

**KEY SUCCESSFUL FACTORS OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN  
KAOSHIUNG CITY GOVERNMENT**

**Luke H.C. Hsiao**

Department of Public Policy and Management, I-Shou University  
Taiwan, ROC. Email: ychsiao@isu.edu.tw

**ABSTRACT**

In such a globalization and knowledge economy era in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the core administrative capacity and performance of public organizations depend on public management and the application of public human resources. The development of human resources concept has been changing from training to people performance. Individual performance does not equal to organizational performance; however, individual performance could be transformed into organizational performance by connecting with process based performance. Individual performance depends on the learning in workplaces and the appropriate job adjustment of employees. In this case, public servants should constantly adapt continuing education, while public management should move toward learning organizations so that the local public organizations can develop high competitiveness. Total 600 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the heads of public agencies and the general public servants in Kaohsiung City Government. After deducting 274 invalid ones, total 326 valid copies were retrieved, with the retrieval rate 54.3%. The research findings show that 1. The priority and importance of the five evaluation factors are ranked as learning, people, organization, knowledge, and technology and 2. Learning type presents the total optimal consistency, followed by learning skill, and employees are mostly emphasized. With the research outcomes, this paper expects to provide some conclusions and suggestions to public organizations which try to implement learning organization in the future.

**KEY WORDS**

Public servant; learning organization; organizational performance; public management.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

With the development of lifelong learning and the change of economic globalization, the theories and the practice of organizational learning, learning organization, knowledge management, and human resource management have flourished that the work experiences and the abilities of employees in organizations are affected. All organizations in public sectors cannot avoid such evolution. With the effects of global competition, the different levels of government have engaged in government reinvention to enhance the administrative effectiveness of public agencies. The business-managed style and customer-oriented concept aims to change the poor administrative effectiveness which resulted from traditional bureaucracy and hierarchic organizations in order to reinforce

the service performance of the government operation. Governments are perceived as the different nature of organizations than enterprises in purposes and functions. However, the core administrative capacity and performance of governmental organizations depend on public management and the application of public human resources in the globalization and knowledge-based economy era in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The development of human resources concept has been revolutionized from training to people performance. Individual performance does not stand for organizational performance; but, individual performance can be transformed into organizational performance by connecting with organizational process performance. For individual performance, the learning in workplaces and the appropriate job adjustment of public employees are critical. To have local public agencies develop high competitiveness, Taiwan government initiative in 2000 tended to increase independent learning capability, act performance management, and emphasize operation costs and implement merit principles for learning government and public human resource management. It indicated that public organizations should reinforce, transform and learn for competitive advantages and establish a learning organization with continuous learning, innovation and reformation. Public servants, on the other hand, should constantly accept continuing education; and, public management should move toward learning organization so that local public organizations could develop high competitiveness.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Learning organization

Bennett and O'Brine (1994) indicated that the culture of Learning Organization presented continuous and increasing ability on learning, adaptation and change that the values, policies, training, systems and structures of an organization were utilized for supporting and enhancing the learning of all members in the organization. Moreover, Senge regarded Learning Organization, in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, as an organization with continuous innovation and progress, in which the members could constantly learn how to learn, expand the learning ability, create the desired outcomes, and fulfill the shared vision (Chung, 1996).

Watkins and Marsick (1993) proposed six courses of action for typical learning organization, namely creating chances for continuous learning, enhancing enquiry and dialogues, encouraging cooperation and team learning, establishing the system of acquiring and sharing learning, empowering and facilitating the members to move toward shared visions, and connecting the organization and external environments. Jashapara (1993) also stressed the competitive advantages from learning and considered competitive learning organization as the synonym of learning organization, where competitive learning organization referred to an organization which could continuously adapt to promoting individual, team and organizational learning by satisfying the changeable customer demands, understanding the dynamics of competitors, and encouraging systematic thinking.

Daft (1997) considered learning organization from the aspect of management that managers should apply innovative thinking and establish a new organization with brand-new leadership; besides, the members in an organization should be able to control the problems in the organization and actively solve them so that the organization could

constantly try, reform, reinforce, develop, and learn to achieve the shared objective between the organization and the members. DuFour (1997) indicated that all members in a learning organization could break through individual ability limit, create the desired outcomes, cultivate new and broad thinking, make efforts to achieve the ambition, and continuously learn how to learn together. Based on the construction of learning organization, Goh (1998) developed a strategic learning organizational model which includes the containing, defining and supporting of missions, shared leadership and its investment, encouraging innovative culture, as well as transforming knowledge among organizations and team cooperation.

