



Towards a learning organization? Employee perceptions

Towards a
learning
organization?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to explore employee perceptions of the development of a learning culture in a medium-sized manufacturing company that was aspiring to become a learning organization.

Design/methodology/approach – The research comprised an extended interview with the company's Organizational Development Manager, a validated questionnaire on the learning organization with a cross-section of 80 staff, and semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of 20 employees.

Findings – The company was using learning to develop its competitive edge, and employees were at various stages of understanding and acceptance of the need for learning and competence development on the job to sustain and develop the company. A tension was detected between the company's objectives and the aspirations of some employees, but the majority appeared to accept the overt learning policy as good for them and the company.

Research limitations/implications – Through circumstances, the sample of employees included a fairly high proportion already involved in training, so there was potential for some positive bias towards training and a learning culture. Nevertheless, the study provides some pointers for involving employees in the development of an organization that values learning and for resolving possible tensions between institutional objectives and individual aspirations.

Originality/value – As well as adding empirical data to the theory-dominated literature on learning organizations, this study contributes towards a better understanding of the perceptions of employees in the development of a learning organization, rather than from the organizational or management perspectives that tend to dominate the literature.

Keywords Learning organizations, Employees, Surveys

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The concept of the learning organization, most often attributed to Senge (1990), revolves around the identification of characteristics of organizational culture and climate that help develop a learning culture. Johnston and Hawke (2002, p. 9) defined a learning culture as:

the existence of a set of attitudes, values and practices within an organization which support and encourage a continuing process of learning for the organization and/or its members.

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Pedler *et al.* (1991), cited in Sambrook and Stewart, 2000, p. 211) described a learning company as “one which facilitates the learning of all members and which continuously transforms itself”. Watkins and Marsick (1996) identified seven features of a learning organization: continuous learning opportunities, inquiry and dialogue, collaboration and team learning, systems to capture and share learning, a collective vision, connection to the company’s environment, and strategic leadership for learning. Garvin (2000, pp. 13-15) suggested that a learning organization had a defined learning agenda, was open to discordant information, avoided repeated mistakes, did not lose critical knowledge when key people left, and acted on what it knew. Johnston and Hawke (2002, p. 18) cited Mabey and Salaman’s (1995) claim that the learning organization was “often a piece of shorthand to refer to organizations which try to make a working reality of such attributes as flexibility, team work, continuous learning and employee participation and development”. Tjepkema *et al.*’s (2000) description of a learning organization included that it makes use of the learning of all employees, and Yeo’s (2005, p. 372) review of the concept concluded that it is based on a belief that the collective learning of the organization’s members will result in improved organizational performance and competitive advantage. All of these definitions emphasize the place of the employee.

The concept of the learning organization is, however, contentious, and has been criticised as merely a management tool for controlling the workers. Bratton (2001, p. 341), for example, suggested that it may be a “subtle way of shaping workers’ beliefs, values and behaviour”. Nyhan *et al.* (2004, p. 69) concluded that the main criticisms had been of the concept’s foundation in “hard-nosed American/Anglo-Saxon economic principles of organizational effectiveness”, encouraged by the non-fulfilment of optimistic forecasts in the 1980s of more human-centred workplaces, and disillusionment about the capacity of information communications technology to create more freedom and autonomy at work, along with lack of evidence of verified examples of authentic learning organizations. Critics saw it, according to Nyhan *et al.*, as a modern management fad designed to “maximize benefits for the company without paying a great deal of attention to ensuring personal learning benefits for employees or workers”. Johnston and Hawke (2002, p.12) stated:

While much of the literature highlights the need for both individuals and organizations to be active in the process of continuous learning and upskilling for sheer survival in both the present and the future, there is also some questioning about whether the conditions associated with the new knowledge economy and the post-Fordist workplace are actually benefiting all workers. Implicit in this discussion is also some questioning about what a commitment to learning on the part of the organizations means for individuals within organizations.

