

BOOK REVIEW (1)

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INTRODUCTION

The technical educational institutions of higher learning are facing quality improvement problems. The system as a whole – national, state & institutional level -- need to be transformed to enable them to adapt to the changes in the country caused by liberalization of economic policies. Transforming the system to the adaptable changes, needs organisationwide effort in learning new knowledge and information so that new skills are acquired by individuals & teams and organization as a whole.

But to introduce organizationwide learning, requires strategies at the organizational level which will create and provide opportunities for all to utilize this knowledge in the actual context of work.

Till now there was no book available in the market which throws light on the way to design and implement such strategies. The one which this review covers, this journal hopes,

will help all those who are engaged in bringing about qualitative improvement in engineering education.

CONTENT DESCRIPTION

The book is divided into 12 chapters.

Chapter one deals with foundation for learning organisations.

There are five principal characteristics of learning organisation :

1. Visible leaderships
2. Thinking literacy
3. Overcoming functional myopia
4. Learning teams
5. Managers as enablers.

Chapter 2 describes the nature of the five bricks of the foundation of learning organisations.

Leaders exist in all parts and all levels of an organisation. But for a learning organisation, leaders must be developed to undertake a note of the transformation taking place. Leader must be given time to build up the foundation. A balanced approach to lead-

ership development contain three elements :

- i) mentoring and coaching
- ii) leadership education and training
- iii) a series of developmental activities

Chapter 3 explains the concept of "thinking literacy" the second element in the foundations of a learning organisation. "Thinking literacy" includes :

- Communication Skills
- Mathematical Skills
- Self-management Skills
- Business Skills
- Team Skills
- Function-specific Skills

Particular attention is invited to self-management skills comprising three key skills (i) how to learn, (ii) how to reason, (iii) how to plan his or her own life and career. Learning to learn tells how to plan a course of action that will lead to the mastery of a new situation. People learn how to learn by experiencing this process.

Learning to reason is the process of structuring problems and following logical process to solve these problems.

Career planning skill enables employees to plan their career even in the face of losing their job in the current service.

The next important skill is the team-skill required where quality improvement is to be brought about by teams through use of meeting skills and negotiating skills.

"Overcoming Functional myopia" explained in chapter 4 requires getting people of all levels and across all functions to widen their focus from their local goals and standards to overall goals of the organization. The

three primary causes of functional myopia are cultural, organizational and administrative barriers that are developed as the organization has grown overtime. To eliminate functional myopia, it requires education and training programmes, changes in organisational design to eliminate structural barriers and rethinking administrative policies and procedures to ensure that they support overall company goals.

Chapter 5 describes the characteristics of "Learning teams". Team skills include :

- Communication Skills
- Cooperative Work Skills
- Meeting Management Skills
- Negotiating Skills
- Conflict resolution Skills

Team-skills are developed through a four stage process i.e. (i) team formation (ii) Team-skills development (iii) Management skills development and (iv) Self management.

Chapter 6 explains the role of "managers as enablers". The managers in the changing organization have following roles to play i.e. (1) Teacher, (2) Team Manager (3) Interpreneure (4) Strategic relations manager.

Chapter 7 emphasizes that all learning organization must invest in people, which must be considered as important as investment in equipment and plant. People are key to the process of transformation, because only people can retain technological edge. But companies should invest not in training and development or technology, and new plants and equipment, but invest only in comprehensive approaches to improve their current and future business prospects and these comprehensive approaches must in-

clude all of the above elements.

Chapter 8 describes "new ways of learning". Learning is a four-stage activity viz. Data gathering; transforming data into information; transforming information into knowledge; and from knowledge to wisdom. In many organizations, learning does not occur, because of the lack of (i) knowledge of available resources; (ii) access to resources (iii) permission to learn & (iv) permission to apply what has been learnt.

All learning organisations should pay careful attention to these barriers and ways of learning. The most important is however, to create a learning environment, first by building five foundations essential for building a learning organization.

