Evaluation of Organizational Literacy in Context of Organizational Learning: A Literature Review

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Abstract. Organizations constitute the restructuring conditions to maintain their functions and enable adaption to new competitive conditions for modern changes as a part of globalization. In this context, the emerging concept of learning organization and organizational learning provide opportunities for creating new information, access to information, sharing and transferring information issues. The concept of organizational literacy is considered as an important component of the information literacy for organizations in terms of surviving in the varying marketing conditions, keeping alive the organizational memorials, adapting to the organizational culture and gaining competitive advantage. In this study organizational learning and organizational literacy concepts were explored in the literature as related concepts in terms of organizational identity and organizational culture. The results were obtained via literature review and reflected the importance of two complementary concepts, organizational literacy and organizational learning, on learning organization.

Keywords: Information literacy, organizational learning, organizational literacy, organizational memory, organizational identity.

1   Introduction

Of late, organizations tend to capture, use and share information faster in order to catch up with new developments and advancements in technology. Organizations are required to adapt themselves and their organizational structures to rapidly changing conditions especially in the organizational information management fields such as ingestion, use, and information sharing according to technological convergence emerged in the related sector. Besides, Learning, as one of the core concepts in the education field, is described as one of the fundamental knowledge management processes. It is also a significant concept related to management field which affects organizations in terms of providing competitive advantage and adaptation of new innovative technologies.

In this perspective, adaptation of new technologies and being a leading part of changing conditions are important for organizational development through improving learning methodologies. Organizations' objectives, their general characteristics, and target groups can be stated as decisive organizational information management factors

that differ from organization to organization. Considering organization structures, employees use information sources and their information literacy skills within the boundaries of organizational procedures and facilities. Adjustments to the new processes, rules and regulations in the nature of organizations require a learning period for employees [1]. In the literature, organization defined as a set of coordinated components such as opinions, beliefs, traditions, values and behaviors [2-3]. In line of this definition, norms, regulations and rules determined by the organizations can be shown as not only essential components for the reflection of organizational identity and organizational culture, but also components that are directly affect adaptation processes to new developments. In this context, it is seen that the relationship amongst organizational behavior, culture, identity, organizational learning and organizational information management are explained by models and theories in the literature. In light of this information, this study aims to indicate the relationship of organizational literacy with organizational learning processes and organizational memory.

2   Organizational Identity and Culture

As in many other fields, new developments have led to various changes in the field of management and organization as well. The reduction of boundaries in global meaning, rise of possibilities in access to information and sharing facilities enforced the organizations to various attempts on for implementation and adoption of innovations in order to ensure the sustainability in changing conditions. In this context several interdisciplinary studies about organizations that are mainly trying to ensure continuity in the changing conditions appear in the literature. Basically, organizations which comprise a plurality of components are expressed as structures that bring people together for specific purposes and express the ideas by itself as a whole with a single identity [4]. In this respect, the concept of organization is a structure where tasks are performed towards determined common goals and it also represents a process which reflects the cultural characteristics in the social sense [5]. On the other hand organizations meet the employees' and administrators' needs and provide the harmony for employees and coordination between the groups within the organization through concerted purposes [6-7]. It would be correct to say that organizations have relative continuity and unity of values. Distinctive features of organizations that are shared by employees constitute organization's system and organizational identity [8-9]. At this point, organizations with their unique cultures and characteristics generate their identities in the community where they are belonged and all over the world. Organizational culture is one of the most important steps for generation of organizational identity. It especially determines written and nuncupative rules that affect employees' behaviors and organization's structure as a transcendental reality [1] and also as a general term presents all forms of organizational reflections containing organizational behaviors and modellings. Organizational culture is represented by distinctive beliefs, values and personality owned and shared within the community that is the human resource of organization.

Organizational identity is generally under the effect of not only target audience's needs but also communities' needs and parameters [9]. It is defined as a whole of forms that are used for representation of an organization and organizational identity

determines how the organization is perceived by target audiences and community [4]. All the forms of self-representation in an organization create the identity of the organization. It is seen that organizational culture and organizational identity are highlighted also under the conceptual definitions of organization. In this regard Hürel [10] states the organization as a body that has unique style, standards, rules, regulations and norms.

