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Adaptation of the Organizational Learning Culture (OLC) Dimension Methodology in the Israeli Local Authorities Context

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Abstract

Survival of organizations nowadays depends on their ability to learn properly and quickly increase their efficiency and their performance and to adapt to the changing environment. Creating an organizational learning culture (OLC) could achieve an increase in the survivability of organizations.

This paper examines the OLC questionnaire, the developed research methodology, adapted and approved by Israeli local authorities. This study analyses 529 questionnaires filled in by municipalities' employees.

The aim of the research: the development of a mechanism for increasing the efficiency of the local authorities by influencing the behavior of employees through the creation of Organizational Learning Culture (OLC).

Keywords: organizational learning, organizational learning culture, OLC multi-dimensional instrument.

Introduction

In the era of technological fast changes, increasing competition between organizations and changes in the needs of the customers, the survival of the organization depends on its ability to learn properly and quickly, to adapt itself to the changeable environment. Under these conditions, where the changes speed and their power are unmeasurable, the organization's ability to learn is critical (Pedler, 1996). Only the organizations that can transform themselves into more intelligent, profitable, and capable of learning will survive. Organizations are looking for ways to increase their effectiveness using internal resources. In order to increase efficiency, productivity and profitability, employees should be able to prioritize learning and development, share knowledge, take an active part in solving problems, and have a desire learn and improve sustainably.

With the arrival of the 21st century, when all the systems in our lives are changeable, there are still archaic, conservative, bureaucratic and stagnant organizations that are

unable to lead to changes. Public systems to which local authorities belong remain conservative and inflexible corporate objects. The routine work, the inferior physical environment of the workplace, the lack of competition, the low wages, the lack of rewards and the suitable reinforcement system – all of these factors are causes for the absence of investment at work beyond the minimum the job's requirements.

Local authorities are the level of government closest to the citizen. They have a central and extensive role that affects the quality of life of a resident in their daily activity. They stand at the forefront of governmental authority and are the first to address the residents (Beeri & Yuval, 2012). The role of the local government is to fulfill two main objectives: to provide a range of public services with quality and efficiency and to serve as a mechanism through the local community that can express their wishes regarding the various features of life in the community.

Like other Western democracies, the local government in Israel has experienced an economic, administrative and political crisis. Poverty of resources, technological changes, lack of transparency, inefficiency in providing service, a growing demand for skilled and high-quality personnel are the factors that are supposed to lead to reform in local government. In addition, research findings over the past decade indicate a moderate to low assessment of the level of services provided by local authorities in Israel.

Finding ways to motivate employees to learn regularly, to improve service level, to increase efficiency and professionalism are important goals of local government. (Beeri & Yuval, 2012; Berner, Efrati, Gronau, & Rasin, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2016). One possible direction of change is the transformation of the organization into a learning organization (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010). Employees have to take part in the development of common goals, to be involved in continuous and sustainable learning and development, and in the implementation of new ideas.

The **purpose of this study** is development of a mechanism for increasing the efficiency of the local authorities by influencing the behavior of employees through the creation of an Organizational Learning Culture (OLC) system.

To achieve this goal, the following issues must be resolved:

- Development of a research methodology and its adaptation
- Approval in the context of Israeli local councils

The learning organizational indices OLC can be used by the manager as evaluation tools for determination and assessment of the current situation and the development of its perfection.

Literature Review

Organizational Learning

Learning as an organizational process was proposed by Argyris and Schon (1978). Since then Organizational Learning has captured the interest in the field of human resource development.

Argyris (1997) defines organizational learning as a process of errors exposure and correction. Learning at the organizational level and the individual level is a process carried out in a cyclical manner: the collection of information, its interpretation, its preservation in memory, its distribution and change in behavior accordingly.

Dixon (1994) claims “each organizational member can learn. An organization learns through this capability of its members. Organizational learning is not simply the sum of all that its organizational members know – rather it is the collective use of this capability of learning” (p. 36). Joo and Lim (2008) assume that organizational learning modifies employee behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.

