



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE INTRODUCTION OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN SELECTED
MALAYSIAN ORGANIZATIONS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY**

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By

ABD RAHMAN BIN AHMAD

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia**

June 2000



**Dedicated to my late father Ahmad bin Ibrahim,
who had always reminded me about the importance of
seeking knowledge. To my mother Che Ah binti
Ahmad, my wife Halimah binti Dahaman and my
children Nur 'Izzah, Muhammad Ilyas, Nur 'Adilah,
Muhammad 'Adli, Nur Amirah and Muhammad 'Imran,
whom always encourages me to complete my dissertation.**



Abstract of thesis presented to the senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Chairman : Associate Professor Azahari bin Ismail, Ph. D.

Faculty : Educational Studies

Little concern has been given to discover the deeper meanings and intricacies of learning organization, although this term has been widespread and has gained attention in a number of Malaysian organizations. The main concern of this study was to generate insight to the understanding of the perspectives of learning organization, its implementations and challenges in selected Malaysian organizations. Specifically, the objectives of the study were: (1) to gain insight and understanding of the concepts of learning organization in selected organizations; (2) to understand how the selected organizations take steps to implement learning organization; and (3) to understand the challenges faced by the selected organizations in the implementation of learning organization.

Multiple qualitative case study approach was used to answer the research objectives. Data were collected through interviews, observations and analysis of formal documents from the selected organizations. The findings of this study were obtained from both



within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. For within-case analysis, the description of three organizations selected was described individually. Whereas, for the cross-case analysis the description compared the findings from each of the three organizations selected. Several methods were used to check the validity and reliability of this study. Three methods: 'triangulation', 'member check' and 'peer examination technique' were employed to check the internal validity. External validity was checked by using multi-site approach. To increase reliability, this study used the triangulation process, graduate committee review and audit trail.

This study found that although the understanding and implementation of learning organization was at the beginning stage in each of the organizations, the result showed some evolving ideas occurred throughout the three organizations. All the three organizations showed the understanding of the concepts of learning organization, its implementation and challenges were based on their own identity. Organization A, being a technical service and development organization, seemed to be more Western-oriented approach. Organization B, which was involved in agriculture and food research and development, was more concerned with experimental activities that related to the Japanese approach. Organization C was a Malay-dominated organization inculcated with Islamic values assimilated both Western and Japanese approaches into the local approach, labeled as the Islamic approach.

As a conclusion, the study clarified the understanding of the concepts, its implementation and challenges of learning organization in the selected organizations.

The study also identified some guidelines for coping with challenges in implementing learning organization within the three selected organizations. The study recommended that the three organizations should continue their efforts in developing their organizations towards becoming full-pledge learning organizations.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah.

Pengenalan kepada Organisasi Pembelajaran dalam Organisasi Terpilih di Malaysia: Satu Kajian Perbandingan

Oleh

ABD RAHMAN BIN AHMAD

Jun 2000

Pengerusi : Profesor Madya Azahari bin Ismail, Ph.D.

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Tidak banyak usaha telah dilakukan untuk mengetahui dengan lebih mendalam tentang makna dan selok belok perkataan Organisasi Pembelajaran walaupun ianya telah tersebar luas dan telah menjadi salah satu subjek menarik di dalam organisasi di Malaysia. Oleh itu, kajian ini telah memberi tumpuan kepada usaha untuk menjana pemahaman mengenai konsep, pelaksanaan dan cabaran Organisasi Pembelajaran di dalam organisasi-organisasi terpilih di Malaysia. Secara khususnya kajian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) meneroka dan memahami mengenai konsep Organisasi Pembelajaran di dalam organisasi-organisasi terpilih; (2) memahami bagaimana organisasi-organisasi terpilih mengambil langkah dalam melaksanakan Organisasi Pembelajaran; (3) memahami cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi oleh organisasi-organisasi terpilih dalam melaksanakan Organisasi Pembelajaran.

Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan pelbagaian dalam kajian kes kualitatif bagi menjawab soalan-soalan yang dikemukakan dalam objektif kajian. Penemuan bagi



kajian ini telah diperolehi dari dua cara iaitu analisis kes dalaman dan analisis kes bersilang. Analisis kes dalaman menghuraikan penemuan dari ketiga-tiga organisasi terpilih secara satu-persatu. Manakala analisis kes bersilang menghuraikan penemuan secara menyeluruh perbandingan ketiga-tiga organisasi terpilih. Beberapa keadah kajian telah digunakan bagi memastikan keesahan dan kebolehpercayaan kajian ini. Tiga kaedah iaitu 'triangulation', 'member check' dan 'peer examination technique' digunakan untuk menentukan keesahan dalaman. Bagi keesahan luaran ianya menggunakan kaedah pendekatan 'multi-site'. Untuk meningkatkan kebolehpercayaan, kajian ini menggunakan proses 'triangulation', 'graduate committee review' dan 'audit trail'.

Kajian ini, telah mendapati wujudnya gambaran tentang idea-idea yang berlegar bagi menerangkan konsep-konsep, proses dan amalan-amalan Organisasi Pembelajaran di dalam organisasi-organisasi terpilih walaupun pemahaman dan perlaksanaannya masih di peringkat awal. Ketiga-tiga organisasi terpilih ini telah menunjukkan kefahaman mengenai konsep-konsep, kaedah perlasanaan dan cabaran-cabaram berdasarkan identiti tersendiri organisasi tersebut. Organisasi A, yang terlibat di dalam perkhidmatan dan pembangunan teknikal, dilihat lebih kepada orientasi Barat dan cenderung kepada pendekatan yang dikemukakan oleh tokoh Amerika iaitu Peter Senge. Bagi organisasi B, yang terlibat di dalam penyelidikan dan pembangunan pertanian dan makanan, lebih menjurus kepada penyelidikan merasa selesa dengan pendekatan yang dikemukakan oleh seorang tokoh Jepun iaitu Nonaka. Organisasi C pula bolehlah dianggap sebagai organisasi Melayu yang dipenuhi dengan budaya Melayu bercirikan Islam.

Pendekatannya lebih cenderung ke arah mengassimilasikan kedua-dua pendekatan di atas ke dalam pendekatan tempatan yang mereka gelarkan sebagai pendekatan Islam.

Pada keseluruhannya, kajian ini menjelaskan tentang kefahaman dan pelaksanaan Organisasi Pembelajaran di dalam organisasi-organisasi terpilih tersebut. Kajian ini juga telah dapat mengemukakan beberapa garispaduan bagi menghadapi cabaran atau halangan di dalam melaksanakan Organisasi Pembelajaran. Sebagai kerangka asas untuk pembaikan, adalah disyorkan kepada ketiga-tiga organisasi terpilih tersebut untuk meneruskan segala dayusaha yang telah dibina bagi membangunkan organisasi mereka untuk menjadi Organisasi Pembelajaran. Juga disyorkan agar kajian ini diulangi lagi dengan menggunakan pendekatan kajian mendalam ke atas setiap organisasi tersebut, supaya ianya dapat menjadi model dalam konteks organisasi-organisasi di Malaysia.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

In moving towards the 21st century, the world is now experiencing an era which could be described as the era of globalization. It is an era which marks a stage where nations and people of the world become inevitably interdependent and in need of each other. As asserted by Lodge (1995), "Globalization is the process whereby the world's people are becoming increasingly interconnected in all facets of their lives -- cultural, economic, political, technological and environmental" (p.1). The same phenomenon is also noted by Chandra Muzaffar (1997), who stresses that, "globalization is not only a simple process through which capital, goods and tastes are constantly flowing from certain centers to the rest of the world, but a reverse flow also dominates" (p. ii). He also suggested that the process often accompanied or brought along fore issues such as the rule of law, public accountability, human rights and human values, and the other canons of good governance among the countries which will reshape the local political institution, social relationships and cultural patterns into a single global system or a global unity. The fact is that the process has, in a way, brought a new perspective to the world's people and nations.