In general organizations have corporate identities that differentiate them from the other organizations. Main elements that reflect organizational identity to community can be sampled as logo, letterhead, business card, web sites and social media environments with the Web 2.0 technologies. The concept of organizational identity contains information about organizations such as who they are, what they do and how they do. Even the concept of organizational identity is the visible face of the organization, it has developed under the concept of organizational memory. The components of organizational culture and identity are located within the context of organizational memory. Organizational memory which plays an important role on organizational learning processes also brings sustainable learning processes in the organizations.

3   Organizational Memory

Memory is an important concept for organizations as well as individuals. Organizational memory provides many advantages for organizations such as recording workflows for similar processes and reuse of recorded information in order to shorten workflows and providing efficiency in time/costs for organizations. Memory is an environment that allows recording the information by supporting the learning processes. In this regard, organizational memory can be thought as a platform or an environment for storing information in order to share and reuse of stored information with aim of organizational processes and benefits. Organizational memory is defined as the accumulation of information and competencies reflecting organizational decisions and experiences gained from best and previous practices [11]. Stored information provides efficiency for decision making processes within the organization. On the other hand, it is stated that organizational memory reduces the cost of new decisions in organizational workflow [12-13]. In general, organizational memory is an important element for organizations and it is affected by the learning and human factors. Organizations that consist of learning by individuals who know how to learn are different from the others in terms of behaviors for organizational processes, use of information literacy skills such as information seeking behaviors. These factors are considered as important elements for creation of organizational memory and it can be said that organizational literacy and information literacy skills and competencies are used in organizations and support organizational memory as well. It is also pointed that access to tacit information is important factor for organizational memory [14]. Moreover Bejinaru and Lordache [15] consider that providing access to tacit information supports learning processes in organizations and allows easier adaptation and implementation of innovative approaches within the organization. As one of the important concepts for organizational development, organizational memory requires effective organizational learning processes that shape managerial perspectives and decision making processes by providing sustainable structures.

4   Organizational Learning

Improvements of organizational learning capabilities are stated as an important factor for organizations in order to gain competitive advantage in sustainable and global meaning with the advancements in information technologies. In this point, it can be said that individuals can contribute to organizational culture by establishing causal links and critical thinking skills that emerge as a result of fundamental information literacy skills. In this regard, studies also confirm that organizational learning is one of the important components of organizational culture [16-17].

Organizational learning is conceptually defined in the literature as a vital capability for organizations that provide contributions to creating solutions for problems and increasing organizational capabilities in order to assure innovative ideas and sustainable competitive advantage [18]. Ghosh [19] explains that organizational learning, differently from individual learning, is based on interpretation and dissemination of information learned as a result of the business processes. Ghosh also states that organizational learning is a concept that occurs as a result of the integration of employees' inventions and assessments with common intellectual models of organizations. On the other hand, Lin and Huang [20] describe that information systems that present internal information to use of employees provide contributions to organizational learning. In this point it is possible to say that technological capabilities that generally support individual learning activities are also important for organizational learning.

According to another point of view stated in the literature, information should be transferred and shared in order to broaden its impact within the organization. In this respect, transmission and sharing of information support problem solving, individual and collective learning, innovations and multi-faceted approaches within the organization [21].

It is also considered that organizational learning and information management approaches are complementary concepts [12]. On the other hand, questioning processes and applications lead to organizational culture and they are shaped by organizational culture as well. Organizations can also develop competencies for information management with the aim of providing competitive advantage, and efficiency in change management, and improving financial conditions. It is stated that they can become a learning organization in the end of these improvements [12].

It is also seen that there are many models and theories explained in the literature with the aim of describing organizational learning and adaptation of learned processes [22]. In the framework of the literature, it can be said that most of the organizational learning processes represented via community of practices (CoPs), were defined as networks organized informally and consisting of actors who have common aim and interests within the scope of organizational learning and information management [23-25]. Playing an important role of organizations' information systems, CoPs provide the transformation of tacit information into explicit information of organizational learning. Moreover, information when it is used individually is perceived as potentially valuable for the organization, it becomes a real value for the organization by bringing learning perception to organizational dimension. This point of organizational information management processes within the scope of organizational learning can be illustrated as Figure 1.