It is that final issue which is the starting point for the research reported in this paper. The impetus for the study was a desire by an organization’s management to know if its strategy was working: as Marsick and Watkins (2003, p. 142) noted, there is little doubt from the research that “a culture oriented towards supporting learning can lead to improved performance”. The Organisational Development Manager was willing to give the researchers access to staff, and to agree to the usual research principles of voluntariness, anonymity and confidentiality, because he wanted to know how the company’s commitment to learning was perceived by employees across the organization. The purpose of the study was to go beyond the generalizations about organizational factors that enhance or hinder the development of a learning culture to explore employee perceptions of such development. This exploration was undertaken in a company that publicly aspired to be a “learning organization”, and used a

questionnaire that has been utilized in a number of countries and through interviews with a sample of employees. It was not intended to provide a comparison with the impact of other organizational initiatives such as TQM, but to consider employee perspectives on a management initiative. Was it “subtle shaping” as Bratton (2001) contended or were the employees open minded and open-eyed about it? The research questions therefore centred on:

- the extent to which employees were aware of the company aspiring to be a learning organization and what their understanding was of this concept; and
- the extent to which and in what ways employees had embraced the concept of the learning organization envisioned by the company.

The paper begins by providing some background information about the company then explains how the researchers collected data through the questionnaire and interviews. Employee responses are reported using the headings from the questionnaire as a framework, followed by a discussion about the extent to which employees perceived and identified with the concept of a learning organization, as conceived by this particular company.

Towards a learning organization

The site of the research was a medium-sized manufacturing organization in Australia which is a major specialist automotive parts manufacturing company, with a number of plants around the world serving international markets, and referred to in this paper as “Ozauto”. At the time of the study its Australian plant had a workforce of some 800, including process workers, tradespeople, production supervisors and managers, engineers and other technical experts, along with stores, marketing, project and administration staff of various kinds. The company was operating in the sort of environment that Johnston and Hawke (2002, p. 19) characterized as “knowledge-based, highly competitive, commercial”.

Among Ozauto’s publicly displayed values were two related to learning: “Targeted individual development” and “A learning organization”. Such aspirations indicate that at the time of the study, Ozauto could be regarded as a “learning-oriented organization”, a term coined by Leys *et al.* (1992), and identified by Tjepkema *et al.* (2000, p. 8) as the first stage in the growth process towards a learning organization. Ortenblad (2004) preferred the term, “partial learning organization” for companies that did not display all the attributes of a learning organization.

Methodology

The research began with an extended interview with Ozauto’s Manager of Organizational Development in order to develop an understanding of the vision and strategies of the company in its development of a learning culture. The authors then used a standardized questionnaire (described below) with a stratified purposive sample of employees, supplemented by interviews, in order to explore how employees perceived the reality of the vision and the impact of the strategies. It was decided that approximately 10 per cent of the workforce, i.e. 80 employees, would be sufficient to provide data for the research via the questionnaires and that one-quarter of those would be interviewed. While for the size of the population a larger sample size would have been preferable, the size of the sample was dictated by the extent to which the researchers, in discussion with the Organisational Development Manager, felt it was reasonable to disrupt the company’s daily operations, particularly given there was a

production line, but they were also confident that together the two samples would provide sufficiently indicative responses to help them reach reasonable conclusions in order to answer the research questions.

The 80 employees, including the 20 for interview, were selected across the organization by the Human Resources office of the company, based on the criterion provided by the researchers that they should represent all levels of the organization. Those selected completed the questionnaires anonymously and returned them in sealed envelopes; the interviews were conducted on a confidential basis and the audiotapes and transcripts remained at all times under the control of the researchers. The researchers perceived some possible skewing towards selecting employees who were involved in some form of training at the time, but it appeared this was not because of any intent to create positive impressions but rather because of the ready access overworked HR administrative staff had to a particular database as well as the availability of employees at the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, the potential for bias on that account was kept under review during the data collection and analysis.

Questionnaire

From what they termed the seven “action imperatives” of the learning organization, Watkins and Marsick (1996, 2003) have developed the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ), in order to assess the extent to which a company meets certain criteria as a learning organization. While there is a number of audit instruments available in the areas of organizational learning (e.g. Garvin, 2000; Templeton *et al.*, 2002), the DLOQ was chosen for the study because it was specifically designed as a “diagnostic tool to measure changes in organizational learning practices and culture” as perceived by the employees (Marsick and Watkins, 2003, p. 136), and it had been validated as a research tool (Yang, 2003). The definitions of the action imperatives, which are also the constructs for the DLOQ, are shown in Table I.

The DLOQ is divided into five sections of questions: “Individual level”, “Team or group level”, “Organization level”, “Measuring performance at the organization level”, and “Additional information about you and your organization”. In the present study, questions from just the first three sections were used in line with Yang’s finding (2003, p. 160) that this slightly shorter version “provides a comprehensive assessment of the learning culture in seven dimensions”. Respondents were asked to rank a total of 43 questions on a scale of 1 to 6 in those three sections. The questions in those sections specifically seek employee perceptions (Marsick and Watkins, 2003).

