Presentation of a Learning Organization Model in Red Crescent Society of Tehran Province

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Original Article

Abstract

INTRODUCTION: The learning organization model does not exist in the RCS of Tehran province based on knowledge management, innovative organizational culture and quality of work life as an important organization, during disasters, especially the Tehran earthquake. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to present the learning organization model in RCS of Tehran province.

METHODS: This applied research was carried out with grounded theory approach. About 15 academic professors and experts of RCS of Tehran province were selected and studied using purposeful sampling method based on the theoretical saturation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

FINDINGS: In this research, the learning organization with five dimensions and 56 concepts were extracted. The dimensions of the learning organization include gaining experience, feedback and evaluation system, systemic thinking, collaborative and fast learning, creative thinking.

CONCLUSION: According to the results, focusing on gaining experience with regard to the occurrence of disasters is one of the priorities of the RCS. The challenges that the RCS faces at the learning organization are such as repeating the problems of previous disasters in new disasters, failure to use documentation and experiences of previous disasters, early forgetfulness of disasters and long return period of some disasters, failure to transfer field and operational experiences, not learning from the bitter experiences of disasters, infringing and sometimes copying processes without considering operational experiences, lack of expert documentary maker or teams in disasters and finally many disasters and little documentation. RCS can take action to manage these defects by implementing the learning organization model.

Keywords: Learning organization; Red Crescent Society; Gaining experience; System thinking.

Introduction

A learning organization is an organization that takes over and manages all the intellectual power, knowledge and experience of the organization to create change and continuous improvement for development and has the ability to create, acquire and transfer knowledge. In the systematic definition, it is an organization that learns powerfully and collectively and constantly changes itself so that it can collect and use information in a better way. (1)

In fact it calls an organization that has the skill and ability to create and transfer knowledge and modify people's behavior to apply new knowledge and insight. (2)

Alvani et al (2016) has stated that a learning organization learns, changes and transforms its performance over time and is capable of changing behaviors, if an organization seeks progress, it must align itself with new needs and environmental changes, in keeping up with environmental changes; change its structure so that it can at least meet its new needs due to the changes. (3)

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The learning organization shows the concept of organizational change approach and continuous improvement and determines the capacity of change. In today's era, the ability and extent to which organizations can learn and react faster than their competitors emerges as a competitive advantage. (4)

IRCS is part of an international humanitarian relief movement, which has found a unique strategic position due to its role as a government-designated organization in disaster relief. The unpredictability of the time of occurrence, the complexity of a range of hazards, rapid demographic, socio-economic and climatic changes and its harmful effects on the one hand and the need of the constructive and effective role of the RCS in conjunction with the Sendai International Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by 2030 on the other hand has increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the functional processes of the RCS.

From a strategic view, the realization of this transformation depends on the RCS transition from the current situation to a dynamic learning organization. The opportunities and obstacles for the RCS to transition to a learning organization were calculated for further investigation in a structural-mission content analysis based on the ten-year organizational strategy and statutes and reexamining of the lessons learned from its roles in the most prominent national and international missions. (5)

In this study due to the lack of a learning organization model, the researcher seeks to present a learning organization model in the RCS of Tehran.

Methods

In the present study, data was collected step by step by referring to the research literature based on the contents of exploratory interviews. The interview questions were designed and specified in advance as an open answer so that the answers fit into the pre-designed categories. Then, the opinions expert and managers were examined.

Due to the need to comply with health protocols, the interviews were conducted virtually and in some cases face-to-face by complying with the protocol. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation, and then the interviews were implemented and reviewed several times. In the present research, test-retest reliability and intra-subject agreement method were used to calculate the reliability of the interviews.

In order to calculate the retest reliability, 3 interviews were selected among the conducted ones, each of which was coded twice in a 30-day interval by the researcher (Table 1).

Table 1. Calculation of retest reliability

Title of the interview	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Test-retest reliability (%)
S2	64	23	18	72
S4	79	34	11	86
S10	57	25	7	88
Total	200	82	36	82

Table 1 shows that the total number of codes in two time intervals of 15 days is equal to 200, the total number of agreements between codes in these two times is equal to 82, and the total number of non-agreements in these two times is equal to 36. The retest reliability of the interviews conducted in this research using the mentioned formula is equal to 82%. Considering that this reliability rate is more than 60%, the reliability of coding is confirmed.

