

Summing Up: Demonstrating the Value of an Organization's Learning Culture

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Scholars and practitioners alike consistently note that although much is said about the learning organization, little is known about how to implement these abstract ideas across national or local cultures and in different kinds of organizations (e.g., different kinds of businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, professional associations, or educational institutions). Our work on diagnosing the learning culture has spanned multiple organizational settings and cultural contexts. In this issue we sum up this experience by bringing together examples of how we diagnosed the learning culture, how organizations have used our diagnostic instrument to guide change, and what we have learned that might influence theory, research, and practice. Previous research in this area has consisted primarily of case studies, single organizational studies, or large-scale surveys in one context. This issue brings together research and practice using the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) in different contexts.

Various scholars have looked at organizational culture, but they have not generally focused on systems-level learning analyses carried out in a wide variety of organizational and national cultures. The DLOQ measures systems-level learning culture. And unlike some learning organization instruments that reflect consultant preferences but may not be guided by theory and research (Gephart, Marsick, Van Buren, & Spiro, 1996), the DLOQ grew out of both research and practice (Marsick & Watkins, 1997) and has been adapted based on new research on its use. As reported in this issue, we sum up years of research and offer illustrations of how to intervene with an organization using feedback results from our organizational learning culture survey (DLOQ).

Purposes of This Issue

The purposes of this issue are to:

1. identify how a validated organizational learning culture survey can be used to advance theory, research, and practice;

2. highlight global examples of how the DLOQ has been used and what we have learned from these applications; and to
3. invite further research and practice with the DLOQ by including the full validated instrument with self-scoring procedures.

Overview of This Issue

In the first article, Watkins and Marsick define learning at three levels and show how these levels undergird their model of the learning organization. They also chronicle the development of the DLOQ and provide a self-scoring version of the instrument.

Validity and reliability is essential whether one is planning to use the survey to stimulate discussion, guide strategic planning, or examine relationships across groups and organizations. Baiyin Yang provides a succinct summary of the multiple-phase process that he used to establish the validity and reliability of the survey. Yang also describes a valid short form of the survey he developed to facilitate future research efforts and addresses the relationships that we have found between learning culture and financial and knowledge performance.

Over two separate studies, Ellinger, Ellinger, Yang, and Howton have surveyed a national sample of *Fortune* 500 managers to examine the extent to which strong measures of financial performance correlate with Watkins and Marsick's dimensions of a learning culture. The third article reports the results of their study. This work has particular significance for those who hope to build an economic rationale for investing in the creation of a learning culture.

The fourth article, by Judy Milton, illustrates how the DLOQ has been used to work with organizations involved in a strategic planning retreat. She describes the use of the survey as part of an intervention with a large non-profit international management association. A Web-based version of the DLOQ was created for this organization. In the next article, Dymock describes what he learned when he used the survey with a major service organization with branches throughout Australia. He interprets findings from a small sample of survey responses and interviews against the background of a major recent restructuring of the company following significant industrial upheaval.

Several authors conducted large-scale national or international studies with different types of organizations and different types of respondents. McHargue describes a national survey study involving 264 large nonprofit organizations and shows that learning organization dimensions are significant determinants of financial performance, learning performance, and mission performance. Sta. Maria looks at the influence of dimensions of a learning culture and concerns about the innovation on the implementation of ISO 9000 across 11 agencies in the Malaysian public sector. Her findings show

that learning culture is important for innovation, but ultimately, the individual organizational context has the greatest effect on the success or failure of innovation implementation. Finally, Hernandez studied learning culture and technology transfer in eight major corporations in Bogata, Colombia. With a large sample of responses from each institution stratified by hierarchical level, Hernandez was able to examine differences across levels. Similar to Sta. Maria, who administered the survey in both English and Malay, Hernandez validated a Spanish translation of the DLOQ.

One direction that we hope will emerge with the publication of this work is that you the reader will pick up that work and continue it in your own organizations and in your own organizational research. To support this, we have included the DLOQ self-scoring version of the survey in Chapter 1. In the Appendix, O'Neil offers a guide for interpreting results that she, Watkins, and Marsick have used to help organizations interpret results and choose interventions to reinforce strengths or shore up weaknesses identified by the DLOQ.

References

- Gephart, M. A., Marsick, V. J., Van Buren, M. E., & Spiro, M. S. (1996). Learning organizations come alive. *Training and Development*, 50(12), 34-45.
- Marsick, V., & Watkins, K. (1997). Organizational learning. In L. Bassi & D. Russ-Eft (Eds.), *What works: Assessment, development, and measurement* (pp. 65-86). Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.

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