

Building the Learning Organization

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Abstract:

In the corporate world, the behaviors of a firm's past are important, but not to the point of forgetting the future and its new lessons. Followers of the behaviorist school speak of "incremental learning"[1] which consists of not forgetting the behaviors of the past, but updating them by new lessons learned from new experiences. We see it as a way of initiating the organization to seize the learning opportunities available to it on an ongoing basis, so that it becomes a learning organization. For many companies, they don't know how to become a learner. Even worse, they don't even know they can learn. In our present article, first, we will explain in detail the concept of the learning firm. Afterwards, we will present the process to become a learning company. And finally, we will expose the prerequisites that a company must have to become a learner. Our modest article is a first step in building the learning company.

Keywords: Organizational learning, knowledge management, the learning company, learning capacity

1. Introduction

In the context of the third millennium, the firm faces several problems. Namely, competition from international firms, lack of internal skills, insufficient liquidity ... etc. This may jeopardize the life of the company. To summarize the situation, the world is changing and the firm must adapt to it and evolve according to new circumstances. But, faced with the change of the environment, there are organizations that resist more than others. There are also companies that move beyond crisis periods faster than others. And there are also teams that can solve problems easily than others. Why do the former manage to change easily with their environment? How do they do it? Is this due to the individuals who compose them or to modes of organization and interaction between individuals? Indeed, we live in a world where the rules of the competition game are constantly changing. An era where the intangible (knowledge and know-how ... etc.) becomes more important than what is tangible (machines, buildings... etc.) for all firms. Where managers recognize the skills and experiences of their employees as a source of wealth and competitive advantage, which must be capitalized. Because, even if a company recruits all the individuals with all the knowledge and skills necessary and sufficient for the exercise of its activity, while they are not implemented in a collective decision-making process, it will not be able to have an advantageous competitive positioning. It is this ability to harmonize and match all individual knowledge and skills that makes the firm more resilient and responsive to its environment. We are talking about a company that learns.

Undoubtedly, the performance of a company depends more and more on its ability to make accessible to its employees all the knowledge and know-how (explicit/tacit, individual / collective), which rarely remain shared within the organization, in order to ensure individual and collective learning. Moreover, the ability of organizations to develop forms of learning is now considered an essential resource offering a leading competitive advantage[2]. In this regard, the learning company must promote the sharing of all

knowledge and know-how between individuals in order to build a shared vision that gives meaning to collective action by building a bridge between individual perceptions and the representation of organizational objectives[3]. Thus, in a learning company, it is not enough to have competent individuals, but it is the whole organization that must be competent and managed as a system in continuous learning that evolves because it is able to learn[4]. Hence the imperative of the existence of an internal organizational context conducive to learning. This can only be achieved through the implementation of skills development and knowledge management strategies within the company. This will allow the company to increase its individual learning capabilities and capitalize on previously acquired knowledge in order to continuously adapt to a constantly changing environment. It will eventually become a learning company. But how? This is the major equation that many business leaders do not know how to solve. And this is what we will try to clarify in our article. Thus, in our present article, in the first place, we will explain in detail the notion of the learning firm. Afterwards, we will present the process to become a learning company. And finally, we will expose the prerequisites that a company must have to become a learner. Our modest article is a first step in building the learning company.

2. The concept of the learning enterprise

Trying to give a clear, precise and unique definition to the learning organization is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Because there are as many definitions as there are authors who have dealt with the subject. Nevertheless, we will limit ourselves in this work to mentioning those that encompass all the notions related to the concept of the learning enterprise. Indeed, Larbi Hanane[5] considers that "the integrative firm, learning with a cognitive dimension, [is] the one whose components are in continuous learning to bridge the gap between their current line of conduct and their daily application ... [and] its manager's brave barriers and pitfalls to improve its [learning] capacity... ». Indeed, according to the author, the firm for it to be a learner, it must be flexible encouraging the permanent sharing of knowledge and experiences between its individuals in order to better face new problematic situations. Thus, it will develop its capacity to strengthen and consolidate its organizational knowledge. As a result, it will become different from the traditional firm. For his part, Mr. Peter Senge[6] considers that learning organisations are those "... whose members can constantly develop their capacities to achieve the results they seek, where new ways of thinking are developed, where collective aspirations are not hindered, where people are constantly learning how to learn together". While Mr. David Garvin[7] considers that the learning organization is "... an organization that has a competence to create, acquire and transfer knowledge and to modify its behavior according to its new knowledge and visions".