As it is displayed in Figure 1, while organizational information is used by units of organizations, the characteristics of information is changed from tacit information into explicit information by meaning the conceptual expression of information management processes.

It is also emphasized in Figure 1 that organizational information management mainly focuses on content while organizational learning focuses on processes including capturing, creating, processing and using of information. In this context, it might be said that organizational learning is an aim of organizational information management and it contains motivation processes of creation, delivering and using of information in the organization [26].
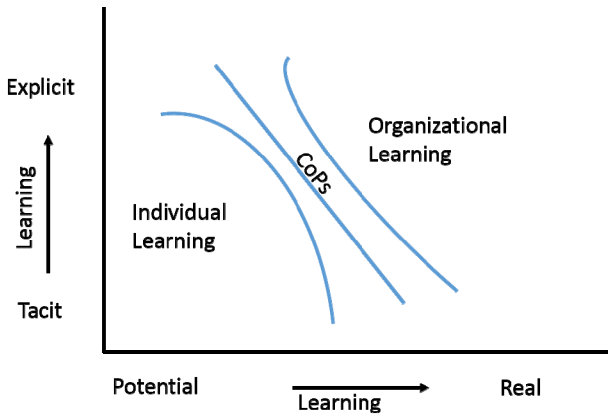

Fig. 1. Transformation of learning and information in the organization

5   Organizational Literacy

Learning processes in organizations are carried out on the basis of organizational objectives, organizational identity and organizational culture. In this context all organizational information management components are affected by the organizational culture and organizational identity. By and large, almost every organization has a hierarchy and all roles and responsibilities are defined clearly and employees complete their works according to assigned roles and responsibilities [27]. In this case, organizational learning processes are formed and improved by organizational workflows, defined roles and responsibilities. It is also acknowledged in the literature that organizational learning is affected by the organizational behavior, norms and organizational culture by requiring active participation of employees and the concept of organizational learning characterized as a process based on common decisions and values of the organization [28]. At this point, organizational literacy can be considered as a concept that is a set of skills and competencies evolved in individuals according to organizational identity, memory and organizational culture. It is also possible to say that the organizational literacy contains all activities related to meeting the information needs, accessing to information, developing strategies for ingestion and capturing of information, sharing and dissemination of information in

the context of organizational benefits. In line with this definition we can infer that organizational literacy as a concept that affects organizational learning and there is an interaction between the organizational culture, identity, behavior and memory. The relationships between these concepts are illustrated and explained in Figure 2. According to organizational literacy - organizational learning relationship model drawn in Figure 2, it can be explained that organizational literacy affects organizational learning processes influenced by organizational memory, culture, behavior and identity. It is also expected in this model that organizational learning affected by organizational literacy has an impact on organizational memory, culture, identity and behavior. Moreover, it would not be wrong to say that organizations who have organizational literacy skills and competencies, develop themselves by learning capabilities, evaluate their workflows and outputs, improve their problem solving skills, adopt new technologies with an innovative perspective and make improvements and developments for sustainable bodies and to become a learning organization [29]. Briefly it is seen that organizational literacy as a concept contains essential skills and competencies that make organizations a learning organization.

According to the literature, it is seen that studies were conducted from different perspectives and generally organizational literacy and corporate literacy terms were used as terminology. UNESCO considers that organizational literacy is a concept that makes organizations stronger and supports them for sustainable competition in 21st century [30]. With regard to this statement, information literacy described as a concept not only for library and librarianship but also it is a concept related to state and private organizations and companies [31]. Lau explains that information professionals can act as experts or consultants for companies in terms of developing information literacy and lifelong learning programs for their organizations. Organizational literacy conceptually used by Blase in 1984 and 1985 in education science by meaning how individuals can be educated better in schools and schools' attributes for individual development [32]. Furthermore it is also revealed that organizations should develop their literacy programs in order to create new opportunities and new innovative approaches [33]. Kauhanen-Simanainen [33], also define organizational literacy as an information flow and set of competencies that are carried out by organizations with the aim of achieving strategic objectives of organizations based on internal and external interactions. As it is explained in the definitions, engagement with the environment is another highlighted factor and it is indicated that organizational literacy is a related concept with learning organization [34].
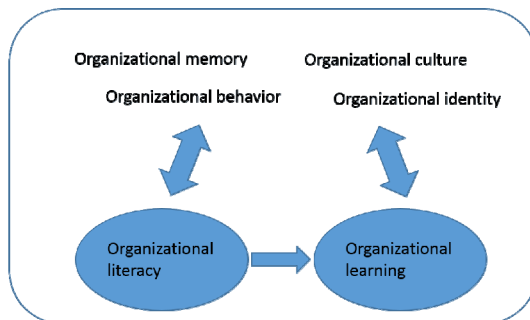

Fig. 2. Organizational literacy - organizational learning relationship model.

