

Relationship between Learning Organization and Employee Engagement: A Study of Higher Education Institutions in Peshawar, KP

SHABANA GUL

Assistant Professor, Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar- Pakistan.

Email: shabana.gul@imsciences.edu.pk

SHEHZAD WAHEED

Research Scholar, Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar- Pakistan.

Email: shehzad_shins@hotmail.com

ALAM SHER

Research Assistant, Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar- Pakistan.

Email: alamsher136@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper focuses on analyzing the relationship between learning organization and employee engagement in the education sector. Data was collected from a sample of 221 faculty members of HEIs in Peshawar, Pakistan. Pearson Coefficient correlation analysis was used for analysis, the result of which suggested a significant relationship between learning organization and employee engagement. The study provides insights into how faculty members will be more committed and involved if they are given a culture of learning and support, where they feel valued.

Keywords: Learning Organization, Employee Engagement, Higher Education Institution.

Introduction

It is generally believed that the fundamental role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is to generate new knowledge and share the already existing knowledge. However, over time these roles have considerably changed due to two key revolutions. During the first academic revolution, institutions that were formed initially for the sole purpose of teaching, added development of knowledge and research to their roles (Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2018). Later, economic development and corporation were added to their duties during the second academic revolution (Schmitz, Teza, Dandolini and De Souza, 2014). HEIs have been associated with knowledge management since their creation, and the three major tasks of universities today, which are education, research, and their service to society, are strictly connected to sharing of knowledge, creation of knowledge and transmission of knowledge (Alexandropoulou, Angelis and Mavri, 2009). HEIs play a critical role in developing economies that are based on knowledge (Secundo, Margherita, Elia & Passiante, 2010). HEIs are considered grounds for the building of intellectual capacity for the creation and application of knowledge. They also promote different techniques for learning in order to keep people's knowledge and skillset updated. However, since HEIs exist in both a compelling and unstable environment they have to not only react but also adapt quickly to fluctuations in their surroundings (Bates, 1997; Levine, 2000; Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2006).

Organizations need to participate in learning and sharing to transform themselves into learning organizations (LO) to thrive in the 21st century. Learning and continuous transformation are facilitated by

LO (Senge, 1990). Pedler, Boydell, & Burgoyne, (1989) suggested that LO's "facilitate the learning of all its members and consciously transforms itself and its context". Their contribution help focus attention on the notion of a continuous learning environment, self-development of all organizational members and the institution of a reward system that fostered and valued personal contributions to the collective cause. Senge (1990) identified five distinct "disciplines" comprising shared vision, team learning, systems thinking, personal mastery, and mental models that reinforce what he called the LO. Organizations do not tangibly transform into LO in one go but rather it is a process. For learning to occur, individuals must also take responsibility while facing personal transformation. Providing a fostering environment to fulfill human needs will boost learning. The development of LO tests employees and groups, to use their cognition, creativity, learning ability, knowledge conversion and constant professional development (Dawood, Mammona, Fahmeeda & Ahmed, 2015). The organization values, practices, systems, structures, policies affect learning for each employee (Bennett and O'Brien, 1994). Wishart, Elam, & Robey (1996) advocated that for securing the capability for continual learning, first of all, the organization's structures and processes should be able to both encourage and support learning. Several academics have lately shown interest in whether HEIs at present are LO's, and if they should develop or not and if they do, how can they become one (Nazari and Pihie, 2012; Nejad, Abbaszadeh, Hassani & Bernousi, 2012). Örtenblad & Koris (2014) believe this is an essential subject, particularly because it is frequently thought those organizations whose fundamental purpose is to create and educate such as universities, colleges and schools should certainly become LOs. By meeting the standards of being a LO, universities should be able to respond to tensions and challenges in their environment. Quite a few researchers have suggested that HEIs should be LO in this ever-increasing international competition (White & Weathersby, 2005; Strandli Portfelt, 2006).