For us, the learning firm is an organization that always seeks to improve by learning lessons from the past to achieve desired results. It is an organization that acts on individual and collective behaviors to be at the speed of the evolution of its environment. This environment is constantly changing, and most often against organizations' strategic projections and forecasts. Add to that, the technologies that change at an increasing speed which makes the company lose all technical knowledge since it must learn how new technologies work. The only element that remains stable in the company is the human resource. It is the only factor that can differentiate between organizations that are undergoing the same contextual changes. Thus, to be or become more flexible and efficient, and to always be ahead, the company must act on this human factor that can transform the mistakes of the past into learning opportunities. He can

even anticipate the uncertain future and be able to develop his ability to learn in the face of the vagaries of the environment.

3. How should the organization learn?

To learn, the firm must have the ability to question itself, to ask itself "who do we want to be?" and to know its employees "who are they today? And who do they want to be tomorrow?" and above all it must learn to win "WITH" its competitors. What makes intra-competitive cooperation is one of the most effective solutions for learning.

3.1 Overcoming intra-firm barriers

If the industrial era has instilled in firms certain practices on which they have been based until today, the era of the 3rd Millennium, that of knowledge and knowledge[8], encourages organizations to act differently. Indeed, the technique of fragmentation, which allowed the resolution of problems by dissecting them into several parts before gathering the sub-solutions, does not seem to satisfy managers. This is why Peter Senge[9] sees things differently through systems thinking. For knowledge remains the set of several pieces of information, and it cannot be said that a problem is definitively solved if it is not treated as a whole. However, the reality is that today's firms do not have all the knowledge. Hence the importance of seeing the concept of intra-firm and inter-firm competition from another angle. Previously, showing ignorance or ignorance was considered a weakness. This pushes the company to act alone in the face of problems. Believing that it learns and advances, but in reality it regresses. But learning or even expressing one's willingness to learn, implicitly recognizes that one does not know everything, and no one can claim to know everything or hold absolute universal knowledge. Firms that have grasped the true meaning of cooperation today work according to the concept of "coopetition" instead of competition.

But it is not enough for firms to be aware of this for "coopetition" to bear fruit. If individuals in a firm, seen as sources and means of learning, are not sufficiently aware and motivated to cooperate with their counterparts in competing firms, the firm cannot learn from the experience of others. This is why we must not limit the autonomy of individuals by preventing them from working with others externally. On the other hand, cooperation with them must be encouraged in order to stimulate their responsiveness and their spirit of creativity and initiative. The hoarding of knowledge, meanwhile, the first enemy of sharing, is no longer a topical concept in this^{3rd} millennium. The real wealth of all firms (small, medium or large, national, multinational or interterritorial...) now lies in "relationships based on trust" and that each brings its added value.

3.2 The comprehensive firm[10]

If we consider that the only way for a company to learn is through its employees, we can say that the company's ability to learn depends on the ability of its employees to understand, assimilate, learn and interact. As such, it must know and understand its employees well. Who are they? Where do they come from? What do they know how to do? What motivates them? What are their ambitions for the future? Etc. According to Steven R. Coley[11] "a responsible organization is an organization in which individuals have the knowledge, competence, desire and opportunity to succeed personally in a way that leads to the collective success of the organization." As a result, the success of the firm cannot take place

without that of individuals, and its learning as well. And the only way to do that is to help them achieve their goals so they can achieve theirs. Hence the interest of motivation.

La plupart des psychologues et sociologues, notamment Don Edward Beck[12], JaakPanksepp[13] et Agnès Lauras-Petit[14], se sont mis d'accord sur les principaux moteurs de la motivation, à savoir : la peur et le désir[15]. « La peur de perdre ce que l'on a et le désir de ce que l'on n'a pas encore ». Partant de ce constat, nous avons fait un rapprochement entre les deux facteurs suscités et la théorie de la motivation selon la pyramide de Maslow. En effet, les gens qui ont peur pour leur vie (personnelle, familiale) sont les plus motivés pour garantir leur minimum vital, et ce n'est qu'après que ce minimum soit assuré qu'ils vont exprimer le désir de vouloir davantage, en cherchant par-là le confort physique. Ensuite, et par peur de perdre leurs possessions (biens, statut social, pouvoir ...), ils se sentent motivés pour assurer leur pérennité. Après, ils cherchent à vivre dans le confort matériel. Après quoi, ils visent leur liberté physique et intellectuelle (se déplacer, s'exprimer, penser, croire ...), qu'ils cherchent à conserver et à protéger par la suite afin d'arriver au confort émotionnel. Et ce n'est qu'à ce stade que l'individu prenne considération des notions de valeurs, d'éthique et de culture et confronte les siennes avec celles de la firme dans laquelle il travaille, en cherchant ainsi son confort moral.