Chapter 9 describes ways and means of "Breathing life into the learning organization". The managers are advised to adopt the same nine steps required to bring up a child, learn about the "learning organisation", assess the current status of the five foundations for the learning organization; develop plans to build up five foundations, get buy-in of all involved parties; develop commitment to learning; develop and deliver needed education & training; institute series of learning practices; provide constant reinforcement of new learning & practices, and be constantly open to new ideas as the employees are freed to learn and share their ideas. The learning organization is not something you buy ready to use or just suddenly proclaim exists. It must go through some developmental steps as any major programme.

Chapter 10 explains the concept of "creating a Virtual Training Organisa-

tion (V.T.O.). The Virtual Training Organisations is a new approach to corporate training and development that :

(i) is itself a learning organization

(ii) has the capabilities necessary to help transform the company into a learning organization. The Virtual Training Organization is different from the traditional T & D organization in following ways :

The VTO focuses more on corporate goals rather than individual skills.

Has expertise on both training & development methodologies as well as company business

Use training methods, formal courses, seminar and workshops plus consultation, coaching and facilitation.

VTOs use consultants, facilitation, coaches along with course developer and instructors.

VTO focus on real-time solutions and not merely on the time to follow methodologies.

VTO adopts "Policy Research" as a basic model and not "academic Research" as is done by traditional T/D.

The chapter goes on to suggest six steps to creating a Virtual Training Organisation, namely; hire or appoint a director; determine the organisation's priorities, assemble right resources, contract for needed services; eliminate non competitive resources.

Chapter 11 deals with "measuring for results". Measuring for results is a three-steps process. First, write measurable objectives; second, plan programmes to achieve those objectives; third, determine and measure meaningful outcomes. By developing proper measurement tools, the organisations not only improve their service to the customers, but also get additional bene-

fits such as increased employee loyalty, reduced employee turnover; greater individual and organisational productivity; ideas for new products & services.

Chapter 12 describes "nurturing learning beyond the next quarter". Learning never stops. Companies must continuously learn in order to keep up and get ahead. It is necessary for the organization to establish five foundations to begin with it. It can then move on to creating the super-structure, the high level skills and methods of learning organization.

The super structure has three major components : continuous enquiry; information capture; information dissemination. The continuous enquiry by an organisation requires continually seeking a better understanding of their customers needs, and their own business processes and work methods - better understand the company's products and services & determine how they can be improved. Together, all of these elements provide information necessary to plan all parts of the Company's future, from its products and services to its markets to the structure of its complete internal and external.

As regards "Information Capture" people from the learning organisation capture information from variety of sources including past experience, the experiences of other Companies, research results, theory and other information available in the public opinion.

"Information Dissemination" is intended to ensure that people have access to information they need, when they need it. But the information transfer will occur if the people know

where the information resides; those holding information are willing to share it; and those needing information are willing to learn from others.

COMMENTS

This is in brief the overview of the contents of the book. The topics handled in this book are of great contemporary significance to the technical institutions. Education in general and technical education in particular is surely going to be the most important instruments for gearing the nation to the proposed reconstruction project. The demand for better education will come from the government, industries and students themselves. Even though, the book is directing its advice to the business corporations, the principles and procedures described therein are equally valid for educational institutions. Technical education institutes have to build up five foundation - visible leadership; thinking literacy; overcoming functional myopia, learning teams; managers as enablers and need to be learning organisations. They must learn the importance of investing effort and money for developing all people in the same way as they invest in equipment and tools. All these people must learn new ways of learning and remove barriers to learning by launching projects for innovation. All managers of technical education must have a long range perspective of developing present organisation into learning organisation and organise sustained effort to maintain learning effort. It should maintain focus on corporate goal, supplement training methods by coaching, consulting & facilitating, focus on

real time solutions and aim at policy research rather than academic research. These efforts must be supplemented by efforts to systematically measuring results of the learning efforts. It must be always remembered that nurturing learning requires a superstructure of continuous enquiry, information capture and information transfer within the organisation.

It must be noted here that it is not easy for the managers and teachers of the technical institutions to embark on this venture. Understanding educa-

tional processes is not the same as understanding business processes. Understanding educational processes requires knowledge of educational and **behaviour of services** in which engineers and technologists are poorly equipped. The effort they will have to invest is far more than what business managers have to do.

Reading this book will at least help these educational managers to grasp the process of building learning organisation in an educational institute.

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