Organizational learning is used to describe certain types of activities that take place in an organization. According to Ahmadi, Daryani, and Bevrani (2014), organizational learning is a construct, which implies that the entity called an organization actually gets engaged in the process of gathering and processing information, and as a consequence its potential behavior is changed.

According to Watkins and Marsick (2003b) “*Organizations often expect that learning and knowledge creation will take place continuously for individuals and that they will share what they know in ways that promote learning in groups and throughout the organization*”(p. 132). They distinguish between three levels of organizational learning: individual, team or group, and organization. An individual level is about how an organization challenges and stimulates a learning response, and at the organizational level it is how an organization creates a learning culture supporting and rewarding what is learned by an individual.

The organizational learning process is dependent upon a workplace culture that encourages staff members, at all levels of the organization to share ideas and insights (Castiglioni, 2006). Hsu (2009) characterized the organizational learning process as focusing on continuous learning by the individual, group, and organizational level: creation, acquisition, and transformation of information and knowledge; shared vision, value, and goals; increasing the learning capacity of members of the organization, empowerment of individual learners, creativity and innovation, integration of work and learning, increasing productivity and improving performance.

It means that change should happen at every level of learning from individual to organizational. These changes should become new practices and routines and support the ability to use learning to improve performance (Watkins & Marsick, 2003a).

The importance of learning for the organization’s success, development and survival yielded an extensive professional literature in the last three decades. However, many researchers claim that there is no accepted theory or model about the organizational learning (Garvin, 1993; Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; Tsang & Zahra, 2008; Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010; Swart & Harcup, 2013).

Organizational Learning Culture

Yanov (2000) proposed that the organizational learning process is rooted in organizational culture. Thus, understanding organizational culture is critical to understanding of the organizational learning processes (Schein, 2010). Human capital depends on the learning organization culture and organizational learning process. A learning culture is an integral part of organizational behavior that occurs as a continuous process of improvement. Without such a culture supporting learning in the organization, the efforts invested in individual learning and development would not produce the expected outcomes (Joo & Yang, 2007).

Organizational culture provides rules for organizational members sharing information, reaching general agreement and acting. Moghadam, Beheshtifar, and Darvishzade

(2012) claim that organizational learning culture is a building where employees are encouraged to exercise their initiatives and where individuals take a personal ownership in their personal learning and development at all levels within the organization. The goal of organizational learning culture is an exchange of valuable knowledge leading to innovation, improved performance, and sustained competitiveness (Lopez et al., 2005). A learning culture should promote values such as experimentation, knowledge acquisition, knowledge-sharing, reciprocity, risk-taking, and recognition of the opportunities created by change (Yeung et al., 1999). At the organizational level, organizational learning culture is one of the key contextual components to enhance organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation (Moghadam et al., 2012). It refers to an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Joo & Lim, 2008).

Organizations learn through the experiences and activities of individual members of the organization. Organizational learning will not occur without dedicating time and creating structures and mechanisms that allow the existence of learning processes that are assimilated in the organization's routine (Englehardt & Simmons, 2002). These structures include frequent meetings for solving problems, flexible time for meetings, regular activities for professional development, shared preparation period, cross-department team meetings etc. Learning organizations are organizations that embed learning mechanisms established within their learning culture (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000). Senge et al. (1999) claimed that organizational learning is the main road to sustainable development: "sustainable development can't be achieved without innovation, and innovation is best achieved in a culture that embraces and fosters learning and change" (p. 535)

Watkin and Marsick (2003b) developed the dimensional questionnaire (DLOQ) that is designed to measure learning culture in organizations. This questionnaire has seven dimensions of the learning organization culture, which are associated with people and structure (Table 1).

Table 1
Value of an Organizational Learning Culture

Dimension	Definition
Continuous learning	Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job.
Inquiry and dialogue	The culture is changed to support questioning, feedback and experimentation.
Collaboration and team learning	Groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded.
Creating systems to capture and share learning	Both high- and low-technology systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided; systems are maintained.
Empowering people toward a collective vision	Responsibility is distributed closely to decision making so that people are motivated to learn what they are held accountable for.
Connecting the organization to its environment	People are helped to see the effect of their work on the entire enterprise; people scan the environment and use information to adjust work practices.
Strategic leadership	Leaders model, champion, and support learning.