Interviews

The 20 staff members interviewed included those in both management and non-management roles. They represented the Manufacturing, Quality & Improvements, Materials Management, Engineering, Marketing, and Human Resources divisions. There were 12 men and 8 women, of whom 3 had been employed for three years or less, 14 had been employed between four and twelve years, and 3 for a least thirteen years, including one who had worked at Ozautu for more than twenty years. Questions in the interviews explored the two key areas indicated above, i.e. awareness of the company’s aspiration to be a learning organization and the employees’ understanding of that concept, and in what ways employees had perceived the development of a learning culture in the organization. The questions asked in the interviews were intended to explore perceptions of learning within the organization but were not based directly on the seven constructs of the DLOQ, in an effort to obtain the

Dimension	Definition
Create continuous learning opportunities	Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job; opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth
Promote inquiry and dialogue	People gain productive reasoning skills to express their views and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others; the culture is changed to support questioning, feedback, and experimentation
Encourage collaboration and team learning	Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking; groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded
Create systems to capture and share learning	Both high- and low-technology systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided; systems are maintained
Empower people toward a collective vision	People are involved in setting, owning, and implementing a joint vision; responsibility is distributed close to decision making so that people are motivated to learn toward what they are held accountable to do
Connect the organization to its environment	People are helped to see the effect of their work on the entire enterprise; people scan the environment and use information to adjust work practices; the organization is linked to its communities
Provide strategic leadership for learning	Leaders model, champion, and support learning; leadership uses learning strategically for business results

Source: Marsick and Watkins, 2003, p. 139

Table I.
Definitions of Dimensions
of the Learning
Organization
Questionnaire (DLOQ)

employees' views from their own frames of reference and then to analyze those responses to see the extent to which they might meet Marsick and Watkins' criteria.

Background interview

According to the company's Organizational Development Manager, senior management had recognised in the late 1990s that there was a growing gap between technological developments in the industry and the knowledge and skill sets that resided within the company. Up to that time, the company's acknowledged capacity to respond quickly to market needs had been dependent on the innate capacity of particular individuals. The executive decided that unless the development of knowledge and skills was managed more strategically, the ability of the company to compete internationally would be constrained. According to the OD Manager, "Being able to outlearn the competition is probably . . . the only strategic advantage that you can develop".

In order to meet the emerging international challenges, the company created an Organizational Development Department with responsibility for promoting a learning culture throughout the organization and overseeing management of the process. This had allowed the company to develop a more structured and strategic approach to learning and training. Ozauto implemented a training and development program that offered strategically driven education and training opportunities for all employees in both technical and non-technical areas. The organization's learning agenda was proactive, with a focus on future rather than current needs, by taking into consideration both the need to develop new knowledge and skill sets to support ongoing innovation in products and services, and monitoring emerging technological developments in the industry.

Responsibility for learning was devolved throughout the organization, "unpackaging" leadership to incorporate the facilitation of ongoing learning and

development of subordinates. Systems were implemented to track learning that occurred throughout the organization. In order to develop a learning culture which “decompartmentalised” learning, blurring the distinction between work and learning, work-based learning methodology was introduced in training and education. These methods emphasised development of the individual’s ability to think critically, take initiative and be proactive, with the intention of enhancing the workforce’s ability to cope more readily with ongoing changes in the workplace.

The company offered its employees rewards and incentives for engaging in ongoing learning. By keeping knowledge and skill sets current, employees maintained their employability and job security, at the same time enhancing their opportunities for promotion. Career pathways had been mapped for all positions in the organization but the company emphasised the importance of individual employees managing their own careers.

Other incentives included payment of course costs by the company, and conducting learning activities during working hours. The company chose to manage its own corporate learning rather than sub-contracting to an external body, in order to ensure the relevance of the learning, but in collaboration with established vocational education and training (VET) providers and universities. Ozauto also utilised a range of other less formal strategies in concert with the formal training, including mentoring, coaching, and access to professional journals. New initiatives were also being explored, including trialing an “Innovation Cafe” as a forum for sharing new ideas among employees.