Clarke (2001) also pointed out the characteristics of learning organization, including team work and learning, cross-organizational culture, shared belief system, individuals, teams and organizations being able to learn from experiences, emphasizing individual, team and organizational learning, encouraging new ideas and approaches, encouraging risk-taking, total empowerment, and each employee being encouraged to express the best performance. Calvert et al. (1994) concluded ten characteristics of learning organization from the survey of 50 practitioners in a business management seminar as the following: 1. It is a collective, open and cross-organizational style learning. 2. The process and the results of learning should be equally emphasized. 3. It can acquire competitive advantages with rapid and intelligence learning. 4. It can rapidly transform information into useful knowledge anytime and anywhere. 5. It allows every employee to make sense the work experiences to learn. 6. The members won't appear fear and defensive attitude and will acquire reward and learning from mistakes. 7. The members undertake the risks but not harm the overall security of the organization. 8. It devotes in experimental and related learning. 9. It supports the individuals or the teams intending action learning. 10. It encourages individuals or teams to share the acquired information and conclusion for learning.

Marquardt and Reynolds (1994) concluded eleven factors in learning organization, as proper structure, learning culture, empowerment, environment detection, knowledge creation and transformation, learning technology, quality, strategy, supportive atmosphere, team and network, and vision. Bennett and O'Brien (1994) proposed twelve factors in supporting the continuous learning of organizations, including strategy and vision, manager performance, management performance, climate, organization and work structure, information flow, individual and team work, work process, performance and target feedback, educational training, individual and team development, and reward and prize, which were expected to affect the learning and the change of an organization. Slater and Narver (1995) believed that an effective organization should present the management structure on enhancing knowledge development. To facilitate a business to transform into a learning organization, five factors were required, namely entrepreneurship, market orientation, organic structure, transformational leadership, and decentralized strategic planning. In spite of that the learning methods were distinct, Wick and Leon (1995) found that such businesses presented some key factors in creating learning organization, such as leaders with definite visions, detailed and measurable plans, rapid information sharing and innovation, and implementation ability. The five factors were considered dispensable; or, the organization might reduce the learning speed and even result in wrong learning.

Marguardt (1996) classified several key success factors in learning organizations in the systems-oriented organization model into five dimensions, namely learning, organization, people, knowledge and technology, which were overlapped (shared) and mutually supportive.

### **2.1.1 Learning**

The sub-systems of learning contain level, type and skill. Learning Level covers individual, team and organization learning. Learning type includes adaptive, anticipatory, and action types; Skill covers five principles of systematic thinking, self-transcendence, mental model, shared vision, and team learning proposed by Senge (1996).

### **2.1.2 Organization**

The sub-systems of organization contain organizational vision, organizational culture, organizational structure and organizational overall strategy. Organizational vision tends to create life community for the organization. Organizational culture encourages team cooperation, innovative knowledge and shared learning experiences among members; Organizational delayering aims to adapt to the competition with shared learning environment. Organization strategy is flexible and correspond to organizational learning and the achievement of organization objective.

### **2.1.3. People**

The sub-systems of people contain managers, employees, customers, strategic alliance partners, organization community and suppliers. Learning organizations should extend learning culture, promote it to the interested groups of the organization, encourage creation and acquisition, share learning experiences and knowledge, and people potential development.

### **2.1.4. Knowledge**

The sub-systems of knowledge cover acquisition, creation, storage and transformation (application) of knowledge. It tends to systematically create new knowledge, classify core innovative knowledge, store and spread new knowledge in knowledge management process, i.e., by collecting valuable information. Once the organization performs its ability, it can maintain the learning outcomes after spatial and temporal changes and the knowledge is still remained inside of the organization.

### **2.1.5. Technology**

The sub-systems of technology include technology-based learning, information technology and electronic performance supportive system. Organizations apply advanced technology to enhance the learning and further promote the effectiveness of learning organization.

Based on the literatures that this paper discussed above, 17 key success factors in learning organization were identified in this paper; and, they were further classified into five dimensions of learning organization for conceptual framework.

## **2.2 Analytic Hierarchy Process**

The hierarchic structure was popularly utilized for evaluating the priority of key successful factors in fields of academic research. Therefore, Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was applied to the statistics of questionnaire survey for the priority among the evaluation indicators.

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), a decision-making method originally developed by Thomas L. Saaty in 1971, became complete in 1980 after continuous applications, modification and tests. The theory of AHP is considered simple, easy operation and being able to acquire opinions from experts and decision-makers that it is practical. Since the introduction of AHP, it has been applied to complex decision-making problems in economy, society and management science (Deng and Tseng, 1989).

