



TLO
12,4

Revisiting the roots of learning organization

A synthesis of the learning organization literature

368

Roland K. Yeo

Temasek Engineering School, Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to provide a literature synthesis of the learning organization and discuss several pertinent theoretical concepts on the subject.

Design/methodology/approach – A range of works mainly from 1990-2004, which aim at providing a variety of perspectives on the learning organization, have been analyzed and discussed based on its theoretical roots and ontological perspectives.

Findings – The synthesis of the literature reveals several common themes from the various learning organization definitions and discovers the greater significance of systems thinking in Senge's five disciplines.

Research limitations/implications – It is not an exhaustive coverage of the learning organization literature. However it offers great research implications where several key concepts can be further explored. For example, is systems thinking really crucial to organizational learning?

Practical implications – Practitioners may find the analysis of the various models in relation to Senge's five disciplines useful, as there are concepts that can be implemented in practice.

Originality/value – It is the amalgamation of several key concepts in the learning organization and the analysis of these concepts in relation to *The Fifth Discipline* which readers will be familiar and able to identify with. People who are interested in pursuing research in the learning organization will find this paper handy as it provides a useful overview of the subject.

Keywords Learning organizations, Literature

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The notion of organizational learning emerged during the 1960s and 1970s when the challenge of change was uppermost in the minds of most managers. During this era, there was growing emphasis placed on taking an outside-in view of behavioral science predicated on the perspective that organizations could be viewed as machines that would require constant repair and upgrading (Cummings and Huse, 1996; Garratt, 1995). Hence, the notion of technological advancement was regarded as the panacea for organizational transformation at that time. On the other hand, with the introduction of the Addison Wesley-Process Consultation series in the late 1960s, another emphasis was given to the way organizations were being defined; that of organic metaphors being associated with the medical model centered on the concept of organizational health (Bennis, 1969). From this view, managers and consultants were seen as playing

