



## HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN LEARNING ORGANIZATION

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**Abstract.** This paper draws on prior exploration on human resource development in a learning organization, including theories about a learning organization, its features, human resource development and learning styles in organizations. The main aim of this paper is to explore human resource development and learning styles in organizations. The author introduces results of the survey covering 37 Lithuanian organizations selected from various industries ranging from a newspaper and transportation, insurance and radio station, to those in trade and manure production. The research shows that mostly explored organizations have a formalized approach to learning and has only a few features of a learning organization.

**Keywords:** human resource development, learning organization, learning styles, Lithuania.

### 1. Introduction

The scale of current economic and social change, the process of globalization, the rapid transition to a knowledge-based society and demographic pressure resulting from an ageing population in Europe are all challenges which demand a new approach to education and training, within the framework of a learning organization and its human resource development. Knowledge and skills of employees are to be constantly developed in order to be in line with changes, information flow, and new technologies.

A changing environment means that all employees must embrace the philosophy of learning. The goal of learning is for employees to master the knowledge, skills, and behaviours emphasized in human resource development programs and to apply them to their day-to-day activities. It has been acknowledged recently that to gain a competitive advantage, training has to involve more than just basic skill development. A learning organization is a company that has an enhanced capacity to learn, adapt, and change, and embraces the culture

of lifelong learning, enabling all employees to continually acquire and share knowledge (Gephart *et al* 1996; Solomon 1994; Thornburg 1994).

The objective of this paper is to explore human resource development particularities and learning styles in organizations.

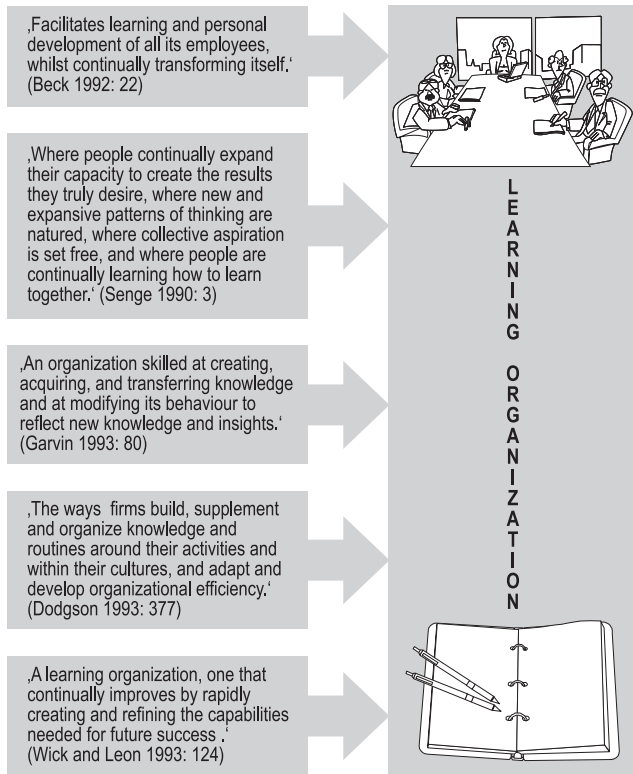
Methods of the research are analysis and synthesis of the scientific literature and empirical research covering 37 Lithuanian companies.

This paper is organized as follows. Firstly, it shows theories of a learning organization concept and its features. Secondly, human resource development and its importance are provided, types of different learning are introduced and particularities of human resource development in an organization are given. Then, results of empirical research about learning styles and possibilities to become learning organizations in Lithuania are shown. Finally, the conclusion about findings, their implementation and connection with the theory are presented.

## 2. Theoretical background

### Definitions and features of a learning organization.

Several definitions and frameworks of a learning organization have been offered throughout the history. The different definitions of a learning organization are given in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Examples of Definitions of a Learning Organization  
*Source: Author*

According to Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1991) a learning company can be thought of as a ‘vision of what might be possible’. Authors state that this can only happen as a result of learning on a total organizational level.

The nature of a learning organization is defined by Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1989, 1991) and Burgoyne (1992) as: ‘An organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself’ (Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell 1991: 9), and is described by Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1989: 3–4) as one, which:

- ‘Has a climate in which individual members are encouraged to learn and to develop their full potential...
- Extends this learning culture to include customers, suppliers and other significant holders wherever possible...

- Make human resource development strategy central to business policy so that the process of individual and organizational learning becomes a major business activity.
- A continuous process of organizational transformation harnessing the fruits of individual learning to make fundamental changes in assumptions, goals, norms and operating procedures on the basis of the internal drive to self-direction and not reactively to external pressures.’