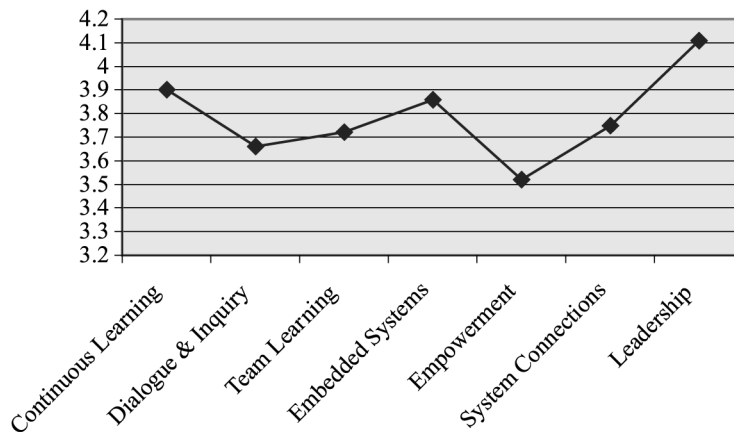
DLOQ responses

When the 80 survey forms for the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) were received in their sealed envelopes, a mean score was calculated for each of the seven dimensions of the learning organization, on a scale of 1 to 6 (Marsick and Watkins, 2003). There were no great differences between what had been initially categorised as “Managers” and “Employees” in their perceptions of the extent to which the seven “imperatives” were evident within the company, with 0.3 the largest gap in the “System connections” dimension. The similar results for “Managers” and “Employees” could indicate that all people employed by the company, regardless of their position, had begun to develop common understandings about the place of learning in the company. Given the various strategies implemented to promote and nurture a learning culture within the organization, such an outcome seems reasonable. It was therefore decided not to discuss them separately but to combine the results, as shown in Figure 1 (the unused extremes of the scale on the Y axis are not shown).

Figure 1 shows that the staff’s perceptions of six of the seven dimensions hovered just under 4 where the maximum possible was 6, with “Leadership” clearly the top ranking with a mean of a little over 4. As shown in Table I, strategic leadership for learning is when leaders model, champion and support learning, and leadership uses learning for business results. The lowest ranked dimension was “Empowerment” (towards a collective vision). None of the dimensions was ranked below 3.5, which was the half-way mark, but on the other hand none was anywhere near the maximum of 6.

Interview responses

In order to explore in more detail employees’ perceptions of the development of a learning culture, interviews were held with 20 of the 80 who completed the DLOQ, primarily as a purposive sample, but also on the basis of workplace availability at the time of the study. The first question was specifically about the concept of a learning organization.



Note: n = 80; Scale 1-6

Figure 1.
DLOQ mean scores for
Ozauto staff

Understanding of the concept of a learning organization

Interviewees were first asked if they were aware that Ozauto aspired to be a learning organization, and what they thought this meant. The responses indicated that all interviewees were clearly aware of this, with several highlighting the critical role of the staff appraisal system in contributing to awareness of the concept. Interviewees generally saw the learning organization evident in the company through the provision of opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills wherever they were in the company:

...everyone can learn so that learning is available to everyone within the organization. No matter what level you work at, there are always opportunities for you to develop.

In addition, interviewees mentioned that the constantly changing nature of the workplace meant that learning needed to be ongoing, with updates necessary to accommodate changes both within the company and in the manufacturing industry generally. Some showed a more sophisticated understanding:

...it's about knowledge management as well, understanding, knowing ... learning from your mistakes, learning so you can make an impact on the future. You are actually actioning your learnings. ...

Following this initial question, employees were asked semi-structured questions based on the two research questions identified earlier in the paper. The responses to those questions are presented below against the framework of the seven constructs of the DLOQ.

Create continuous learning opportunities

Provision of continuous learning opportunities for employees was most evident to interviewees in terms of having access to training as indicated above. There was general consensus that requests for training were supported by management as long as the learning was seen to bring benefit to the organization and be directly relevant to the individual's current role or potential future role in the organization:

... the company, within reason, bends over backwards to let you learn what you want.

Overall, interviewees expressed a high level of receptiveness to the rewards and incentives offered, including promotion within the organization, the opportunity to acquire nationally accredited qualifications, the payment of course fees by Ozauto, the provision of courses onsite and in company time, and the tailoring of learning so that it was directly relevant to the job. A number also mentioned the role that informal daily experiential learning played in the organization, as one interviewee described it:

So there's a lot of that informal, just on the spot really, dealing with problems. And as you fix a problem, you learn how to deal with it yourself the next time.