According to Thomas (2009) organizations need a responsible workforce who for accomplishing their purpose and mission can face any challenge. It is the collective responsibility of the employees to fulfill their organization's mission. Organizations whose workforce is committed and engaged will be successful ones in the future. Such organizations look carefully into employee engagement because they know it would result in creativity, better customer satisfaction, more production and an overall better reputation and image for the organization (Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017). When employees are involved, they tend to innovate and bring about opportunities to implement them with continuous assistance from the culture of a learning organization. Employees that are aware that their organization's culture is committed to learning, they lean more towards having discretionary efforts and display a proactive behavior (Park et al., 2014). Thus, for employee's work engagement, the organization's support is important, which can be done via knowledge sharing, continuous learning, social interaction among employees and empowerment (Park et al., 2014). Employee Engagement is considered an essential component of the Learning Organization. This phenomenon is extensively studied in Banking, Health and Information Technology sectors. However, very limited research is available about the role of Employee Engagement in the Learning Organization in the Higher Education sector. Given the extensive structural and policy changes introduced by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan, the transformation of HEI as a Learning Organization has been on the tables for a while. This study aims to examine the relationship between Learning Organization and Employee Engagement in HEIs of Peshawar, KPK.

Learning Organization

The concept of learning organization started to emerge after the Second World War. The history of LO's could be traced back to organizational approaches like action learning, individual self-development, and organizational development. During 1965, the term "Organizational Learning" was added to the dictionary of management by Cangelosi & Dill (1965). Rapidly increasing competition, changes in technology, new methods of work, mergers, globalization, financial constraints and reorganizations emphasized learning and adaptation as a key to survival (McCarthy, 1997). These events, according to McCarthy (1997) required continuous improvements from organizations and their people, which is the fundamental feature of a learning organization.

Learning Organizations (LO) have been defined from several viewpoints e.g. Senge (1990), considered LO as Organizations, where employees are continuously expanding their capacities for creating, will result in what they wish, new and more expansive patterns of understanding are nurtured, and where aspirations are set free, and where employees are constantly learning how to learn. The focus of Senge (1990) was employee's capacity whereas Goh (2001), considered LO from organizational perspective and defined LO as organizations that focus on clarity, and providing support in its mission and vision, collaborations, encouraging experimentation, and being able to transform knowledge across boundaries to lead to teamwork and harmony. Rowden (2001), emphasized employee's involvement as the defining factor of LO and advocated that organizations where all members are involved in problem-solving, experimentation, change, improving their capacity, will both learn and achieve their true purpose are LO. Moilanen (2005), definition is aligned with Goh (2001) definition as he considers LO as Organizations where learning is considered important in terms of its goals, vision, values in their day to day operations.

In the backdrop of the given definitions, this study defines Learning Organization as an organization that continuously expands the capacity of their employees to acquire, create and transfer knowledge, where a culture of tolerance, collaboration and support is fostered, where the thought process is holistic and systematic.

Distinction between Organizational Learning and Learning Organization

Organizational learning and learning organization are similar but different concepts despite being used as a substitute for one another. According to Popper & Lipshitz (1998), every organization has a process of learning which they develop by learning from experience or strategic choice. Therefore organization learning is an event that is present in every organization. But it doesn't mean that the learning style of every organization is the same. While learning organization is a particular kind or type of organization, which has some specific characteristics and elements that enable it to survive in a highly dynamic environment to learn and adapt (DiBella, 1995). According to Schein (1997) learning organization is when the organization learns as a whole system while organization learning is the learning of its members. The distinction is made more precise by Tsang (1997) as he explained; learning organization is a special form of the organization itself while organization learning describes an activity or action within an organization.

Employee Engagement

Engagement in common usage refers to absorption, dedication, energy, enthusiasm, focused effort and passion. In 1920s studies were conducted on a set of people's willingness to complete organizational goals, which gave birth to Employee engagement. The concept was further developed by researchers during World War Two when the US Army would predict battle readiness and unity of effort before strikes. Post-war, during the era of mass production, morale was indicated as an important factor for speed and quality. In modern times with the introduction of knowledge workers, talent management of individuals was given more emphasis and a term was needed to describe the attachment of these individuals to their organizations and jobs. Hence the term 'employee engagement' came into being (Siddhanta & Roy, 2010). According to Chandel (2018) employee engagement promotes integrating an individual to his job and organization with the help of financial rewards and other sources of satisfaction which reinforces a behavior of commitment. Engaged employees will exhibit some emotion, behavior, and absorption while performing their tasks and duties in their organization. These associations reflect that throughout the history of management, employee engagement was present (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Employee engagement as a term was used for the first time in a journal, "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) defined that unique construct of employee engagement as "personal engagement/disengagement a harnessing of the individuals' selves within work role contexts manifesting in physical, cognitive and emotional role performances or an uncoupling of the selves causing withdrawal, and the individual will then defend