The definitions reveal that a company engaged in improvement processes and which attempts to build in these mechanisms, is not necessarily a learning organization. The essential features in provided definitions of a learning organization appear in Table 1. These elements are, of course, considerably generalized but they nevertheless give an idea of which processes should occur in an organization.

**Table 1.** Key features of a learning organization

Feature	Description
Continuous learning and improvements	Employees share learning with each other and use a job as a basis for applying and creating knowledge.
Knowledge Generation and Sharing	Systems are developed for creating, capturing, and sharing knowledge
Systematic changes	Employees are encouraged to think in new ways, see relationships and feedback loops, and test assumptions.
Learning Culture	Learning is rewarded, promoted, and supported by managers and company objectives
Encouragement of Flexibility and Experimentation	Employees are free to take risks, innovate, explore new ideas, try new processes, and develop new products and services.
Valuing of Employees	System and environment focus on ensuring the development and well-being of every employee.

*Source: Author*

A learning organization that emphasizes knowledge management and training is seen as one part of a system designed to create intellectual capital. In a learning organization training processes are carefully scrutinized and aligned with the company goals. It should be noticed that the essence of the idea of a learning organization is not training, but self-development. A learning organization emphasizes that learning occurs not only

at the individual – employee level (as we traditionally think of learning), but also at group and organizational levels. If the company aims to place itself in such a position, it needs to have a process by which the organization as a whole changes its methods, practices and procedures and by these means transforms itself into a learning organization (Burgoyne 1992). It shows the importance of human resource development.

### **The importance of human resource development**

Nadler coined the term human resource development (HRD) in 1970 and offered a model with three components: training, education, and development (Nadler and Nadler 1991). Much of the published literature on the definition of the field has been focused in the west – originally, in the United States (Weinberger 1998) and, increasingly, in Europe. However, human resource development is a discipline that is more developed in Western industrialized countries than in the rest of the world. Therefore, defining HRD is not easy and up till now not a single point of the view or framework of HRD has been predominant (Dilworth 2003). Weinberger (1998) explored different HRD definitions in the United States and concluded that there is no single agreement on the definition of the field and that HRD is rather a mosaic of multiple perspectives.

For example Pace *et al.* (1991) describes HRD as the individual development, career development, and organization development roles to achieve maximum productivity, quality, opportunity, and fulfilment for organization members as they work to accomplish the goals of the organization. According to Kumpikaite (2004) Human Resource development is a process, covering training of new employees, their adaptation, professional development, re-skilling, career development and reserve formation, in order to improve and develop personal and team work performance, having combined organizational and personal employees' objectives and needs, and allowing employees continually develop, in this way achieving the best possible results of the organization.

The purposes for development fall into two major areas – (1) the organization and (2) the individual – but these need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is desirable that they could overlap, but no attempt should be made to force that relationship. For an organization, there can be several purposes for development. An important one is that organizations are continually changing, and it is not always possible to know the direction in advance.

Traditionally, most of the emphasis on development has been at the basic and advanced skill levels. However, it is recognized that many jobs require extensive use of knowledge, particularly as a result of technological change (Pfeffer 1997). This requires employees to share knowledge and use it creatively to modify a product or serve a customer, as well as to understand the service or product-development system. The use of multimedia, the World Wide Web, and other new technologies will increase in the future for several reasons. First, the cost of these technologies will decrease. Second, companies can use technology to better prepare employees to service customers and generate business. Third, use of these new technologies can substantially reduce training costs (e.g., travel, food, housing) related to bringing geographically dispersed employees to one central training location. Fourth, these technologies allow trainers to build into training many of the desirable features of the learning environment (e.g., practice, feedback, reinforcement). Fifth, as companies employ more contingent employees (e.g., part-timers, consultants) who may not work in a central geographic area, technology will allow training to be delivered to these employees in a timely, effective manner (Noe 2005).

To become a successful learning organization, companies may be required not only to place a greater emphasis on training but also to change human resource management systems to support learning. Accordingly, it was decided to carry out the research to find out the approach to learning and development in Lithuanian companies and their possibilities to become learning organizations.

### **3. Research design**

The study draws on qualitative and quantitative analysis of interviews, conducted to highlight the approach to training and development in Lithuanian companies. Barham's (1999) description about different learning approaches was used for this survey.

Organizations exhibit three different approaches to training and development (T&D) (Barham 1999):

- Fragmented.
- Formalized.
- Focused.

All these three approaches are described below in this paper. The first one is *fragmented approach to learning and development*. Under the fragmented approach, training and development are peripheral rather than in-

trinsic to the organization. Training (in so far as it takes place at all) is:

- Not linked to organizational strategies and goals;
- Perceived as a cost, not an investment, or even a luxury and waste of time;
- Non-systematic;
- Directive (participants have little to say about the training they are given);
- Carried out by trainers and takes place in the training department;
- Concerned with knowledge-based courses.