Throughout this process of understanding employees, the firm must not neglect an important factor, which is the development of the personal skills of all individuals. Because they all have the permanent need to ensure their employability and improve their ability to adapt with the change of their environment. This requires the firm to continuously guarantee development opportunities for all employees while ensuring the achievement of its strategic objectives. This can be problematic, because in some cases, the leaders themselves do not know what they want to do in the medium term.

3.3 How to learn differently ?

From the definitions of the learning firm advanced above, it can be seen that becoming a learning organization is not an easy process, otherwise all firms would be. On the other hand, if any project has a beginning, that of the learning company is to reconsider its human resources. We have shown that the firm can only learn through its individuals. However, in the individual, it is not only his labor power that he uses mechanically (Taylorism), but a brain with which he thinks and which is the real tool of his work. Because even for the execution of mechanical, repetitive and simple tasks (Taylor's OST[16]), there is behind a cognitive work that commands these tasks. This means that, regardless of the individual and the manual work he performs, there is behind a battery of neurons that interact to do the work. Thus, the brain is the engine of all work done. Thus, the firm must act on the neurons of its employees by stimulating and encouraging them in order to modify their way of thinking to become creative and innovative. As a result, the firm will have used a new method to learn.

4. The prerequisites for becoming a learning company

A learning company is one that seeks to adapt to its environment in order to maintain and then increase its competitiveness. This is why she is aware of the fact that the best way to overcome environmental disturbances is to prevent with a good future-oriented skills management strategy and the implementation of a knowledge management approach.

4.1 At the organizational level

Before embarking on a GPEC or KM approach, the company must be able to carry out these two projects. She must know herself first, know what she is able to do and how she does it. This is why it must first establish its management map.

Indeed, the mapping of the management of the company is "a matrix constituted by the roles, responsibilities and processes necessary for the activities of the company on the one hand, and the positions on the other hand"[17]. It is a question of listing in a grid all the functions necessary for the survival of the firm on the one hand, and the related positions on the other hand. Through this matrix, the firm can define the "sub-mappings" or the "integrated maps", namely, that of human resources, technological resources, intellectual resources and financial resources. This mapping is a preliminary step to any action that aims at the learning of the firm. Because it helps to draw up a general inventory of the knowledge, skills, technological means and financial structure existing within the firm. This gives an idea of the actions to be taken to ensure the desired learning (for example: new knowledge to acquire, skills to develop ... etc.). But this does not prevent this mapping from being established at any time during the activity in order to be able to control the development of resources (intellectual, human, technological and financial) that must meet the requirements of strategic objectives.

4.2 Knowledge Management Plan

Pour que l'entreprise puisse apprendre, il faut qu'elle acquière sans cesse de nouvelles connaissances. Or, il s'agit de ressources qu'il faut gérer et capitaliser. D'où l'importance de la « gestion des connaissances ». Ce management des connaissances commence d'abord par quantifier les connaissances disponibles avant d'aller chercher d'autres nouvelles. C'est un concept à plusieurs définitions selon les auteurs qu'ils l'ont abordé. En effet, Jean-Yves Prax[18] considère le KM comme étant une approche qui tente de manager des items aussi divers que les pensées, les idées, les intuitions pratiques et les expériences émises par des gens dans l'exercice de leur profession. C'est aussi un processus de création, d'enrichissement, de capitalisation et de diffusion des savoirs qui implique tous les acteurs de l'organisation, en tant que consommateur et producteur. Le KM suppose, selon le même auteur, que la connaissance soit capturée là où elle est créée, partagée par les hommes et finalement appliquée à un processus de l'entreprise. Le Club Informatique des Grandes Entreprises Françaises, CIGREF[19], quant à lui, définit le KM comme un ensemble de modes d'organisation et de technologies visant à créer, collecter, organiser, stocker, diffuser, utiliser et transférer la connaissance dans l'entreprise, matérialisée par des documents internes et externes, mais aussi sous forme de capital intellectuel et d'expérience détenus par les collaborateurs ou les experts d'un domaine.