Inter-coder reliability

In order to calculate the reliability of the interviews with the within-subject agreement method of two coders (evaluators), a PhD student was asked to participate in the research as a colleague (coder); afterwards, the necessary training and techniques for coding the interviews were presented to him, then the number of three interviews was coded and the percentage of agreement within the subject, which is used as a reliability index of the analysis, was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Intra-subject agreement} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements} \times 2}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100\%$$

Table 2. Calculation of reliability between two coders

Title of the interview	Total number of codes	No. of agreements	No. of disagreements	Inter-coder reliability (percentage)
S1	86	37	12	86
S7	67	27	13	81
S13	71	30	11	84
Total	224	94	36	84

Table 3. Interview questions

Row	Questions
1.	What are the constituent elements of a learning organization from your point of view?
2.	What is your definition of a learning organization in the RCS?
3.	How can the constituent factors of the learning organization affect the employees of the RCS from your point of view?
4.	What do you know about the inhibiting and facilitating factors of the learning organization in the RCS?
5.	What are your suggested strategies for implementing a learning organization in the RCS?

Table 4. Primary themes

Basic concepts	Interview text (example of quotes from the interviewees)
Knowledge management for change	It can be expected that the RCS will be a learning organization where everyone will learn powerfully and collectively. In this case, this organization constantly changes itself and collects and uses information in a better way.
Institutionalize the need to learn	Learning should be considered as a constant need of employees and while emphasizing on learning, how to learn, absorb and distribute new knowledge, creating and producing new and needed information and knowledge should be done so that this knowledge is reflected in the behavior and performance of employees.
Enhancing creativity to draw the future	In my opinion, the RCS should continuously develop its capacity to create the future, because only preserving life is not enough, and productive learning seems necessary for the continuation of life.
Transferring experience through knowledge management	The RCS is a powerful, competitive and effective organization and has the ability to produce new knowledge and in this way has gained a lot of experience and is able to transfer its knowledge to solve various issues and problems.
Improving the level of effectiveness in the interaction of systems	The learning organization in the RCS is defined as a set of interconnected systems, and it is natural that the interaction between these systems determines the effectiveness of the organization.
Replacing the culture of collectivism against individualism	Extensive interaction and participation of employees is necessary with the aim of realizing a learning organization. Increasing the skills of conversation and collective thinking will improve the skills and abilities of individual people.
Drawing a vision and carrying out targeted activities	We need to know where we stand and where we are going to get to! If we fail to properly identify our goals, we will undoubtedly fail and we will never be able to properly implement organizational learning.
Implementing strong leadership in order to empower employees	The structure of volunteering in the RCS prioritizes the transition from management to leadership, and organizational leaders take steps to empower their employees and volunteers with the utmost intelligence and strength.
Identification of facilitating factors in the delegation of authority and free flow of information	Mutual trust between human resources, managers and leaders of the organization, learning and the free flow of scientific-experiential information among employees, volunteers and members, task-oriented teams, the competence of the forces to accept more responsibilities and delegation of authority by organizational leaders is easy.
Learning with both scientific and experimental tools	Parallel learning from modern sciences and lived experiences in the work environment is necessary, and efforts should be made to train forces that are sensitive to change. Objective and tangible experiences are one of the best ways to learn in any environment.
Attention to details to achieve big goals	Expressing and examining some small features that ironically lead to the achievement of big goals can show the value of paying attention to small details in learning organizations.
Institutionalizing thinking in innovation and creativity	Dreaming and pursuing dreams step by step that may seem unattainable and even imaginary at first are institutionalized among all levels of a learning organization.
Drawing the future to improve employee motivation	In learning organizations, even in the most difficult situations, hope for the future ripples among leaders, employees, and members of the organization.
Creating an open space for presenting creative and new ideas	The members of the learning organization should be so risk-taking, innovative and self-reliant that they do not fear that their new ideas will not be accepted. This same courage and self-confidence will cause flow.
Employee participation in achieving the organization's goals	In learning organizations, employees and volunteers have the spirit of participation and teamwork and cooperate with other forces as much as they can to advance the goals of the organization
Considering organizational knowledge and experiences	In the learning organization, even failure is used as an efficient tool to improve the knowledge level of the organization, and in the old saying, a wise person will not be bitten twice from the same hole.
Updating processes based on technological progress	Considering the technological advancements of the learning organization, it will always be in the thinking of continuous improvement of the processes, in order to provide more up-to-date and desirable services.
Investigating and evaluating teamwork problems in the organization	Managers try to prevent problems in the organization. It is true that the challenges and problems of teamwork should be minimized, but some problems are worth spending more time and evaluating them in a more detailed way.
Systematic planning for employee promotion	Paying attention to the interests, needs and expectations of employees according to their physical, mental and intellectual conditions; It will make them interested in improving their science and knowledge.
Using indicators for evaluating past accidents	Among the evaluation indicators of the RCS's optimal service provision, the speed in responding and the ability to adapt to critical conditions, so using the experiences of various accidents is a suitable solution to strengthen this indicator.
Institutionalizing innovation in specialized matters	In the learning organization, the creation of knowledge, new awareness, innovation and initiatives is not a specialized work, but a kind of common behavior; RCS is a forward-thinking and knowledge-creating organization where people are creative and innovative, and thinking, collective discussions, and the discovery of new ideas and thoughts are encouraged and innovators are nurtured.
Learning according to organizational culture	Each organization must develop a structure that best fits its human resources, background, skills, technology, mission, and organizational culture, and then develop the appropriate learning style and structure.
Existence of common ideals as motivation for learning	Specific goals are defined in the RCS statutes, and the movement of employees on the track of these goals will cause a group effort to improve the level of knowledge.
Developing targeted plans to realize the learning organization	Organizations do not become learners by chance, and this requires planning and targeted efforts in an organization like the RCS
Changing the structure to align with globalization	With its traditional structure, the RCS does not have the necessary strength and flexibility for globalization, and in order to survive, it has to change its structure or equip itself with tools to cope with global changes.
Determining appropriate evaluation indicators in the learning process	In order to increase the effectiveness of the learning organization, among the existing norms, it is necessary to determine appropriate indicators in the continuous evaluation of learning processes.
Accelerating cooperative learning	The family structure of the RCS as an opportunity in critical and short times of accidents and disasters will accelerate the learning process among employees.
Learning from events and lived experiences	The RCS intelligently learns to show and change different behaviors in front of different subjects, and as changes are made, it also learns.
Group learning will achieve international standards	The format of group work in the RCS accelerates and facilitates learning and will lead to the formation of an organization that conforms to global standards.
Organized planning to improve the level of motivation	In order to improve the learning level of employees and members, the structure and administrative organization of the RCS should pave the infrastructure in order to motivate learning.
Evaluating the growth and development of employees according to the structure-oriented training	Staff training guidelines should be compiled and implemented in a structured manner and evaluated after the training process of staff development and growth.
Learning will lead to organizational excellence	The culture of learning and teaching in the RCS will create a culture of excellence in this organization.
The feedback of the incentive system in learning improves motivation	The incentive system (material and spiritual) will be effective in the process of learning and improving the work-personal skills of RCS employees.
Using the experience of employees in various fields	Empowerment and delegation are indicators that can indirectly encourage employees to learn and acquire new and different experiences.
The necessity of continuous evaluation of indicators	If we evaluate indicators such as effectiveness, impact, choice, value, trust and security among employees annually, we will realize the necessity of a learning organization.
Participation in the management process to improve the level of motivation	It is clear that the participation of employees, members and volunteers in the decision-making process of the population will increase the motivation to learn.
Learning based on transparency in job	The clearer the description of the duties of the employees, the more the personnel will try to learn skills and knowledge.

