

Continuous Learning Management (CLM): A Model for Saudi Organizations to Learn, Manage and Retain Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Learning has always been a major concern for many organizations around the globe, especially when it comes to retaining knowledge. Saudi organizations are no exception. The expansion of the Saudi economy has generated a great demand for organizational learning that is continuous, improved upon and transmitted to the present and future workforces. Huge sums are being spent on learning nevertheless learning objectives are not being achieved. In this context, we present a model for continuous learning management (CLM), substantiated by an empirical study in Saudi Arabia to integrate learning and organizational strategies so that learning provides required outcome that ensures business success. CLM attempts to establish a link between learning and business success which, according to the literature review, has been missing from the learning strategies.

Our study sets two criteria for developing CLM. a) Determine whether or not an organization is a learning organization. For this purpose, five learning principles, widely presented in the literature, have been recommended to be followed as input while preparing employees' training and management development programmes. b) Integrate training and management development with the organizational strategies in such a way that change is continuous and effective i.e. organizational development becomes a phenomenon.

Organizations fulfilling above criteria are assumed to be learning organizations capable of retaining knowledge. Since knowledge is attained for organizational change that is continuous we thus suggest that CLM would drive organizational development and would resolve the issues of learning in Saudi Arabia.

KEY WORDS: learning organization, knowledge management, training, management development, organizational development, business success.

1) INTRODUCTION

Saudi economy is expanding at great speed and so is the trend for Saudization-creating jobs for Saudi nationals. In this context, the need for organizational learning capable of retaining and transmitting knowledge to the workforce has become inevitable. Learning in Saudi Arabia as elsewhere is generally acquired through organized training and management development programmes to give employees job-related skills. Our experience suggests that in spite huge budgets being spent on training and management development the required objectives are hardly being achieved thus hindering organizational goal achievement.

Organizations emphatically seek goal achievement, yet according to Chadwick and Raver (2012), this goal achievement is dependent upon a concomitant focus on learning, providing a strong theoretical base for linking learning with goal achievement. This theory is not new. Dweck (1986) presents his views on why and how learning unfolds in organizations by using emergent, motivational perspectives inspired by achievement goal theory. From their discussion of goal orientation culture, we find an important consensus between Dweck (1986) and Chadwick and Raver (2012): that learning is influenced by a formal organizational structure with fewer power differences. The novel idea here is institutionalizing learning within the organization. This point of view, that a formal structure with fewer power differences facilitates learning, is supported by Edmondson (2002) and James (2002). This implies that the learning process must begin from within the organization. In this regard, we obtain further support from Chadwick and Raver's (2012) work. They emphasize that organizational leaders who create an environment in which challenges are taken as opportunities to learn from mistakes are most likely to generate learning. Based on concepts

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of linking learning with goal achievement and institutionalization of learning, we present a case establishing a formal mechanism that facilitates organizational attempts to retain knowledge. Our view is strengthened by Chadwick and Raver's (2012) suggestion that learning will take place in an environment in which the individual, group and organizational goal orientations are institutionalized. There has been much debate on organizational learning in the literature, hence our contribution in this paper is that learning alone is not a solution for goal achievement. Our arguments in this respect are: a) for sustained goal achievement it is imperative to attain, retain and improve knowledge and pass it on to the organizational workforce; and b) learning has to be formalized. This calls for integration between training, management development and organizational strategies.

Influenced by the total quality management (TQM) theme and by Chadwick and Raver (2012), we aim to develop an integrated model that institutionalizes learning. In this respect, our argument, like TQM, is that everyone in the organization has to be involved at each level from each work group to attain and retain learning by way of institutionalization. Thus, we can draw inference based on the discussion from the literature that: a) learning is imperative for goal achievement and b) for sustained goal achievement there is a need for knowledge to be retained and linked to business success. How to retain knowledge is a question that we aim to answer in this paper by suggesting the establishment of a formalized organizational framework – we propose to call this a model for continuous learning management (CLM).

2) Theoretical base for CLM

To retain knowledge an organization has to be a learning organization. In this context, we focus upon the characteristics that make an organization a learning organization capable of retaining knowledge. The idea that organizations could learn and retain knowledge over time was first articulated by Cyert and March (1963). Cyert and March (1963), however it did not go very far in the direction of retaining knowledge. They provide a general theory of organizational learning with reference to the environmental impact (Cyert and March 1963, p. 84), which remained a focus for academic debate for quite a long time. The specific idea of a learning organization emerged towards the end of the 1980s (Easterby-Smith and Leyles 2011). Easter by-Smith and Leyles (2011) provide an interesting debate on organizational learning; however, there did not appear to be a specific model or criteria that could help in assessing whether or not an organization is a learning organization.