The process of AHP could be simplified as describing problems, looking for factors and establishing hierarchic relations, finding the relative importance of decisions in various hierarchies with paired comparison, establishing paired matrices, calculating the eigenvalue and the eigenvector of matrices, and acquiring the priority.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1 Research framework

Based on the literature review, the variables with high significance were organized for the framework of Analytic Hierarchy Process, aiming to discuss the key success factors in Learning Organization (See Figure 1).

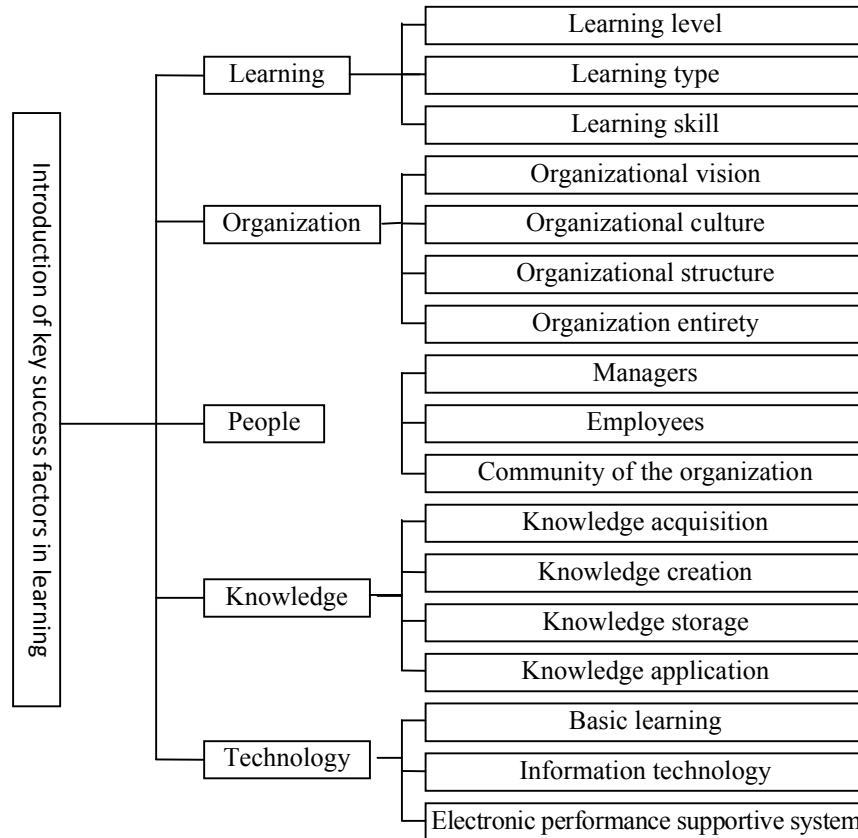


Fig. 1: Research framework

### 3.2 Questionnaire distribution and retrieval

Kaohsiung City, located in southern Taiwan, became the second city with the population over one million in Taiwan in 1975. In order to balance the development of the north and the south, Kaohsiung City was promoted as the second municipality directly under the jurisdiction of the central government on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979. The development of Kaohsiung City has gradually got rid of the destabilization caused by hostility between politics and industries and stepped toward green, ecology, technology, culture and nature. After the county merger on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the green industries of tourism, culture and technology are continuously promoted in Kaohsiung City. With the sunshine and mild climate all the year, the hospitable and passionate people, and the mountains, rivers, sea and harbors, it has been successfully developed into a tourism city with abundant history and culture as well as mountain and sea resources. There are plenty of touring spots worth visiting for unforgettable memories.

Total 600 questionnaires were distributed to the diverse public agency heads and the public servants in Kaohsiung city government. After deleting 274 invalid ones, total 326 copies were retrieved, with the retrieval rate 54.3%.

## 4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Level II evaluation factors in Analytic Hierarchy Process

With the questionnaire survey, the level II evaluation standard in analytic hierarchy process for key success factors in learning organization was obtained. The data were calculated the geometric mean of relative importance in pairs for analytic hierarchy process matrices. The consistency ratio  $C.R. = 0.024 < 0.1$  showed the consistency of decisions among experts. The ranking of priority and importance among the five evaluation factors is listed in Table 1, as learning, people, organization, knowledge and technology.

**Table 1:**  
**Priority of the key success factors in learning organizations**

Priority	Key success factors in learning organizations	
1	Learning	0.296
3	Organization	0.212
2	People	0.243
4	Knowledge	0.145
5	Technology	0.094

### 4.2 Global consistency evaluation in Analytic Hierarchy Process

For acquiring the priority of evaluation indicators, the consistency ratio of the hierarchy (C.R.H.) should be calculated. The result,  $C.R.H. = 0.01372 < 0.1$ , showed the consistency ratio of the hierarchy being acceptable. Table 2 displays the comprehensive consistency, where learning type appeared the highest of all factors, followed by learning skill, and employees was mostly emphasized.