him/herself physically, cognitively or emotionally while performing the work roles”. Mathieu (2005) looked at employee engagement as an experience of authority and responsibility. Shimazu & Schaufeli (2009) considered it as a concept that is guided by a worker’s personal and job resources predicts their mental, physical, behavior and performance. Bakker & Demerouti (2008) focused on the benefits of employee engagement as supported the idea that engaged employees are passionate and have a sense of affection with their work activities, which enables them to meet better the requirements of jobs they work on. For this study employee engagement is considered as a concept where an employee is engaged in their work physically, emotionally and cognitively.

In the given background this study attempted to analyze the relationship between learning organization and employee engagement in HEIs. The study followed the following theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship.

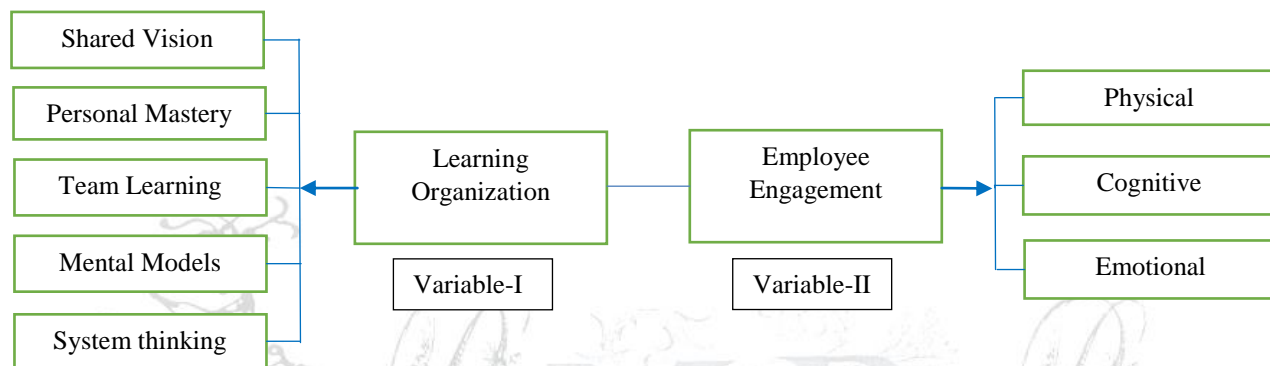


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Methodology

Public and private HEIs recognized by HEC in Peshawar was the population of the study, whereas data was collected from permanent faculty members of the sampled HEIs. The following table provides comprehensive details about the methods used for the study

Table-1: Overview of Research Methods

Research Methods		Description
Population and Sampling	Population	Public and private HEIs recognized by HEC in Peshawar
	Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 03 Public Sector HEIs • 03 Private Sector HEI • n = 221 permanent faculty
	Sampling Technique	Simple Random Sampling
Data Collection Instrument	Learning organization	34 items scale developed by Park (2008)
	Employee Engagement	18 items scale by Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010)
	Distributed Questionnaires	300
	Received Questionnaires	221
	Response Percentage	74%

Data Analysis

Confidentiality of HEIs was maintained throughout the study's process i.e. from data collection, to analysis and results. For the purpose, public sector HEI were labeled as HEI 1 to 3 and private sector HEIs were marked as HEIs 4 to 6. The following table prove a comprehensive view of the respondents of the study;

Table-2: Respondents Details

Response Category	Category/ Sectors	Frequency	Percentage
HEIs Response	Public Sector	137	62%
	Private Sector	84	38%
Respondents Designation	Lecturer	98	44.3%
	Asst. Prof	81	36.7%
	Assc. Prof	34	34%
	Professor	08	3.6%
Respondents Gender	Male	146	66%
	Female	75	34%
Respondents Age	22 – 30 years	52	24%
	31 – 40 years	104	47%
	41 – 50 years	46	21%
	50 and above	19	9%

The following table shows that LO and EE have a linear and statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.01$). The strength and magnitude of the association is also high ($r = .685$).

