



Learning institution to learning organization

Kudos to reflective practitioners

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to explore if reflective inquiry and action learning have an influence on job and organizational effectiveness. A reflective-action learning framework will be used as a prior theory to illustrate its link to organizational learning.

Design/methodology/approach – The case organization is a Singapore higher learning institution. In-depth interviewing with 50 faculty members and the Deputy Director of academic affairs was employed to find out more about the practice of reflective-action learning group (RALG) that had been established for over three years. Additionally, ethnographic observation was used to support and strengthen empirical evidence.

Findings – Key findings reveal that RALG is closely aligned to Kolb's experiential learning cycle where a series of learning dynamics is involved. For instance, the role of reflection motivates individuals to shift from single- to double-loop learning, increasing their competence and capacity to undertake greater challenges. In addition, transferring new knowledge to a modified action increases the interaction of the learning loops. This way, triple-loop learning may be engaged to enhance the competitive advantage of individuals and subsequently, the organization.

Research limitations/implications – The study has shed light on two underlying principles that govern the RALG framework: cognitive and behavioral perspectives. These perspectives are closely linked to the nature of organizational learning, an area that has gained prominence in organizational research.

Practical implications – The linkage between RALG and organizational effectiveness has led to a gamut of practical implications. For instance, the role of purposeful communication encourages the divergence of individual learning issues and the convergence of shared thinking. In addition, the concretization of abstract generalization derived from reflection provides opportunities for greater team dynamics with a focus on innovation.

Originality/value – This paper offers an international perspective illustrating the progressiveness of an Asian higher learning institution with a global mindset. The study is a unique example of the success of RALG with specific implications for organizational learning practices in a wider array of professional contexts. It is believed that the findings will be of value to international researchers and practitioners in the fields of organizational and human resource development.

Keywords Action learning, Interviews, Organizational effectiveness, Learning organizations, Singapore

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest (Confucius, 551-479 BC).