On the other hand, organizational literacy is a conceptual road map that directs employees for their workflows, organizational roles and responsibilities. In this context, skills and competencies of organizational literacy are described as taking the systems perspective, focusing on the organizational task & the processes that support the task, understanding roles determined in the organization, understanding individual differences, taking a self-reflective & adaptive stance, understanding of unconscious/covert processes, personal vision & proactive stance, interpersonal competencies, personal mastery, Self-authorization & leadership [35],

Beyond the competencies listed above, at first, organizational literacy competencies are described as reading, observation, evaluation, understanding and interpreting skills and it is stated that individual skills are insufficient by themselves and organizations should develop their organizational literacy structures according to their organizational identity and cultures, values and norms [32]. The studies in the literature indicate that organizational learning and learning organization concepts have an important influence on organizational literacy skills and competencies and it is also an administrative concept for organizations. Furthermore, it is possible to say that organizational culture, memory and identity are major components for carrying out organizational literacy competencies in organizational dimensions.

6   Conclusion and Discussion

Learning processes which determine the nature of individuals and organizations emerge as one of the most important skills in today's conditions that are vital to be able to rapidly adopt the changing conditions. Nowadays organizations evaluate learning processes in organizational level for various reasons such as to remain competitive, flexible and innovative and to maintain the consistency as the age requires. In these processes, organizations are influenced by organizational culture, organizational memory and organizational behaviors. When the organizations operating different sectors and located different scales are evaluated basically within the frame of organization concept components they can apply the organizational literacy concept with common learning methodologies. The organizational literacy concept provides several advantages for organizational practices like establishing true collaborations in line with the shared common vision and objectives in organizations. In the context of organizational literacy, usage of information systems is described as strategic component of organizational development and it is strongly related to information literacy skills of employees. Moving from this point, it can be said that the use of information systems also increase organizational literacy level of organization in the wider sense. Plus, the service trainings are considered as an effective activity on the development of individual and organizational phenomenon for adoption of innovations and sustainable organizational functioning.

Shaping the current decisions in management processes is possible through establishing right communication and it correctly analyze the past and current time differences and similarities. Organizational literacy processes managed with the right processes provide advantages in terms of competition and continuity while it enables the development of organizational culture and organizational memory. In general, it is possible to say that information technology solutions have significant effects on formation of organizational literacy processes. Therefore, organizational literacy

processes include the basic information management process which consists of acquisition, storage and processes of information also known as information life cycle. In the light of this information the following factors are influential for the effect of developing literacy skills both individual and organizational sense:

- The creation and revision of the literacy strategy for an organization within the framework of a program according to the organization's purpose and vision,
- Making investments in employees' education in order to improve their levels and adapt to changing circumstances processes
- Increase investments for information systems
- Planning of training programs or encouragement of participation in such programs that will enables to individuals of the organizations basic literacy skills and lifelong learning skills.

In the framework of these components mentioned above, the advantages and benefits of organizational literacy competencies and skills can be listed as: execution of team works, efficient management processes with the integration of individual and organizational competencies and skills, effective change and innovation management with the productivity in management processes, support of team works in order to develop new ideas and opinions by collective intelligence and cooperation, providing cost and time efficiency with the use of common literacy modules instead of using individual learning processes, creation of systematic solutions for data collecting and analyzing, critical thinking and organizational workflows.

In this context, it can be concluded that although organizational literacy provides many advantages and benefits for organizations, organization learning and literacy competencies, similar to individual learning, may differ from organization to organization. Learning characteristics also varies widely as a result of identity and cultural differences in organizations. In this regard, the differences should be taken into consideration for further studies that will be conducted on organizational literacy skills.

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