Adapted from Watkin and Marsick (2003b)

Theory of Watkin and Marsick (2003b) explains how people shape culture for learning. They propose a learning process at two levels: learning at the individual level and learning at the organizational level. Watkin and Marsick (2003b) emphasize that individual learning is related to organizational learning though not equal to it. They support the idea that organizational culture is built by leaders and other key people, who learn from their experience, influence the learning of others, and create an environment of expectations.

Organizational learning culture has found wide expression in the studies in recent decades, examining its effect on job's satisfaction, turnover intention, organizational commitment, organizational performance, organizational learning process, organization leader's impact (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004; Joo & Lim, 2009; Song, Kim, & Kolb, 2009; Hsu, 2009; Hung, Yang, Lien, McLean, & Kuo, 2010; Joo & Park, 2010; Song, Jeung, & Cho, 2011; Emami, Moradi, Idrus, & Almutairi, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, organizational learning culture described both the structural and process dimensions of learning within an organizational context. The analytic framework of the learning organization developed by Watkins and Marsick (2003b) serves as the theoretical basis for this study.

Building a Sustainable Learning Culture

Contemporary organizations meet a high requirement to develop a sustainable learning culture where short term solutions are not the answer to the problem anymore, where leaders encourage organization's capacity of a transformative change, and transform organization into a learning community where people collectively identify problems and work towards finding new ways to solve them (Senge, 2000; Iliško, 2010; Iliško & Badjanova, 2014, Salite et al., 2015; Iliško, 2016). Fargreaves (2005) and Senge (2000) offer to expand and deepen one's understanding about organizational change via sustainability perspective, respectively, by acknowledging all aspects of change – political, economic, social and culture aspects and view this process as complex and chaotic accelerated by the post-modern society. Hardgreaves (2005) understands change in learning organizations as “a complex, paradoxical and chaotic and challenging phenomena” (p. 5). In a post-modern world of diversity, uncertainty and confusion, for the transformative changes to take place one needs creativity, institution and sensitivity. In the process of organizational change towards the aim of sustainable organization, organization needs to develop connections among the purpose of organization, the organizational values, structures, cultures and the lives of employees. Senge (1990) particularly points to a dynamic complexity of a contemporary organization that has a self-organizing capacity to lean from and solve ongoing problems. As Fullan (1993) argues, such learning organizations can easily synthesize opposites and co-exist where this is necessary for the success. Therefore, Senge (1990) and Senge et al. (1994) encourages an organization to learn from the Eastern cultures a greater appreciation of the “interconnectedness of life, processes, community, interdependencies and long term frame” as compared with the emphases of Western culture on separateness, isolation, competition and short time frame planning (p. 565). The most important force in a sustainable learning organization are people themselves who work toward producing results they really want (Senge, 1990). Senge (1990) views sustainable organization as a learning organization where

all the participants have a capacity to learn by creating shared vision, working in teams, and developing system thinking. This requires individuals to see an organization in a process of a dynamic change in a long term perspective.

Research Approach and Sample

The empirical basis of the research was the data obtained from a survey of 529 respondents that was examined in 12 local authorities in Israel. In order to give representation to all types of local authorities, they were taken from all districts: South, Center, North; all types of local government were invited for this study: municipalities, local authorities and regional authorities; all types of the cities were included: large, medium and small belonging to a different socio-economic status index.

For this study, OLC adapted questionnaire with 46 items was used. The dimensions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data analysis consisted of such stages as the adaptation of the constituent parts of a questionnaire, preliminary analysis, which allows formulating research hypotheses and their proofing.

The adaptation of the questionnaire included an analysis of the factorial structure of the questionnaire and an analysis of the suitability of indicators displaying the OLC components.

For the purpose of analyzing the factor structure of the parts of the questionnaire, an exploratory (research) factor analysis was performed that reduces the dimensionality of the phenomenon under consideration, moving from indicators to aggregated indicators and latent variables.