descriptions	
Using experiences to overcome challenges	In organizations where the knowledge management system has been implemented, we will witness the creativity and agility of employees in facing issues and challenges.
Assessing the talent of employees continuously	Prepare a list of employees who are interested in learning and creative regularly (for example, every six months).
Evaluation and identification of employee talents	An information bank of talents of employees and volunteers should be established and their knowledge and talents should be used for organizational productivity when necessary.
Learning through teamwork and transfer of experience	In the RCS, knowledge and experience in carrying out activities is transferred informally and based on the attendance records of employees in operations.
Competency assessment, the context of creating new patterns	If worthy employees and volunteers are identified and introduced, it can be expected that new patterns will emerge in the organization.
Evaluating the effectiveness of employee training	The learning process of the employees is aligned with the objectives of the RCS after the analysis of the outputs, rewards or salaries and benefits are paid.
Evaluating the competence of employees	To achieve a learning organization, merit selection and meritocracy will be calculated under the organizational culture and will be presented as a leader in the crisis management process.
Feedback based on process transparency	If the criteria and coefficients of the vertical and horizontal promotion charts are clear, the employees will also try to reach them.
Organizational atmosphere to improve the level of learning	Employees consider themselves as members of the organization's family, so that they can step in sync with the goal of personal growth and advancing organizational goals.
Effective communication for the development of knowledge and experience	If the components of the organization update themselves continuously and regularly in relation to each other, we can expect the growth of experience and knowledge
Taking advantage of experiences	It is natural that if the methods learned from the implementation of ideas are documented, successful and failed ideas will be encouraged with various mechanisms and experiences will be transferred in full transparency.
Collaborative learning	The learning organizations in the RCS will facilitate the fields of learning by using various scientific and experimental capacities in the volunteers.
Using previous knowledge and experiences	Collecting and studying the history of RCS activities in the past years can prevent mistakes from happening again.
Technical and critical look at operations to improve organizational knowledge	Reviewing, evaluating and publishing the results of the operations will improve the level of knowledge of employees, members and volunteers.
Collaborative management to enhance learning	Definitely, applying collaborative management skills will be a turning point in the learning of the entire organization.
Scientific meritocracy based on knowledge	Paying attention to the value of human resources by focusing on scientific and experimental competence creates motivation for learning in the population personnel
Systemic view to the learning organization	Investing in the scientific and experimental improvement of employees reduces the costs caused by crises.
Creativity, knowledge management & teamwork	The learning organization in RCS is known for its creativity, knowledge management and working group in crises.
Crisis management using the learning organization	Considering the simultaneous realization of the knowledge life cycle (production and collection, distribution, analysis, storage and application of knowledge), the learning organization can take advantage of opportunities and eliminate crises.

