

L. L. Bean Learning Organization Case Study

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Abstract

Learning organizations are a form of business model designed around innovation and creativity that help organizations stay competitive and relevant in a continuously changing global economy (Yukl, 2013). This paper addresses the benefits of learning organizations when applied to the L. L. Bean Company case study (Hodges & Gill, 2015). More specifically, the paper also addresses learning organizations from the perspective of them having cultures of continuous learning, learning from their customer's feedback and having effective collaborative communication systems in place. The paper then addresses the adaptability of the learning organizations business model to nonprofit organizations and environments. By specifically identifying communities of faith as a good possible example of nonprofit organizations that this business model could effectively utilize. Finally, the paper offers some additional thoughts regarding the L.L Bean Company, in terms of how it could further enhance its presence as a learning organization and ends with some future considerations for this model and its applications for employees and the next generation of millennials with social media.

Keywords: Learning Organizations, The Fifth discipline, Peter M. Senge, Change

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The aim of this assignment is to evaluate how learning organizations function and enhance organizational effectiveness and profitability when applied to a case study scenario involving the L. L. Bean Company. The corporate environment for most organizations has become fierce and extremely competitive due to globalization and the continual flow of technological developments and advancements. As a result, organizations are finding themselves having to develop core value competencies and work life philosophies, very similar to their human capital populations. Thus, to become, maintain, and sustain success in today's corporate environments, organizations have had to develop competencies of vision, collaboration, creativity and innovation, while at the same time becoming continuous lifelong learning organizations. This is the new normal for the modern corporate work environments (Ege, Esen & Asikdizdar, 2016). Consequently, learning organizations have been described as adaptable organizations that are continuous lifelong learners, which maximize information from all stakeholders both within and outside the organization through a teamwork concept to become the most effective, productive and ultimately profitable organization possible (Hodges & Gill, 2015). Subsequently, the goal of this assignment is to discuss some of the learning organizations benefits, how the model can be adapted to other organizations and its potential application to modern organizations, in general.

Some of the most essential benefits received by L. L. Bean Company, as a learning organization, were having a culture of continuous learning, learning from their customer's feedback and having effective collaborative communication systems in place. According to Luhn (2016), "the aim of a learning organization is continuous organizational development" (p.11). In the case study of L.L Bean Company, the whole organization of L. L. Bean provided a

great example of the potentially benefits that can be obtained from a company whose culture is solely committed to being a continuous lifelong learning organization (Hodges & Gill, 2015). From the company's inception in 1912, the L.L. Bean Organization demonstrated its commitment to developing a culture of continuous learning by learning from their customer's feedback, structured outdoor activities and mail order subscription purchases. By taking the knowledge obtained from those transactions and developing it into tangible product designs, the company was able to leverage that knowledge to contribute significantly to the company's overall success of the company as a learning organization (Hodges & Gill, 2015). The L. L. Bean Company did not simply make their product designs in a dark room somewhere without any input from their customers; instead, they intentionally sought after customer feedback to learn how to become a better organization. "The ability to gather information and use that information to alter behavior is the pillar of effectiveness in a learning organization (Hodges & Gill, 2015, p.222). Additionally, the L. L. Bean Company established effective collaborative communications systems to transmit timely and relevant information. It is extremely important for learning organizations to have in place structures that pass on invaluable feedback to their management and product design teams. Having these structures in place are fundamental to all learning organizations (Luhn,2016).

Adapting learning organizations concepts to nonprofit organizations could be extremely valuable for those organizations, especially churches, hospitals and universities. Nonprofit organizations, particularly churches have historically been stagnant, un-innovative and unwilling to change and apply new practices to their cultures and religious traditions (Barnes, 2010). The author of this writing believes the application of learning organizations to churches could be of great benefit to their respective communities and constituents. Applying Peter Senge's

continuous learning pillars as identified by Hodges and Gill (2015) could play a significant role in communities of faith and help extend them beyond the four walls of the church doing simply bible studies and biblical pedagogy. Actually having infrastructures that share and make relevant information to their constituents could be extremely beneficial and helpful in transforming dying and at risk communities throughout our nation and world (Hodges & Gill, 2015). Imagine the application of Peter Senge's learning organization definition to communities of faith, "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together " (Fillion, Koffi, & Ekionea, 2015, p. 76).

The L.L. Bean Company could further define itself as a learning organization by ensuring Peter Senge's five pillars of learning organizations are not only applied at the corporate level but also at the individual and personal level of each of their employee within the organization. Yukl (2013) suggest, "leaders can facilitate organizational change by having a workplace that is flexible and innovative" (p. 400). In the case study, the L.L. Bean Company clearly demonstrated its commitment to being a continuous lifelong learning organization through its effective business practices and applications. However, very little was mentioned organizationally regarding how these principles could be duplicated in their employees lives personally (Hodges & Gill, 2015). Additionally, the L.L. Bean Company could better develop a shared an organizational shared vision. Again, while the L.L. Bean Company's business practices clearly demonstrated a genuine commitment to the goals of being a learning organization, it was difficult to obtain that same view through this vision for the company (Hodges & Gill, 2015). Consequently, the author of this writing believe, establishing an vision

that embraces the learning organization principles and helps drive the organization mission are critical components to having a successful learning organization.

Conclusions

In conclusion, learning organizations are powerful and very useful organizational models that foster continual creativity and cutting-edge innovation for organizations that apply them. In the case study of the L.L. Bean Company, their organizational model provided some of the best learning organization principles by having a culture of continuous learning, learning from their customer feedback and having effective collaborative communication systems in place. Throughout the case study, the L.L. Bean Company provided an excellence example of how an organization can still be competitive global economy (Hodges & Gill, 2015).

Future Consideration

Some future considerations for the application of learning organizations are organizations should work to develop training plans that help employees and the organization, as a whole implement the Peter Senge's five pillars into their daily life more effectively and continuously (Fillion et al., 2015). Additionally, as technological advancements continue to come forth, organizations should consider ways to utilize social media platforms to enhance learning organizations reach as an organization function (Luhn,2016). Finally, organizations should consider ways to add on to Peter Senge's five pillars of learning organization to continue their focus and drive toward excellence in an competitive economy (Fillion et al., 2015).

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