development on the job markets, the technological progress and the dynamic increasing of knowledge.

In order to promote and to establish the organizational learning culture through work-based-learning in Indonesian company, we have to considered the local context and the situation of the educational and economic system as well as the cultural aspects.

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