Table 5. Results of basic themes, organizers and dimensions

Overarching themes of dimensions	Component organizer themes	Basic themes of indicators
Gaining experience	Knowledge management	Knowledge management for change/technical and critical look at operations to improve organizational knowledge/learning from events and lived experiences transferring experience through knowledge management
	Application of experiences	using experiences to overcome challenges/applying previous knowledge and experiences/taking advantage of experiences/using the experience of employees in various fields/effective communication to grow knowledge and experience
	Gaining scientific & practical experience	learning with both scientific and experimental tools/considering organizational knowledge and experiences/organizational atmosphere to improve the level of learning/crisis management using the learning organization
Feedback & evaluation system	Feedback analysis system	Feedback based on transparency of processes/the feedback of the incentive system in learning improves motivation/identification of facilitating factors in the delegation of authority and free flow of information
	Compilation of employee evaluation indicators	Determining appropriate evaluation indicators in the learning process/using indicators for evaluating past accidents/ the necessity of continuous evaluation of indicators
	Periodic & continuous evaluation	Evaluation and identification of employee talents/evaluation of competences in the context of creating new patterns /evaluating the growth and development of employees according to the structure of training/examining and evaluating teamwork problems in the organization/assessing the talent of employees on a continuous basis/ employee competency assessment/evaluating the effectiveness of employee training
Systematic thinking	Strategic foresight	Drawing a vision and carrying out targeted activities/system planning for employee promotion/ formulating targeted plans to realize the learning organization/organized planning to improve the level of motivation/ mapping the future to improve employee motivation
	System approach	Institutionalizing the need to learn/learning based on transparency in job description/improving the effectiveness level in interaction of systems/ systemic approach to the learning organization/implementation of powerful leadership in line with employee empowerment/scientific meritocracy based on knowledge
Collaborative and fast learning	Participation in learning	collaborative management to enhance learning/employee participation in achieving the organization's goals/group learning/accelerating cooperative learning/participation in the management process to improve level of motivation
	Group learning	Group learning to obtain international standards/replacing the culture of collectivism against individualism/ learning according to organizational culture/learning for organizational excellence/ changing the structure to align with globalization/ learning through teamwork and transfer of experience/existence of common ideals as motivation for learning
Creative Thinking	Strengthen thinking in affairs and creativity	Enhancing creativity to draw the future/institutionalizing thinking in innovation and creativity/ creating an open space in presenting creative and new ideas/creativity, knowledge management and teamwork/ updating processes based on technological progress/institutionalizing innovation in specialized matters/ attention to details to achieve big goals

Findings

According to Table 2, the total number of codes is 224, the total number of agreements between these codes is 94, and the total number of disagreements between these codes is 26. Reliability between coders for interviews conducted using the mentioned formula is equal to 84%. Considering that this reliability rate is more than 60%, the reliability of the coding is confirmed and can be claimed that it is appropriate. By reviewing the data collected from the research text (theoretical basis) and in-depth interviews, the researcher identified and named their hidden concepts at this stage.