Under the fragmented approach, training and development are peripheral rather than intrinsic to the organization. Many organisations are still in the fragmented phase. The focus here is on *training* (a discontinuous process) rather than *development* (a continuous process). The organization takes little responsibility for training and expects little in return. Training courses are not linked to organizational objectives and are 'offered' by the training department to the organization (if a training department exists). A common problem is that what learning individuals might experience on the course is rarely implemented back at work. Sending the occasional manager on a team working training program may produce little tangible benefit.

The second one is *a formalized approach to T&D*. Under the formalized approach, organizations adopt a more systematic approach to training and development. Training:

- Becomes linked to human resource needs;
- Becomes more systematic (perhaps by linking it to an appraisal);
- Still emphasizes knowledge-based courses, but widens the focus on including skills-based programs;
- Is linked to individuals' career development;
- Is carried out by trainers (but the range of skill demands on trainers widens);
- Involves line managers through their role as an appraiser;
- Attempts to link training to the workplace through pre- and post-course activities.

This approach is described as formalized because training is linked into organizational systems, which ensure that training activity takes place with some regularity. Individual training needs are identified through appraisal interviews and their manager then directs individuals toward training courses. So, while there is recognition of individuals' varying training needs, there may be little freedom of choice.

Another problem is appraisals becoming an annual ritual or chore. Managers often dwell on easy issues and do not touch on areas requiring improvement and development. Even though there may be a large investment in training (perhaps with a large training centre and staff), training is still not the organization bloodstream.

And the last one is *a focused approach to T & D*. Some organizations have become concerned to link organizational and individual needs more directly and make training and development a continuous activity. Under this focused approach, training and development become intrinsic to the organization. The main characteristics are:

- Training & development and continuous learning by individuals are perceived as necessary for organizational survival in a rapidly changing business environment;
- Training is regarded as a competitive weapon;
- Learning is linked to organizational strategy and individual goals;
- The emphasis is on through-the-job development, so learning becomes a continuous activity;
- There is greater willingness to use new approaches (e.g., open distance learning, self-development programs, etc.);
- Training is self-selected;
- The main responsibility of training now rests with line managers;
- There is a new emphasis on learning as a process;
- The organization tolerates some failure as a part of the learning process.

The emphasis in the focused phase moves away from training to personal development. Training and development are driven both by the organization strategic goals and individual need. It represents a switch from a teacher- to a learner-centred approach, from an emphasis on 'training' to 'learning'. Relatively few organizations would claim they have reached such a truly focused approach.

#### 4. Analysis of the results

Analysis of a learning approach according to Barham (1999) in Lithuanian organizations was carried out in 37 companies. 10 enterprises were manufacturing, 19 trade companies and 8 providing services (e.g. a radio station, newspaper, customs intermediaries, training centre, and transport enterprises). Managers of Human resource development department of organizations took part in this poll.

An interview has been made for this research. 1–6 questions are designed to find out different approaches (the fragmented, the formalized or the focused (Barham 1999) to training and development in an organization. The 7<sup>th</sup> question is asking about learning organization concept implementation in reviewed organizations (Table 2). The score ‘1’ means fragmented approach, ‘2’ – formalized approach and ‘3’ – focused approach to learning in 1–6<sup>th</sup> questions ‘0’ means that the concept of a learning organization is not implemented and ‘1’ means that this concept is started to actualize in organization (question No 7).

**Table 2.** Statistics

	No 1	No 2	No 3	No 4	No 5	No 6	No 7
Valid	36	35	35	32	34	32	37
Mis-sing	1	2	2	5	3	5	0
Mean	1.64	2.20	1.83	2.50	2.06	2.22	.32
Min score	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Max score	3	3	3	3	3	3	1

Source: Author

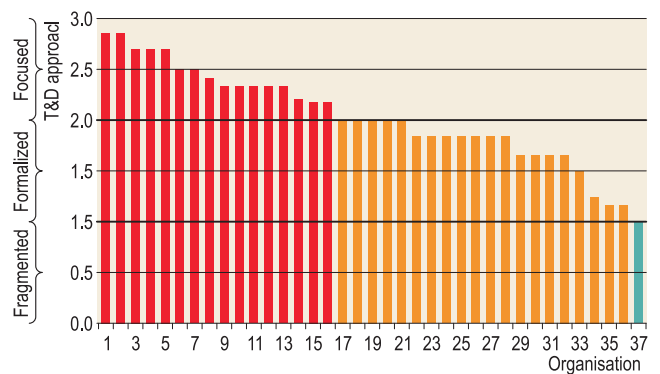
According to these results (see Table 2 & 3) we can see that non-systematic learning is in 58.3 % of organizations. So it is early to speak about human resource development because the process does not continue. About half of all organizations perceive T&D development as an investment and 17.1 % as a competitive weapon. But 34.3 % of reviewed organizations still perceive T&D as a cost, not an investment or even a luxury and waste of time. It can be noticed that 59.4 % of respondents stated that the emphasis is on through-the-job development, so learning becomes a continuous activity in these organizations. Basically it can be mentioned that the percentage of answers from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> questions is the biggest under the formalized approach.