Table-3: Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1
1. Learning Organizations	3.5520	.63129	
2. Employee Engagement	3.8338	.67779	.685**
			.000
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table-4 shows all the dimensions of LO and employee engagement have a positive and significant relationship with each other.

Table-4: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrix

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Personal Mastery	3.539	.8345							
2. Mental Models	3.579	.7423	.685**						
3. Shared Vision	3.523	.7560	.671**	.658**					
4. Team Learning	3.533	.6761	.611**	.643**	.675**				
5. System Thinking	3.585	.6928	.617**	.663**	.689**	.674**			
6. Physical Engagement	3.831	.7995	.520**	.439**	.471**	.437**	.461**		
7. Emotional Engagement	3.861	.7571	.442**	.415**	.442**	.492**	.466**	.695**	
8. Cognitive Engagement	3.810	.7149	.441**	.396**	.480**	.503**	.491**	.714**	.696**
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									

The result in table-5, shows a positive and significant relationship between the Learning Organization and Employee Engagement when the data was divided on the bases of gender. For males, with R-value being .681 shows the correlation between the two variables with Sig. = .000 ($P < 0.01$). And For females, the R-

value is .472 and shows a correlation between the two variables with Sig. = .000 ($P < 0.01$). On the basis of Age, Learning Organization and Employee Engagement have a strong and positive association as well. Similarly, a positive and significant relationship exists between the Learning Organization and Employee Engagement on the basis of designation as well.

Table-5: Significance of Demographic Variables

Category		Number	R-Value	Significance
Gender	Male	146	.681	.000
	Female	75	.472	.000
Age	22-30 years	52	.484	.000
	31-40 years	104	.636	.000
	41-50 years	46	.604	.000
	50 and above	19	.816	.000
Designation	Lecturer	98	.610	.000
	Asst. Prof.	81	.565	.000
	Assoc. Prof.	34	.710	.000
	Professor	8	.745	.034

Five dimensions of Learning Organization (Physical Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision, Team Learning and System Thinking) were compared with three variables of Employee Engagement (Physical Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement) separately on the basis of Gender, Age and Designation. Personal Mastery has a positive and significant association with all three variables of Employee Engagement in terms of gender, age and designation. Mental models have a positive relationship with all variables of Employee Engagement but show some insignificant results in the subcategories of gender, age and designation. Shared Vision is positive with Employee Engagement with some insignificance in the subcategories of demographics. Team Work again is positive with some exceptions in the demographics variables. Lastly System Thinking also has a significant association with Physical, Emotional and Cognitive Engagement along with some insignificance in the few of the demographics.

Discussion and Recommendations

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between Learning Organization and Employee Engagement. The findings of the study indicate a strong and positive relationship between LO and Employee Engagement. These findings are in line with the study of Kuvaas & Dysvik (2010), who found that organizations that are focused on developing their employees' skill and provide them a learning environment, generates a learning attitude in their employees which in turn influences employee engagement. In this study, personal mastery shows a positive response with Physical, Emotional and Cognitive engagement, which means that HEIs that care about an individual faculty's capacity and personal growth will have its faculty emotionally stable, excited and focused on their jobs. This would enable them to make better choices about their career development and continuous learning. Mental models show a positive relationship with Physical, Emotional and Cognitive engagement, indicating that those HEIs having a culture of sharing views, open dialogues and respect for each other's perspectives, will have faculty members who are energetic, flexible and concentrated on their jobs. The shared vision indicates a strong association with Physical, Emotional and Cognitive engagement which means that those HEIs where goals, visions and missions are planned and created with participation from its members, will have active and focused faculty, who will also share their personal vision with that of the organization. Team learning indicates a positive and significant relationship with Physical, emotional and cognitive engagement. An HEI that encourages teamwork activities and group projects will have its faculty actively involved in collaborative work with concentration and enthusiasm. System thinking also displays a strong positive association with physical, emotional and cognitive engagement which suggests, those HEIs that during their process of change work with regards to their environment and their stakeholders' interest, will have a

workforce more available, motivated and satisfied with their jobs. Moreover, from the analysis of variables with demographics, it is evident that factors such as gender, age and designation might affect the level of engagement and employee's relationship with the organization. Female faculty show a medium relation as compared to the male faculty who show a more significant and strong level of engagement with their institutions. Young faculty members show a less significant association than the aged groups while the factor of designation show a small difference in the engagement of the junior faculty positions with that of senior faculty positions.