Meanwhile, the notions expressed through the use of the terms such as "World Society" (Bornschiefer and Lengyel, 1989), "Borderless World" (Ohmae 1990) and "Global Village" (Tofler, 1993) also reflected the overall dimensions of the concept of the world as a globalized world. Since the notions imply the world-view of the global situation, the understanding of a world society as a particular form of communalism not held together by any state in its broadest connotation may then be conceptualized as the most comprehensive pattern of human co-existence (Bornschiefer and Lengyel, 1989). However, to Ohmae (1990) a borderless world reflects today's world economic trends in a global perspective that has no restriction or blockade in order to serve the needs or the demands of consumers. Whereas Tofler (1993) views the world as interconnected with the flow of information that causes dramatic changes not just to international business but also to global prosperity and peace. In addition, Marquardt (1996) also has expressed that globalization has produced an immense impact on the economic environment and that many organizations consequently have to realign their management strategies and efforts towards upgrading their employees knowledge and skills in order to exist viably.

In this regard, there seem to be a widespread phenomenon with respect to the process of globalization. The process has not only created new systems in both technological and human existence with the impact of trade in goods and services, the movement of labors, capital flow and spread of information but also has created the global competitive war which spurred new thinking and opened to the wide approaches

and strategies. Apart from that, the process also demands a great deal of knowledge, experience and distinctive elements of creativity to understand the existing competitors, customers and technology undergoing constant changes in the future. As a consequence, the global competition and the demands of customers, citizens and the environment require a lot of learning and changing from time to time or even from moment to moment.

In the meantime, in order to understand what sort of dynamic responses are demanded for the challenges of the globalization, it is necessary for every nation, state or even company to think globally and act locally. Moreover, there is no substitute for knowing what the companies or firms are trying to achieve before they set out to achieve the future. In line with this, Odenwald (1996) cautions the companies or firms that are moving into a global market as:

The transformation of companies from domestic to global organizations leads to struggle with ever-changing terminology, technologies, and resources. The new organizations require different approaches to leadership, culture, and teamwork. New processes must also be designed for developing products and getting them to market, to the customer, and back again for reengineering and redesign before sending the next versions off the assembly line to repeat the process. The speed with which new processes are actuated also produces new measure of success. No longer are companies ridiculed for a product that fails. They are applauded for their innovation and quick response to need and trends, and their competitive ratio moves up the scale as they take their new knowledge back to the drawing board for their next entry into the market place (p.17).

Furthermore, he stated that the new challenges that demanded companies or corporations to run business as global organizations required not only just change but

also transformation. Therefore, they must have visionary leaders, innovative strategies, synthesis of cultures, integration of teams, on going flexibility and never-ending transformation.

In view of the above scenario, it can be concluded that for any organization that desires or aspires to succeed or achieve success, it has to resort to redefining the role and function with respect to learning, unlearning and relearning. This is an urgent agenda as indicated by Ulrich, Jick and Glonow (1993) who stress that the ability of individuals and organizations to learn becomes a primary means for winning. To Howard (1990),

the premier organizations of the 21st century will be those whose employees consistently learn from their environment, readily discard old - yet comfortable - ways of doing business, and create new effective strategies that encompass their learning (p.12).

Whereas to Adler and Cole (1993), "a consensus is emerging that the hallmark of tomorrow's most effective organizations will be their capacity to learn" (p.1). Perhaps this is best related to what has been suggested by Bennett and O'Brien (1994), "to survive and prosper on the 'whitewater' ride into the 21st Century, organizations must adopt a new way of managing that is based on the capacity to learn and change consciously, continuously and quickly" (p.4). In addition, Bohn (1994) states that "as we move from the Industrial age into the Information age, knowledge is becoming an ever more central force behind the competitive success of firms and even nations" (p.1).