The debate in the literature indicates certain elements influencing organizational learning, such as Cyert and March (1963) talking about environmental impact, Coopey (1995) and Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) raising concerns over transferring knowledge within the cultural context and Lawrence, Mauws, Dyck and Kleysen (2005) calling for the inclusion of power, politics and culture in the theories and practices of learning. However there appears a gap as none of the above showing what makes an organization a learning organization. Another important element of learning appears in the literature by Thomas and Allen (2006), cited by Easterby-Smith and Leyles (2011), suggesting the lack of a link between learning and business success. Similar views are put forward by Dweck (1986) and Chadwick and Raver (2012), but Thomas and Allen (2006) provide a succinct idea where the gap lies. The foregoing discussion gives us a theoretical base on two grounds on which to develop a model for CLM. These are; a) define what makes an organization a learning organization and b) establish link between learning and organizational success. Bearing that in mind, our attempt to develop CLM is a step in the right direction to ensure that learning is retained, improved upon and transmitted to the organizational workforce. To develop a theoretical base for CLM, we first refer to the learning criteria presented by Werther and Davis (1986) in an attempt to determine whether or not an organization is a learning organization.

According to Mondy, Noe and Premeaux (2002), a learning organization is one with the capacity to adapt and change continuously. Change, to be successful, requires everyone to be involved, which implies that learning has to take place at every level of the organization and each work group has to be involved so that the required results are achieved. This definition of learning we deduce from Klein (1998), who suggests that learning aims to increase one's capacity to take effective action, thus requiring individuals at each level of the organization to have the capacity to take action.

For learning to increase individuals' decision-making capacity, we propose an integrated CLM model that has to be based on input, processes and outcome. In this respect, we propose learning principles as input, training and management development as processes that would drive organizational development as an end result. Organizational development involves processes for bringing about and implementing change (Purves, 1989 cited in Torrington and Hall, 1991 pp. 476). Torrington and Hall (1991 pp. 476) described "organizational development as 'macro' approach to development, as contrasted with individual training and development which is primarily a 'micro' approach. "This implies both training and management development are essential components that drive organizational development in the pursuit of achieving desired goals. Torrington and Hall, 1991 pp. 476-77, agree that any OD practitioners would necessarily consider involving all eleven elements of organizational development given by Purves (1989) in process of

change. Since most of these elements are outcome of learning process as we have been arguing, therefore we present a case that OD, a macro change approach, would be driven by organizational learning and hence can be considered as end result of the CLM that would fill the gap between organizational learning and business success as pointed out by Thomas and Allen (2006). The construction of such a model is imperative for organizational success, as we can see from the discussion in the literature covering over half a century, from 1963 to date, in which authors and management practitioners are equally concerned about learning that is retained and produces results.

Since our concern in this paper is the accumulation of knowledge that is utilized towards goal achievement, we therefore presume that a learning organization retains knowledge and utilizes it while responding to the change required by internal and external environments, technologies, competitiveness, innovation, HR policies and so on. This implies that organizational learning and knowledge management become everyone's concern within the organization. Accordingly, we combine three different theoretical frameworks to develop CLM. These are learning principles as input, training and management development as learning processes and organizational development as an outcome. There is a plethora of discussions in the literature providing a conceptual viewpoint on how better management development could be achieved. What is missing is the formal structure of learning that links learning with business success. This is the area to which we make a contribution. In this respect, our discussion now moves towards the first element of CLM to set the criteria for a learning organization.

2.1) Learning principles: criteria for a learning organization

A learning organization continually expands its capacity to create results (Senge 1990). However, organizational learning is not brought about simply by training individuals. It can only happen when an organization facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself (Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell 1991). This provenance of learning is also traceable in Watkins and Marsick's (1992) finding that learning organizations are characterized by total employee involvement in a process of change directed towards shared values or principles. This implies setting criteria for learning that are based on certain principles and could be taken as an input for our proposed CLM. We therefore consider the following learning principles given by Werther and Davis (1986) as useful input for the model.

2.1.1) Participation

Learners' participation is an important element of the learning process. Beitler (2013), in his Internet article, points out that employees' empowerment has become inevitable at every level of the organizational process to maintain a competitive edge. This means that employees' involvement in learning matters is as important as in other operational matters. Participative decision making in selecting learning programmes would provide learners with an opportunity to control their learning that would be long-lasting, motivating and goal-oriented.

2.1.2) Repetition

An interesting discussion is presented by Fiol and Lyles (1985), arguing that individuals' learning does not necessarily reflect organizational learning as individuals' learning is repetitive. However, at the same time they recognize the importance of repetition because repetition refines individuals' skills and results in the development of cognitive systems – an important factor for organizational learning. According to Hedberg (1981), it is through individuals that organizations accumulate knowledge. Since repetition is one of the elements of individuals' learning, we therefore conclude that repetition contributes indirectly to organizational learning.