Factor analysis was carried out with the selection of factors by the Extraction method with principal component analysis and subsequent Rotation Method (Varimax-with Kaiser Normalization). Varimax rotation minimizes the number of variables with a high factor load (assuming that others variables have low factor loads). This method is the most commonly used, because it facilitates the interpretation of factors. To assess the results of factor analysis, additional statistical indicators are used. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is used to assess the suitability of the correlation matrix used. If this coefficient is large enough, and the corresponding significance level is small (for example, less than 0.05 or 0.01), this indicates the reliability of the calculation of the correlation matrix. To evaluate the suitability of the elements of the correlation matrix and the possibility of its description using factor analysis, the so-called Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is used.

The processing of the questionnaire was reduced to the calculation of aggregated indicators (secondary data) on the basis of indicators (primary data obtained directly from the survey). Aggregated indicators of the identified factors can be obtained both as a result of calculating the arithmetic average of the respective indicators, and as a result of the exploratory factor analysis. The first option is the simplest from the point of view of implementation, but it does not take into account the differences in the factor loads of individual indicators. In the second variant, on the contrary, the contribution to the allotted factors of all indicators, including those that have small factor loads, is taken into account.

As a result of factor analysis, aggregated estimates of factors have a standardized form (measured on a z-scale). Standard estimates are distributed according to the normal

law with zero mean and unit variance. This is convenient for conducting a comparative analysis of different indicators or the same indicators for different groups of respondents. Standardized values of factors allow researchers to classify respondents for each of the factors, depending on whether they are above or below the average. If the aggregated indicators are obtained as the average values of the corresponding indicators, then their standardization makes sense for better understanding and their subsequent interpretation. The disadvantage of the z-scale is negative and fractional estimates, which can cause difficulties in the qualitative interpretation of the test results. Therefore, special, linear transformation methods for z-estimates are applied to translate them into a set of positive integers.

Internal consistency is a characteristic that reflects the internal consistency of the obtained measurement results. Internal consistency is determined by the connection of each specific element of the questionnaire with the overall result. The extent to which each element conflicts with the others, as far as each individual question measures the direction to which the whole test is directed. To assess the reliability-consistency of the items in the questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used.

In order to classify respondents in the space of the identified factors, a two-stage cluster analysis was carried out. Clusters allocated in the space of OLC factors allows one to classify organizations by the level and structure of OLC. Working with the selected clusters allows one to analyze both the phenomena themselves and the relationships between the various parameters of phenomena at a higher qualitative level. Preliminary data analysis includes descriptive statistics of quantitative data (calculation of mean values of characteristics, mean square deviation, median, quantile function).

The majority of respondents 348 (65.8%) were women, 181 respondents (34.2%) were men, which corresponds to the gender composition of the general population. By level of education, the respondents were distributed as follows: 201 (38%) – VA, 100 (18.9%) – MA, 228 (43.1%) have Matriculation certificate. Position Time: 490 (92,6%) – Full time, 39 (7,4%) – Part time.

The age of respondents varied from 24 to 72 years and half of the respondents were at least 45 years old. The average age for the sample is 45 years. The work experience of respondents from 2 months to 45 years, with an average of 13 years. A quarter of respondents had no more than 5 years of work experience, while the other quarter had not less than 20 years.

Research Results

To analyze the factor structure of the questionnaire in the space of the OLC indicators, a factor analysis was performed. The criterion for the adequacy of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sample of the Sampling Adequacy (KMO) is 0.968, Sig. of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is less than 0.001, which indicates the expediency of using factor analysis to analyze the structure of the questionnaire. According to Organizational Learning Culture dimensions (Watkin & Marsick, 2003b) that included seven dimensions, this research selected 5 dimensions, of which only one matched the original.

Selected factors can be interpreted as employees' inclusion, continuous learning, encouraging leadership, supporting system, proactive learning environment (Table 2).