The findings of the study add significant implications to the existing literature on Learning Organization and Employee Engagement in HEIs setting. The study specifically looks at the five different dimensions of Learning Organization and explores which has the most effect on the variables of Employee Engagement. The results from this study also support the Demand-Resource model which highlights that in order to generate employee engagement, knowledge-intensive firms should provide the required resources and support to them (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The study provides manual to the education sector especially HEIs to emphasize more on involving the faculty, providing a learning and supporting system will enhance the overall performance of the institution. The study supports the difference in concerns of each faculty on the basis of their gender, age, and designation, for this reason, therefore, all faculty members should not be dealt in a single and general way. In academics, employee engagement is particularly necessary since the faculty is involved in a cycle of continuous teaching and research studies. It is difficult and challenging to replace the experience, skills, and knowledge of trained and developed personnel. Therefore, retention of faculty members is essential as without engaged faculty, academic institutions cannot achieve quality and sustainability. Employee engagement is a continuous and long term process that requires frequent interaction between the employee and organization to create mutual dependency. Administration of HEIs should actively communicate with their workers and make them a part of the core team when formulating strategies and goals.

The Final Word

There are certain limitations to the study that must be taken into account. For instance, a self-administered questionnaire for all the variables causes social desirability which could be reduced by using a mixed approach with a qualitative study. Both public and private sector universities were dealt in the same way which we know are administered differently, suggesting a difference in culture. The study also recommends conducting comparative studies across universities from different sectors located in other countries for more generalized results. The findings of this study imply that HEIs should strive towards a culture where continuous learning, development of employees, knowledge sharing, system thinking, teamwork, shared decision making is supported, encouraged and rewarded. In such a collaborative environment, faculty members would work with more interest and enthusiasm where they feel valued and engaged. Further, the difference in the interests and perceptions of employees should be kept in mind. The interests of males might differ from those of females. Similarly, senior faculty might have concerns different than those of the junior faculty. Hence, each employee working in any given organization should be handled separately.

References

- Alexandropoulou, D.A., Angelis, V.A. and Mavri, M., (2009). Knowledge management and higher education: present state and future trends. *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning*, 5(1), pp.96-106.
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E., (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career development international*, 13(3), pp. 209-223.
- Bates, T., (1997). Restructuring the University for Technological Change. *Murdoch University*.
- Bennett, J.K. and O'Brien, M.J., (1994). The Building Blocks of the Learning Organization. *Training*, 31(6), p.41.