First stage: basic themes

In this stage, the collected materials were written in a table in two stages and suitable titles were chosen for each of them. The first stage was done by the researcher himself and the second stage was done by one of the expert and opinionated people, then the common titles were fixed and the different titles were modified; in this stage 56 primary codes were extracted. (Table 4)

Second stage: organizing themes

At this stage, the researcher compared the primary codes and did the task of categorizing and receiving the components by discovering the relationship between the common areas. In this step, 11 core codes (components) were identified in the form of 56 items. (Table 5)

Third stage: overarching themes

In this stage, the researcher focused on the strength of the concepts and components, considering the previous stages, and in a more general category, the common features of the outstanding components from the previous stages were identified and organized in a more general and limited category due to the commonalities. In this step, 56 items were categorized in 5 dimensions in the form of 11 components.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, the learning organization was introduced with five dimensions after examining the interviews of the experts and specialists in the form of 56 basic themes (indices) such as: experience gathering, feedback and evaluation system, systemic thinking, collaborative and fast learning, creative thinking.

Due to the occurrence of accidents and disasters, the focus of gaining experience is one of the priorities of the RCS. There are challenges that the RCS faces at the level of the learning organization, which can be solved by implementing the learning organization model including repeating the problems of previous disasters and accidents in new ones, failure to use documentation and experiences of previous disasters, premature forgetting of disasters and the long return period of some disasters, failure to transfer field and operational experiences and not learning from the bitter experiences of disasters, infringing and sometimes copying processes without considering operational experiences, lack of expert documentary makers or documentation teams in disasters and accidents, occurrence of many disasters and little documentation.

At the structural and organizational level, the challenges that must be considered for the successful implementation of knowledge management in the disaster risk management structure are such as: the idea of temporary management, absence or lack of specialized knowledge about the assigned management task, the governance of a work culture that demands quick results, the governance of the culture of fostering and admiring showcase work, ignoring the future in aid and operational organizations, precedence of political, party and group interests over organizational interests, employees' lack of familiarity with documentation, lack of specific and practical standards and software for recording information, unfamiliarity with effective methods of documenting experiences, lack of relatively accurate criteria for valuation and choosing valuable experiences, not asking operational managers, hiding experiences from newly arrived managers, lack of documentation guidelines especially in the operations department.

In the following, these items should be included in the agenda, including: establishment of the National Organization of Crisis Documents at the macro level for operations or a deputy in the crisis management organization and comprehensive documentation of operations (the existence of an information system that is responsible for providing, retrieving, analyzing and using appropriate information to varying degrees in the crisis management department), documenting the experiences of managers and operational forces with qualitative research such as autobiography, action research, phenomenology, documentation of organizational documents and activities by creating a documentation unit in all operational

organizations (using effective data recording software and evaluating data quality regarding data collection and recording, also collecting and managing data and turning it into useful information is the basis of a successful planning in all stages before, during and after the operation), suggesting the implementation of research projects in order to formulate guidelines, checklists and in general all components of gathering documentation of operations from needs assessment to termination, preparation of documentation instructions and conducting documentation courses and taking examples from successful organizations in the field of documentation, such as the war education headquarters and also evaluation of documentation software and documentation methods based on existing scenarios (6&7).

Among the problems and challenges that must be considered in the lower layers, the following can be listed: the existence of informal organizations to support the manager and as a result not providing clear reports, fear of being reprimanded and creating media scandals due to providing a clear and accurate report, political fringes, lack of critical discourse, lack of communication between the university and operational organizations, lack of evaluation and analysis reference system, emotional discourse and early forgetting of disasters, individual exclusivity of documentation of previous experiences, lack of discourse to analyze and refine experiences, failure to hold post-operation analysis sessions, lack of researchers in the field of operations and communication with operational teams, lack of national and international publication of aid organizations' reports, imitative educational system, innate lack of desire to write, lack of belief in historical review, common sense and having a passive system against disasters (8&9). In order to manage these challenges, it is suggested to identify propulsion and uncertainties in a prospective study and implement scenarios for the successful implementation of learning organizations in organizations related to crisis management. (10&11)

According to the results of the statistical analysis, gaining experience is effective in creating a learning organization in the RCS of Tehran province, and this result is consistent with the research literature and the view of Peter Senge, who mentions it as an effective factor in creating a learning organization.

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