2.1.3) Relevance

Learning has to be relevant to the learner's job requirements. The tools, materials and instruments used in the learning process must be relevant to the learner's job environment. It is frequently observed that learners in certain situations are given training on sophisticated equipment, to which most learners do not have access at their own workplace, thus resulting in their disengagement from the learning process. In this context, we present two examples.

The first example is from health studies suggesting that the retention of motor learning is best accomplished with variable training schedules including impairment-oriented training (IOT), constraint-induced movement therapy (CIMT), electromyogram (EMG)-triggered neuromuscular stimulation, robotic interactive therapy and virtual reality (VR) (Krakauer 2006). The second example is simulation-based learning that allows the linking of theory to a real-world situation (Chung, Harmon and Baker 2001). This means that the learning has to be relevant to the individual's task requirements.

2.1.4) Transference

Also relevant is the transference of learning. There are two elements that it is important to take into consideration while determining whether an organization is a learning organization or not: first, the learning gained

is transferred to an individual's work environment; and second, the learning gained is shared with present and future workforces. Learning, to be transferable to an individual's workplace, must fulfil the job requirements, i.e. the learner should be able to master the job-related skills that can easily be applied in a job situation. Flight simulation and student simulated-based learning are examples in which learners are trained on simulators resembling real-life characteristics closely (Chung *et al.* 2001). Simulation provides a matching working environment with relevant materials, equipment and scenario, so the skills acquired are transferred quickly to the learner's job situation.

Concerning the transference of learning to be shared by members of the organization, we refer to Fiol and Lyles's (1985) arguments that individuals' learning alone does not suffice for an organization to be a learning organization. Fiol and Lyles (1985) cite Hedberg (1981), who state that organizational learning occurs through individuals but there has to be a mechanism in place that develops cognitive systems and memories that are shared by the members of the organization. The opinions of Starbuck, Greve and Hedberg (1978), Donaldson and Lorsch (1983), Daft and Weick (1984) and Fiol and Lyles (1985) all converge that organizational learning results in associations, cognitive systems and memories that are developed and shared by members of the organization. This implies that individuals' learning will only contribute to organizational learning if it results in transference to the workplace and sharing with present and future members of the organization.

2.1.5) Feedback

Learners must be provided with feedback on their performance before and after individuals' learning has taken place. It is important for individuals to know the extent to which their learning has contributed to their job effectiveness and to the organizational learning. In short, feedback motivates learners and in its absence there could be global discouragement and eventual loss of interest in learning from the individual as well as the organizational perspective.

2.2) Inference for learning organizations

The five learning principles discussed above have been in existence from 1986, first suggested by Werther and Davis (1986); however, there has been a lack of agreement on whether these learning principles are indicators of organizational learning or not. Since these principles are quite common to all sorts of training and management development processes, we conclude that learning principles are useful criteria for individuals' learning and hence deduce that 'learning organizations are those which acquire knowledge provided learning principles are followed in all learning processes'.

Individuals' learning based on learning principles helps in developing and maintaining learning systems congenial both to individual and to organizational learning capable of transmitting knowledge to others by way of organizational histories and norms (Mitroff and Kilmann 1976; Martin 1982; Lawrence and Dyer 1983; Thomas and Allen 2006; Chadwick and Raver 2012). Based on the above arguments, we conclude that the literature does provide a base for developing a model for continuous learning management, with learning principles as input. This is expected to change work-related behaviour, as Kimble *et al* (1961) considers learning to be a relatively permanent change in behaviour.

Based upon the inferences drawn above, we now begin to relate learning principles to two learning processes – 1) training and 2) management development – in some detail to draw a sketch of the CLM model in the following sections.

2.3) Learning process 1: training and development

Training and development with reference to human resources are used simultaneously; however, the two have different objectives. Training helps employees to gain skills related to their present job requirements, whereas development focuses on the future jobs to which employees may be promoted (Werther and Davis 1986). For the sake of clarity, we follow the same theme for training and development in this paper.

Training principles are simple and straightforward, emphasizing 'getting training right'. This implies that training must have a clear objective, i.e. what is to be achieved at the end of the training. Laird (1978) provides three objectives of training. The first objective is that 'there must be information about behaviour to be achieved'. This means prompt action in response to instructions. The second objective requires that 'there should be criteria for performance-related behaviour'. This implies setting the minimum acceptable performance standard. The third objective is 'setting the condition for performance', for example politeness in answering customers' calls.

From the above, we argue that training is a process of changing behaviour (already discussed), which will only be accomplished provided that learning principles are applied in the process of designing, implementing and evaluating training programmes.