Promote dialogue and inquiry

Several interviewees noted that there had been a change in the way employees were expected to operate in the workplace, with more opportunities for input and participation:

... it used to be that you left your brain at the gate and your supervisor said I want that done this way and if you thought of a better way to do it, it was "No, I told you to do it this way". Whereas now, we are asking - the people that best know are the people that do the job everyday.

Many interviewees pointed to the significant role played by managers and supervisors in this process. Personal qualities, such as approachability, were seen as helping create an environment where employees felt "safe" in expressing their views, and one manager claimed:

... it is lifting the dialogue. People are talking at higher levels. They are talking knowledgeably, and people are starting to express their own opinions instead of listening and waiting to be told what to do.

Another manager agreed, but said there were fewer opportunities to do this between teams, largely due to their physical separation in the plant.

Encourage collaboration and team learning

Meetings were commonly used as a forum for team learning, with some managers proactively involving team members and occasional "guests" to stimulate discussion and reflect on workplace achievements and disappointments. Cross-functional project teams were also used, and these offered opportunities for informal learning, and exchanges of understandings and ideas. However several interviewees mentioned that one of the challenges of working effectively in cross-functional teams was the need to be able to understand the language used so that a shared understanding of the task at hand could be established.

Establish systems to capture and share learning

There was a general view that Ozauto had made significant advances in promoting learning at the individual level, and to a lesser extent at the departmental level. However, several interviewees felt that the company needed to devote attention to establishing systems which enabled employees to learn from past mistakes, and there were apparently plans for the implementation of a database system which would provide central access to information within the organization. In some areas there were local initiatives to capture employee knowledge at the work unit level.

Empower people towards a collective vision

The key strategy in empowerment appeared to have been the involvement of managers from all departments in the process of developing the company mission and values statement. One manager interviewed was enthusiastic about that process and felt he had benefited from the experience which had occurred over a period of three or four months.

There was also some evidence of staff being allowed to exercise scope in how they achieved work goals, with some explaining how they were able to set their own work objectives and then go about achieving them without interference from management:

...they accept the fact that we know our jobs and they leave us to it.

The main indicator of a collective vision, however, was the interviewees' awareness of the company's aspiration to be a learning organization and of the imperative to be internationally competitive, which is also related to the next section.

Connect the organization to its environment

Interviewees indicated that they received a summary of recent executive meetings from departmental managers, giving them an idea of strategic issues at the organizational level together with an insight into any specific departmental issues. There seemed to be a generally common understanding of the globally competitive environment in which the company was operating.

Leaders model and support learning

Interviewees were asked how they perceived the role of leaders in relation to learning within the organization. Those in management roles indicated they had a clear understanding of their responsibility to act as facilitators and supporters of learning. The in-house leadership development program was seen as contributing to the development of this understanding and provided an opportunity to acquire skills enabling them to act as facilitators. Managers/supervisors were generally viewed as people to approach for feedback and clarification of issues rather than as providers of solutions. A number also mentioned the value of having key leaders in the organization who had progressed through the ranks as role models for aspiring employees:

The majority of the good ones come from the shop floor and I think that fact, that the people on the shop floor can see that ... the bar's high but they know that there's something at the end of it when they get there.

The interviews with employees concluded with a specific question about their perceptions of a learning culture, and a summary of the responses are presented in the next section.

Perceptions of learning within the organization

Interviewees were specifically asked how they perceived that learning was viewed within the organization. Some interviewees felt that although learning was generally held in high regard within the organization, people's perceptions of learning varied according to the level at which they worked. For example, it was suggested that some employees on the shopfloor tended to view learning as a tool used by management to stimulate involvement in the workplace rather than as an avenue to personal development. One supervisor said:

I think they see it often, [that] we use it as a fad to try and get their involvement in something ... I don't know if they can see a direct line of sight for a career path.

It was also acknowledged that some people in the organization, particularly on the shopfloor, had little interest in learning beyond their involvement in mandatory training such as occupational health and safety. This was perceived to be linked to people not having a view of themselves in roles at higher levels. As a result, one manager pointed out, such employees "settled" at each level of the organization which, he said, was not necessarily a negative because that contributed to the overall functioning of the organization.

Several respondents indicated that the pace of the work environment was not conducive to such strategies as systematic analysis and reflection but instead forced snap decisions. In addition, some interviewees said there were still some instances where managers were reluctant to release staff for training unless it was absolutely necessary.

