Using Quality Assurance Mechanisms to Enhance Change and Organizational Learning

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Abstract

This study shows how Quality Systems could be critical enablers for Organizational Learning (OL) and change, and how Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms, in particular, need to be used in a learning organization as continuous improvement tools and as systems of thinking. The study presents how the national QA system was used in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for that purpose in Saudi Arabia. The characteristics of a Learning Organization (LO) include systems thinking, building shared visions, team learning, mental models, and personal mastery. The level of learning through QA processes is related to loop learning level, single vs. double or triple learning loops.

A mixed methods approach was used in this study to investigate stakeholders' perceptions and patterns relating to the levels of implementation and change effected by QA procedures. The study also elaborates on evaluation and reflection methods used within the QA system to encourage continuous improvements and institutional learning, and how they interacted with the organizational cultures. Based on their approaches in using QA systems that influenced the level of learning organization characteristics, HEIs were categorized in this study into three levels, ranging from low to high. Only a few of the HEIs were classified as having a high learning organization level.

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The study recommends developing the leadership skills of top management and quality leaders to enable them to consider the learning organization characteristics and their connections with quality mechanisms and tools. HEIs need to move to systems thinking using mental models, where people deal with interconnected events and gain deeper insights into the structures and underlying challenges, utilizing the best practices found in learning organizations.

Keyword: Learning Organization (LO); Organizational Learning (OL); Quality Assurance (QA); National Commission on Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA); Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)