

Preface

It is my enormous pleasure and satisfaction to give a brief account of the PAL story as its preface.

Through wisdom is a house built;

And by understanding it is established;

And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

(Old proverb of wisdom)

We can almost see the analogy of the above saying in the running of an organization in today's competitive environment. An organization has to learn and improve continuously to keep up with the world that is moving so fast. No longer is the wisdom that built the house, so to speak, enough to maintain the riches in it.

Knowledge is central to the sustainable development and growth of the organization. Be it an individual or an organization, the ability to make good use of knowledge comes with, and only with, sufficient level of understanding and experience. Such understanding and experience can only be brought about by a conscious process of learning and application. It is not surprising that many managers, entrepreneurs as well as researchers in the West have been paying increasing attention to the concept and importance of organizational learning (OL) and learning organization (LO). Unfortunately, for an organization, it is an organism only by analogy. It is not in its inherent nature to learn, let alone improve. Yet, for many of today's organizations, without continual learning, profits and successful products or services will be hard to come by.

For OL to be useful and effective, there must be leadership and commitments from the management together with motivation and effort from the staff. Most of all, the goal of OL must be clear to all. It must be seen not only to add value to the development and improvement of the organization but also to benefit the staff in some perceivable way. In other words, OL is a process that needs all the usual functions of management, i.e., planning, resourcing, directing, monitoring, evaluation, and controlling.

A simple Google search will reveal that a great deal has been written about OL and LO in the last two decades. But it seems that much of the exposition remains at conceptual level. Real-life success stories of OL implementation are few and far between. It appears that barriers to OL are still an issue today as they were two decades ago.

This book is the culmination of invaluable efforts of Kris Law, Y.C. Chau, K.F. Kwong, and Chris Cao Rui who worked with me studiously and tirelessly on this long-running industry-based research and their respective Ph.D. thesis.

Together with our collaborating industrial partner, we have travelled a long OL journey that started more than a decade ago.

Together we have developed the OL framework which we termed PAL, short for project action learning.

Together we have come to understand that the four PAL pillars are prerequisites for successful PAL implementation.

Together we have put in place and pushed a practical wavelike implementation strategy which has taken us through thick and thin over more than a decade of OL experimentation and realization in real industrial settings.

And together we have arrived at this juncture of the OL journey, able to look back with considerable satisfaction that PAL is a proven OL vehicle to take an organization toward the LO destination.

This is a book based on our decade-long implementation experience and is written for OL practitioners who may wish to jump on to our PAL vehicle and embark on the OL journey.

But naturally, continuous success needs continuous efforts. Winston Churchill's saying very aptly closes the preface:

Now this is not the end.

It is not even the beginning of the end.

But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Kong Bieng Chuah

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Practices

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