Mr. René-Charles Tisseyre[20], summarized the KM in a conscious, coordinated and operational management of all the information, knowledge and know-how of the members of an organization at the service of this organization. As for Mr. Gilles Balmissé[21], gives us a broader definition. According to him, knowledge management is an approach to managing the knowledge and know-how held by employees, customers, suppliers and partners in order to help the company achieve its growth objectives and remain competitive. However, it is not a question of managing knowledge from time to time and in a partial way, it is a permanent process throughout the life of the company, and it concerns the two forms of knowledge, explicit and tacit, defined by Polanyi[22].

As far as we are concerned, we will adopt the definition of Mr. Larbi Hanane[23]. He considers that the KM is "a set of consciously coordinated managerial activities and practices, anchored in a strategic

vision and assisted by social and technological tools or models to manage knowledge well according to a living and global approach to learning and skills development, involving all the actors of the firm. They are concerned, each in his business, by the socialization, capitalization, sharing and fruiting of knowledge to develop the firm and / or create value". This definition seems interesting to us because it includes the dimension of organizational learning and skills development, which are the objective of our research.

Furthermore, knowledge management is a multifaceted process, involving all activities aimed at disseminating knowledge in the enterprise. The KM is not interested in all the so-called structured information of the company such as customer files, accounting, logistics... etc., but rather seeks to integrate all the unstructured information that remains tacit among employees, in a context of concretization and systematic exploitation. One of the peculiarities of the knowledge management approach is that everyone has already practiced it without knowing it, at least informally. There is therefore nothing new except the grouping of these activities under the unifying concept of Knowledge Management. It is therefore not a revolution but an evolution.

Implementing this approach is not an easy practice. Indeed, the definition of a knowledge management strategy requires a global approach to the organization and its intellectual capital. Because it is a long-term approach, conducted with a strategic will that requires a perfect analysis of the nature of the company's knowledge and know-how, to lead to the establishment of an adapted knowledge management "system", based on procedures, methodologies and tools.

Table 1: Phases of Implementing a Knowledge Management Approach

Phase	Description
Startup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a dynamic around KM - Identify KM object pilot services
State of play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify existing ways of storing and transmitting knowledge
Identification of key resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define a mapping of the company's knowledge - Spot who knows what?
Capitalizing on knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collect, filter, sort and formalize knowledge in order to make it a repository - Use the SECI capitalization model of Nonaka and Takeuchi[24]
Dissemination and exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making what has been capitalized accessible - Encourage individuals with good communication

Source : Produced by Professor Adil EL HARRAK

4.3 At the level of communities of practice: towards collective learning

According to Etienne Wenger [25], communities of practice "...are groups of people who express a concern, a set of problems or a passion for a subject and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this field by interacting on an ongoing basis. ". Thus, communities of practice, through the pooling of individual knowledge, the sharing of personal experiences and good organizational practices, can either create new knowledge, and at this time they are called "epistemic communities", or develop new practices for the benefit of their firms, and in this case they are called "communities of strategic and innovative practices" or "communities of operational excellence" when they are formed by experts [26]. Organizing the company in the form of communities of practice is an effective technique when you want to develop cross-functional cooperation that goes beyond hierarchical compartmentalization or when the company is part of a continuous innovation process.

In the context of learning organizations, these communities of practice, also called learning communities [27]. They constitute a source of organizational learning by using the technique of socialization [28], by sharing knowledge and experiences on a given problem or by helping each other to face a new situation. Communities of practice give meaning to their collaboration, the final object of which is collective learning, despite their belonging to the same organization [29]. The most illustrative example of is the cluster or "industrial district" of Silicon Valley. Indeed, Silicon Valley is considered the archetype of the high-tech cluster. There are twelve fields of expertise [30] supported by communities of practice.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that in an increasingly changing environment, characterized by strong competition, organizational learning is becoming a requirement for any company wishing to maintain and strengthen its competitive position. Indeed, developing the learning capacities of a company comes down to developing those of individuals in the first place. Because it is he who constitutes the group and subsequently the entire company. Thus, the model we have proposed for a company to become a learning company focuses primarily on the characteristics of the learning company. It must review its mode of operation and its traditional organization chart towards a more flexible structure that promotes sharing and learning. Thus, organizational learning is a key process for firms that stimulates innovation. In this sense, the process of setting up a learning company must be considered as a real business project involving all internal employees. Without neglecting the managerial aspect, which plays a decisive role in the success of such a project.

Finally, it seems obvious that competition is the determining factor that could encourage companies to learn. However, to embark on the path of learning, the company must think about the development of the learning capacities of these individuals and the establishment of an organizational culture that promotes learning and encourages individuals to borrow the path of the quest for new knowledge. This is what we will explore in our next article.

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