Table 2
Adaptive Value of an Organizational Learning Culture

Dimension	Definition
Employees inclusion	cultural process that includes the employees of the organization, makes them a part of the organization decision making at all levels and motivates them to contribute to the organization needs and vision. According to Santos et al. (2017) inclusion is a process that refers to all efforts guaranteeing maximum participation of any citizen, in any social arena. Inclusion presupposes the participation of the employees in the definition of priorities and policies (Booth & Ainscow (2011). Inclusion concerns the active seeking and integration of diverse perspectives that employees bring to the team in decision-making process (Li et al., 2015).
Continuous learning	a process that improves and preserves learning within the organization. Continuous learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job (Watkin & Marsick, 2003b). Tannenbaum (1997) defined it as “the process by which individual or organization learning is fostered on an ongoing basis. Ongoing learning is encouraged through an organization’s training policies and practices, rewards systems, etc.” (p. 438). Continuous learning is a process of acquiring and sharing knowledge and skills on a daily basis and applying them to new behaviors (Sessa & London, 2015)
Encouraging leadership	managerial means that encourages and supports employees to take proactive actions towards achieving the goals and vision of the organization. It focuses on the individual’s strength and contributions in order to drive employee motivation and performance to a higher level. When people are encouraged, they feel valued and cared for. Encouraging leadership as a managing process that focuses on the individual resources and potential of employees in order to enhance self-esteem and self- acceptance (Dinkmeyer & Eckstein, 1996)
Supporting system	an organizational environment that provide all necessary tools both in the organizational and the managerial domain in order for the employees to have all needed infrastructure for continuous learning. It is part of routines that facilitate learning and shared understanding (Heraty & Morley, 2008). This system is managed within an infrastructure that promotes and rewards learning. Development of a support system allows improvement interplay between knowledge acquisition and application and knowledge sharing (Kirwan, 2013).
Proactive learning environment	an organizational capability providing the employees with all technical and motivational means that encourages learning. The most significant role of proactive learning environment is to construct a learning ability, which enables anyone to learn anyplace at any time. As the external environment becomes more complex, it has brought with it a realization that organizations need to build a learning environment in order to facilitate learning at work (Heraty & Morley, 2008). A learning environment not only enables learners to access resources and interact with learning systems in any place and at any time, but also actively provides the necessary learning guidance, tools right form (Hwang, 2014).

The total percentage of variance attributable to the identified factors is 56.7%. The Employees' inclusion factor explains 12.8% of the total variance, Continuous learning 12.7%, Encouraging leadership 12.3%, Supporting system 10.9%, Proactive learning environment 7.9%. Cronbach's Alpha for the scales constructed is from 0.829 to 0.894, which indicates their good internal consistency.

Two stage cluster analysis in space OLC factors allowed allocating 4 homogeneous concerning to the considered groups phenomenon – OLC Cluster Group. The distribution of respondents by the corresponding groups is shown in Figure 1. Selected factors can be interpreted as Learning organization, Organization in conflict, Outdated organization, Organization in evolution. 4 types of organizations were found relative to their learning level (Table 3).