Summarizing results of every organization (Fig. 2) we can see that there is only one company where the average of answers is only 1, this signifies this company has only fragmented approach to T&D, the average of 20 companies vary from 1.1 to 2, so these companies change their approach from fragmented to formalized and the rest 16 companies increase their position in T&D and go from formalized to focused approach of T&D.

**Table 3.** Results of Learning Approach in Organizations

The fragmented approach	The formalized approach	The focused approach
Training and development is:		
Non-systematic	Systematic	Perceived as necessary for organizational survival
58.3 %	19.4 %	22.2 %
Not linked to organizational strategies and goals	Linked to human resource needs	Linked to organizational strategy and individual goals
20.0 %	40.0 %	40.0 %
Perceived as a cost, not an investment	Perceived as an investment	Regarded as a competitive weapon
34.3 %	48.6 %	17.1 %
Directive	Attempts to link training to the workplace	The emphasis is on through-the-job development
9.4 %	31.2 %	59.4 %
Concerned with knowledge-based courses	Emphasizes knowledge-based courses & include skill based courses	Training is self-selected
17.6 %	58.8 %	23.5 %
Carried out by a trainer and takes place in the T&D department	Involves line managers through their role as an appraiser	The main responsibility for training rests with a line manager
12.5 %	53.1 %	34.4 %

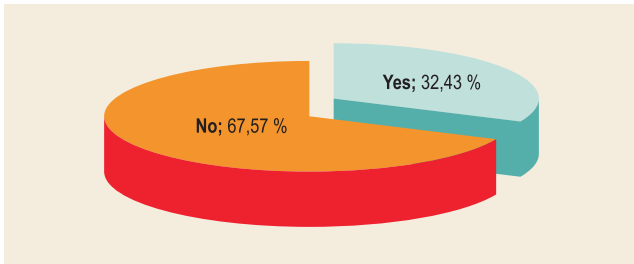
Source: Author



**Fig. 2.** Organizational approach to training and development

Source: Author

It was found out that about 2/3 (67.57 %) of organizations did not start to actualize principles of learning organizations (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** The concept of a learning organization which has been started to actualize in the organization

Source: Author

Results of the survey display to us the necessity of improving training and development and changing the approach to learning in organizations.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

HRD is a relatively young field in the world and very young in the post Soviet countries, such as Lithuania; and there are significant challenges to its future. The development process has the potential to make a strong positive impact on the performance of individuals, teams and the organization as a whole. Organizational learning literature tends to be fragmented and complex, though it can be seen as very comprehensive (Barham 1994; Neergaard 1999; *et al.*). Based on the survey, the author identified that only 32.43 % of examined organizations started to implant concepts of a learning organization and most of the companies are around the formalized approach to T&D. Participation in learning and human resource development is contested by all kinds of situational aspects, such as power relationships, status, and sticking to old habits. Confusion about desired learning outcomes may not be supportive for investments in the learning potential of the workplace and in training and informal learning activities (Nieuwenhuis & Woerkom 2007). Therefore these action steps can be used for building the organization capacity to learn in order to change the present situation (Marquardt & Reynolds 1994: 110):

- Transform the individual and organizational image of learning;
- Create knowledge-based partnerships;
- Develop and expand team learning activities;
- Change the role of managers;
- Encourage experiments and risk taking;

- Create structures, systems, and time extract learning;
- Build opportunities and mechanisms to disseminate learning;
- Empower people;
- Push information throughout the organization to external associates (customers, vendors, suppliers, and so forth);
- Develop systematic thinking;
- Create the culture of continuous improvement;
- Develop a powerful vision for organizational excellence and individual fulfilment;
- Root out bureaucracy.

Bing *et al.* (2003) apprehends that challenges of future will increasingly marginalize HRD within organizations and it will be left on the sideline. They speak about that the world has raised challenge for HRD to become a more accountable and integrated part of the organizational life and to become more concerned with the short-term and long-term well-being of a global society than with internal HRD definitional and turf issues. All those with a stake in the future of HRD are invited to join together to grapple with the critical challenges that face our field, to engage in deep meaningful dialogue about the challenges, and to construct workable, effective, and immediate approaches addressing the challenges to secure the future of HRD.

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