Discussion

All the interviewees showed that they were aware that Ozauto had "learning organization" as one of its values and in general they had a high level of understanding of what that concept might mean. This understanding was mostly related to the provision of individual learning opportunities, but there was some recognition that ultimately it was about the broader development of the company. The fact that many of those interviewed linked the company's learning strategies to its competitiveness in the marketplace was an indication that employees were aware of the global pressures on the organization. Ozauto had attempted to empower employees by involving managers in the development of its mission, vision and values statements, although it did not seem there had been much involvement of employees at "lower" levels. That the "empowerment" dimension had not yet been fully realized was indicated by the fact that this aspect received the lowest rating of the seven dimensions in the DLOQ. There was also ambiguity in the operation of project teams, suggesting that there may be a fine line between employees being able to exercise initiative and feeling supported by the organization to perform their roles effectively.

Perceptions of how the learning policies of the company impacted on the workplace varied across the organization. The view expressed that training through an external vocational education and training provider was generally seen as "a place to learn the fundamentals of the trade while the workplace was seen as a place to hone skills", has implications for the way an employer organises workplace learning as well as for the significance of informal learning.

Employees generally responded positively to the provision of ongoing learning opportunities. They appeared to be responding positively to Ozauto's policy of giving them the skills, confidence and authority to deal with problems as they occurred, and to the development of supervisors as facilitators of learning by utilising accredited leadership packages. There was some small but at that stage insignificant acknowledgement of the place of informal learning.

The leadership development programs appeared to be effective in what one respondent called "reframing the manager", by both encouraging them to think in new ways as well as to recognise they could be change agents within the organization even if only within their part of the workplace. An advantage of holding such courses on-site was that it brought managers together from across the organization and so helped the cross-pollination of ideas. The apparent success of the intention that managers should support and model learning was reflected in both the DLOQ responses and the interviews.

A number of employees commented on the difficulty of making project teams functional in a short time, and the DLOQ ranking for the team learning dimension was second last in the list of seven, suggesting that this aspect of workplace learning, generally highly-regarded in the literature, is often difficult to achieve without proactive commitment by all members.

One of the interesting findings that came from the research was the observation by some managers that since the renewed emphasis in the company on learning, dialogue within work groups operated “at a higher level”. Establishing a climate in which employees felt it was safe to offer an opinion and to have an expectation that their opinions would be valued was obviously a key factor, and the role of the manager seemed to be significant in this process. On the other hand it was clear that there were some employees, particularly on the shopfloor, who were quite content with their working lives and had no aspirations to advance beyond their current level.

What emerged from this study was a picture of a company that was using learning to develop its competitive edge and thus try to ensure its future viability, and of employees who were at various stages of understanding and acceptance of the need for learning to sustain and develop the company. Ozauto appeared to be trying to ensure that “responsibility was distributed close to decision making so that people are motivated to learn toward what they are held accountable to do” (Marsick and Watkins, 2003, p. 139).

However, as some respondents noted, learning was a means to an end for the company. Ozauto made no secret of the fact that it expected its workers to be learners for the sake of the organization, and those who would not were encouraged to move on. There were both overt and less explicit pressures to learn beginning to permeate the company. The recruitment of workers “committed to growing with the company” meant that they were expected to align themselves with the values of a learning culture. This was not the “subtle shaping” that Bratton (2001) referred to, but a quite explicit expectation, understood throughout the organization, particularly in those areas where technological developments were critical in maintaining what the company saw as its competitive edge. In other words, from the perceptions of those surveyed and interviewed, employees were willing to accept the emphasis on learning on the basis that it was good for them and the company. Nevertheless, the notion that there were some employees who were “settled” at certain levels of the organization and hence provided some necessary stability for the organization in times of change is an intriguing one that warrants further research within the context of a learning organization. Another issue warranting further investigation was the perception that there was a perceived difference in the outcomes of off-site and on-site learning, suggesting management might need to review the purposes of the external provision and consider increased acknowledgement of the role of work-based learning.

Conclusion

Nyhan *et al.* (2004, p. 69) said that the criticisms of the learning organization concept could be summed up as “a management tool maximizing benefits for the company without particular concern for the personal learning benefits for the workers”. What this study suggests is that there is likely to be a continual tension between trying to empower employees whilst at the same time indicating that their future employment with the organization depends on their willingness and capacity for continuous learning. It is a tension between the aspirations of the company and those of the employees, a tension that arguably is evident in any company seeking to make a profit in a capitalist economy. In this instance, it seemed that employees were aware of the

pressures on the company and on themselves, and for the most part had decided the benefits of working for the company outweighed any disadvantages of being part of a learning-oriented organization.

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