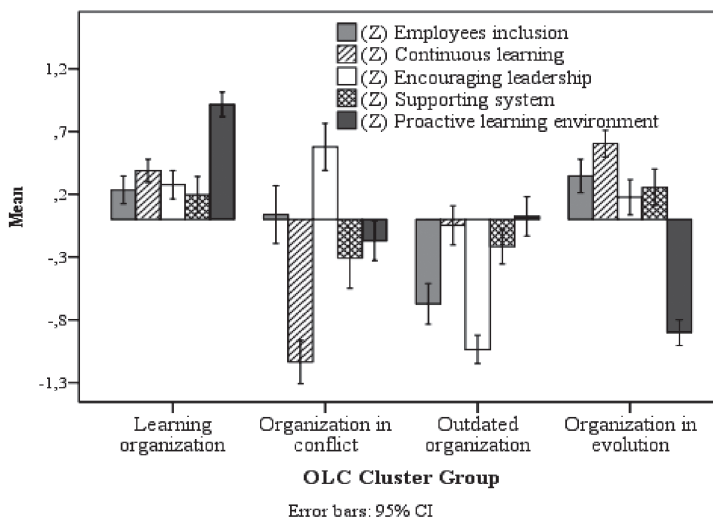


Figure 1. Distribution of organizations by clusters in the space of factors OLC

Table 3
Type of Organizations According to OLC

Dimension	Definition
A learning organization	an organization with constant learning and improvement orientation. The organization and the management provide all the technical and motivational means to connect the employees to the organizational goals and objectives, a process ending with improvement resulting from constant learning. The organization develops learning tools such as information technologies IT, training, sharing and knowledge transfer and “organizational memory”. Management encourages employees to improve and learn, by providing the time and resources required, and by encouraging and rewarding success.
An organization in conflict	is an organization that has long been stagnant although the management is constantly trying (apparently unsuccessfully) to introduce methods of learning and improvement. The organization does not have the tools to enable a learning and constant improvement environ-

Sequel to Table 3 see on the next page.

Sequel to Table 1.

	ment. There are no mechanisms for preservation and sharing of knowledge. Employees are indifferent and do only what is required from them.
Outdated organization	an organization without motivation to improve and study both at the managerial level and at the employee level. Management wants only that employees do what is required of them without initiating change and improvement, without learning and transferring knowledge, without developing tools and providing learning systems. An organization is very reminiscent of the industrial revolution – people are part of a machine – everyone has a role and must not deviate from it. The employees are “robots”.
Organization in evolution	organization in a positive process of learning and improvement. Both the management, the employees, and the stimulating organizational factors all act as a strong vector of learning and improvement. However, the organizational tools that support this have not yet been developed and constitute a barrier to turning the organization into a classic learning organization.

Conclusion

Local authorities in Israel derived their framework from those of the British Mandate in Palestine. After the State of Israel was established in 1948 legislation was made to set the duties and authorities of the local government that include providing local services, such as garbage disposal, road paving and maintenance of public gardens and parks, social services, and establishment of institutions for sports, education, culture and health.

Traditionally, this sector in Israel suffers from some main problems (Cohen, 2016): the excessive influence of the political echelon; labor unions became the key players in the political arena; no professional senior bureaucracy and low motivation of employees; employees are not trained and able to deal with the social-economic changes; has enjoyed high employment protection and premium pay; the system is very concentrated and is multi-procedures, especially notable concentration of the Ministry of Finance.

Due to the fact that municipal employees receive the status of permanent employees, the leadership of the organizations must act to improve efficiency with existing employees without being able to replace them. For this purpose, it is important to create an Organizational Learning Culture that motivates the employees to learn and improve.

This research defined OLC as multifactorial phenomenon and its perception is multidimensional. Factor analysis conducted in this study points to five organizational learning culture dimensions: Employees inclusion, continuous learning, encouraging leadership, supporting system, and proactive learning environment. Those dimensions define the type of organization: A Learning organization, an Organization in conflict, Outdated organization and Organization in evolution. The developed method makes possible to distinguish the factor structure of the phenomenon.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents demonstrate their readiness for OLC implementation, their perception and assessment of how this is applied in the organization may differ. The method allows classifying employees in relation to their organization.

The proposed methodology can be used both to assess the type of organization according to OLC and to build a development plan for improving the organization. The same organization may have employees who see their organization differently in terms of the OLC. It means that access to them and the work plan should be different according to their perception. With the purpose of effective realization of OLC, individual and group work is necessary, depending on at what level of perception the employee is and to which of the clusters belong.

Sustainable organizational learning is not a government directive. These actions are carried out by employees at every opportunity and every day to improve and develop. According to Senge (1994), “without theory, method and tools people cannot develop the new skills and capability required for deep learning” (p. 36). The contribution of the research is that the organizational learning process is an important strategic tool for the organization’s management to increase the involvement and contribution of the organization’s employees to its goals, to increase efficiency, productivity and service quality. The methodology allows local organization to implement self-assessment in terms of effective performance of the OLC and, based on the analysis of the results obtained, develop plans for improvement. The methodology tested in Israeli local authorities can be applied to various public sector organizations in different countries.

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