**Table 2:**  
**Priority of global consistency evaluation factors in Analytic Hierarchy Process**

	<b>Level II evaluation factors (hierarchy priority)</b>	<b>Level III evaluation factors (hierarchy priority)</b>	<b>Global priority</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
key success factors in learning organizations C.R.=0.017	Learning (0.296)	Learning level	6.46	9
		Learning type	11.23	1
		Learning skill	10.36	2
	Organization (0.212)	Organizational vision	9.14	4
		Organizational culture	8.26	6
		Organizational structure	3.34	12
		Organization entirety	4.07	10
	People (0.243)	Managers	8.77	5
		Employees	9.82	3
		Community of the organization	0.83	17
	Knowledge (0.145)	Knowledge acquisition	7.91	7
		Knowledge creation	2.33	14
		Knowledge storage	1.19	16
		Knowledge application	3.75	11
	Technology (0.094)	Basic learning	7.41	8
Information technology		3.01	13	
Electronic performance supportive system		2.12	15	

**5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Summing up the data analyses and the research conclusions in this study, several suggestions for practical application are provided for the key success factors in learning organization. The studied ranking appears learning, people, organization, knowledge and technology that learning organization is an organization creating itself with learning and expanding future energy. An organization with learning but not creation is not perceived as a learning organization, but an organization just only for learning. For this reason, a learning organization needs to transform learning into creation. Moreover, the demanding needs of people are multi-levels, which cover from the basic clothing and food, security, sense of belonging to individual values. Once public organization solves the demanding needs of clothing and food, security and sense of belonging, the employees will demand higher level of needs. In this case, public managers should respect and fairly treat public employees, or, they might not work hard. For public organizations, both the development of the organization and employees should be emphasized. When the development of organization, but not employees, is only concerned, public service will likely to be succeed. For public employees, they have to pay attention to both personal and organizational development. As a result, public organizational leaders should lead employees experience the meaning of business operation. A shared vision, as an ideal expectation for the future, shall propose in any public organization. Such an expectation can be discussed and proposed by either leader or employees. Besides, the vision of an organization should be widely understood and memorized within public organization.

Vision presents the expectations share both all members of organization that the public employees could easily find problem solutions for the vision. Nonetheless, without a consistently shared vision, public employees will not take action for enhancing the overall effectiveness of public organization.

#### REFERENCES

1. Bennett, J.K. and O'Brien, M.J. (1994). The building blocks of the learning organization, *Training*, 31(6), 41-49.
2. Calvert, G., Mobley, S. and Marshall, L. (1994). Grasping the learning organization, *Training & Development*, 48(6), 38-43.
3. Chung, Yen-yi (1996). The meaning and the criticism of learning organization theory (I), *Personnel Management*, 33(9), 4-19.
4. Clarke, A. (2001). *Learning organizations: What they are and how to become one*. London: The National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education.
5. Daft, R.L. (1997). *Organization theory and design*, N.Y. West.
6. Deng, Chen-yuan and Tseng, Kuo-hsiung (1989). The content features and the application of Analytic Hierarchy Process. *Journal of the Chinese Statistical Association*, 27(6), 5-22.
7. DuFour, P. (1997). *The school as a learning organization: Recommendations for school improvement*, National Association of Secondary School Principals, NASSP Bulletin: Reston.
8. Goh, S.C. 1998. Toward a learning organization: The strategic building blocks, *Sam Advanced Management Journal*, 63(2), 15-22.
9. Jashapara, A. (1993). The competitive learning organization: A quest for holy grail. *Management Decision*, 31(8), 5-15.
10. Marguardt, M.J. (1996). *Building the Learning Organization: A Systems Approach to Quantum Improvement and Global Success*. N.Y: McGraw-Hill.
11. Marquardt, M.J. and Reynolds, A. (1994). *The Global Learning Organization*, New York: Irwin.
12. Senge, P.M. (1996). Leading learning organizations. *Training and Development*, 50(12), 36-37.
13. Slater, S.F. and Narver, J.C. (1995). Market orientation and the learning organization. *Journal of Marketing*, 59(3), 63-74.
14. Watkins, K.E. and Marsick, V.J. (1993). *Sculpting the learning organization*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
15. Wick, C.W. and Leon, L.S. (1995). From ideas to action: Creating a learning organization. *Human Resource Management*, 34(2), 299-311.