- Cangelosi, V.E. and Dill, W.R., (1965). Organizational learning: Observations toward a theory. *Administrative science quarterly*, pp.175-203.
- Chandel, P. (2018). The evolution of employee engagement: a unique construct.
- Dagher, G.K., Chapa, O. and Junaid, N., (2015). The historical evolution of employee engagement and self-efficacy constructs. *Journal of Management History*, 21(2), pp. 232-256.
- Dawood, S., Fahmeeda, M. and Ahmed, A., (2015). Learning organization: Conceptual and theoretical overview. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 2(4), pp.93-98.
- DiBella, A.J., (1995), August. Developing Learning Organizations: A Matter of Perspective. In *Academy of Management proceedings* (Vol. 1995, No. 1, pp. 287-290). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management.
- Friedman, H.H. and Kass-Shraibman, F., (2017). What it takes to be a superior college president: Transform your institution into a learning organization. *The Learning Organization*, 24(5), pp. 286-297.
- Goh, S.C., (2001). The learning organization: an empirical test of a normative perspective. *International Journal Organization Theory and Behavior*, 4(3-4), pp.329-355.
- Kahn, W.A., (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of management journal*, 33(4), pp.692-724.
- Kuvaas, B. and Dysvik, A., (2010). Exploring alternative relationships between perceived investment in employee development, perceived supervisor support and employee outcomes. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 20(2), pp.138-156.
- Levine, A.E., (2000). The future of colleges: 9 inevitable changes. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 47(9), pp.B10-B10.
- McCarthy, D. G. (1997). *The loyalty link: how loyal employees create loyal customers*. Wiley.
- Middlehurst, R. and Woodfield, S., (2007). Responding to the internationalisation agenda: implications for institutional strategy.
- Moilanen, R. (2005). Diagnosing and measuring learning organizations. *The Learning Organization*.
- Nazari, K. and Pihie, Z.A.L., (2012). Assessing learning organization dimensions and demographic factors in technical and vocational colleges in Iran. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(3).
- Nejad, B.A., Abbaszadeh, M.M.S., Hassani, M. and Bernousi, I., (2012). Study of the entrepreneurship in universities as learning organization based on Senge model. *International Education Studies*, 5(1), pp.67-77.
- Örtenblad, A. and Koris, R., (2014). Is the learning organization idea relevant to higher educational institutions? A literature review and a "multi-stakeholder contingency approach". *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(2), pp. 173-214.
- Park, J.H., (2008). Validation of Senge's learning organization model with teachers of vocational high schools at the Seoul Megalopolis. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 9(3), pp.270-284.
- Park, Y.K., Song, J.H., Yoon, S.W. and Kim, J., (2014). Learning organization and innovative behavior: The mediating effect of work engagement. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 38(1-2), pp.75-94.
- Pedler, M., Boydell, T. and Burgoyne, J., (1989). The learning company. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 11(2), pp.91-101.
- Popper, M. and Lipshitz, R., (1998). Organizational learning mechanisms: A structural and cultural approach to organizational learning. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 34(2), pp.161-179.
- Ramjeawon, P.V. and Rowley, J., (2018). Knowledge management in higher education institutions in Mauritius. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 32(7), pp. 1319-1332.
- Rich, B.L., Lepine, J.A. and Crawford, E.R., (2010). Job engagement: Antecedents and effects on job performance. *Academy of management journal*, 53(3), pp.617-635.
- Rowden, R. W. (2001). The learning organization and strategic change. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 66(3), 11.
- Schein, E. H. (1997). Organizational learning as cognitive re-definition: Coercive persuasion revisited. *Society for Organizational Learning*.

- Schmitz, A., Teza, P., Dandolini, G.A. and de Souza, J.A., (2014). Universities as knowledge intensive business services—a systematic literature review and a case study of a research group. *International Journal of Engineering and Innovative Technology*, 3(7), pp.40-47.
- Secundo, G., Margherita, A., Elia, G. and Passiante, G., (2010). Intangible assets in higher education and research: mission, performance or both?. *Journal of intellectual capital*. 11(2), pp. 140-157.
- Senge, P., (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. London: Century Business.
- Senge, P.M., (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Currency.
- Shimazu, A. and Schaufeli, W.B., (2009). Towards a positive occupational health psychology: The case of work engagement. *Japanese Journal of Stress Science*, 24(3), pp.181-187.
- Shuck, B. and Wollard, K., (2010). Employee engagement and HRD: A seminal review of the foundations. *Human resource development review*, 9(1), pp.89-110.
- Siddhanta, A. and Roy, D., (2010). Employee engagement engaging the 21st century workforce.
- Strandli Portfelt, I., (2006). *The University; A Learning Organization?: An Illuminative Review Based on System Theory* (Doctoral dissertation, Institutionen för utbildningsvetenskap).
- Thomas, K.W., (2009). *Intrinsic motivation at work: What really drives employee engagement*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Tsang, E.W., (1997). Organizational learning and the learning organization: a dichotomy between descriptive and prescriptive research. *Human relations*, 50(1), pp.73-89.
- White, J. and Weathersby, R., (2005). Can universities become true learning organizations?. *The learning organization*, 12(3), pp. 292-298.
- Wishart, N.A., Elam, J.J. and Robey, D., (1996). Redrawing the portrait of a learning organization: Inside Knight-Ridder, Inc. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 10(1), pp.7-20.