2.3.1) Training design, implementation and evaluation

When designing training, it is important to bear in mind two factors: 1) individuals' learning must be based on learning principles, as we established in the light of the literature; 2) the development of cognitive systems, memories and associations for individuals' learning to contribute towards organizational learning. How this can be achieved? Mondyet al. (2002) suggest identifying training needs (ITNs) appropriately. According to their suggestion, ITNs require three levels of analysis: a) taking into consideration the overall business perspective based on the strategic plan, mission, vision and corporate objectives, b) task requirements to achieve the business objectives and c) individual training needs to be based on symptoms such as labour turnover, accident rate, working conditions, etc. The symptoms of training needs largely indicate where the problem lies and how it can be resolved, for example increased turnover due to injuries, increased wastage due to lack of skills and so on. All the three levels of analysis suggest that training has to be linked to the organizational learning needs aiming at business success.

In this regard, we consider training to be cyclical in that individuals' learning is based on participation, repetition, relevance, transference and feedback capable of developing cognitive systems, memories and associations focusing upon organizational learning. Organizational learning in turn expands the business capacity, and as the business capacity expands, new avenues for learning open. This results in organizational development (OD), which we refer to as the end result of learning processes. To make this cycle functional, training needs to be implemented and evaluated carefully.

Regarding the implementation of training, Torrington and Hall (1991, pp. 458–9) and Mondy et al. (2002, p. 222) both present a list of training methods that can be applied to implement training to achieve the desired results. Training evaluation, on the other hand, is a means for confirming whether the desired results have been achieved. A positive evaluation from the employees' point of view is a demonstration of enhanced learning that has changed their work-related behaviour, reduced turnover, reduced absenteeism and contributed to organizational effectiveness.

Similarly, from the organizational point of view, a positive training evaluation indicates two major benefits: 1) short-run benefits resulting enhanced production associated with reduced complaints and reduced waste; 2) long-run benefits resulting innovative products or services. In both cases, organizational effectiveness is enhanced. In this respect, Mondy et al. (2002) provide three important factors to determine the worth of a specific learning programme. These factors are: a) participants' opinions or feedback, b) the extent of learning that has taken place and c) behavioural change. Another important element of training evaluation is benchmarking, which was initially used for business operations, but is now being used for training functions (Mondy et al. 2002).

The above methods are not an exhaustive list of training evaluation. An earlier work by Rae (1983) provides a simple but comprehensive list of training evaluation together with various levels of evaluation. A discussion on these issues is beyond the scope of this work; however, it is important to concentrate on training effectiveness.

2.3.2) Training effectiveness

Training effectiveness has been a major concern as organizations spend billions of dollars each year on management training and development (Saks, Tamkin and Lewis, 2011). Despite several decades of discussion and research on learning, Saks et al. (2011) still raise a valid question: 'is management training and development effective?' The discussion raising concerns over the effectiveness of training dates back to Burke and Day (1986), Collins and Holton (2004), Taylor, Russ-Eft and Taylor (2009) and Powell and Yalcin (2010), who all carry out meta-analyses and attain findings that are not entirely encouraging. Why is the problem of the effectiveness of training and management development still around? We fully endorse this problem and this issue is not to be resolved in this paper; however, we consider that one of the reasons for such a problem could be the absence of a mechanism that links learning with business success. For this reason, our attempt to produce CLM is the first step in finding the answer to the questions raised in the literature (Rea 1983; Senge 1990; Pedler et al. 1991; Mondyet al. 2002; Thomas and Allen 2006; Saks et al. 2011).

We have, in the above sections, explained how training management would render result provided training is based on learning principles. In the following section, we extend the discussion to learning process 2, i.e. executives' and managers' learning. Once that is complete, we develop learning frameworks combining both training and management development to integrate them with organizational strategies.

2.4) Learning process 2: management development

Another dimension of learning is management development, normally concerned with the learning of executives and managers. American Society of Training and Development presents industry reports on training expenditure and it appears that most training expenditures are directed towards executives and managers. Organizations expect that their investment in management development will provide them with skilled and effective managers who will in turn make their organizations more competitive and successful. However, the meta-analyses

by Collins and Holton (2004) and Powell and Yalcin (2010) have the same reservation regarding the effectiveness of management development as they have for other training programmes normally meant for operatives and lower-level management.

Management development is best described as the process whereby managers learn and improve their skills, not only to benefit themselves but also to benefit their employing organizations (Cannell 2008). According to Mondyet al. (2002, p. 229), management development consists of all the learning experiences provided by an organization resulting in an upgrading of the skills and knowledge required in current and future managerial positions. This implies that management development is a learning process, as is the case of training management, and the both need to be synchronized to achieve organizational learning that is effective and has economic benefits for the organization. An obvious difference between training development and management development is that training concentrates on narrowly designed learning, enabling employees to perform well in their present job, whereas development and management development have the wider scope of developing an employee as a whole to deal with present and future challenges. Bearing this difference in mind, the learning strategies for management development have to be designed from different perspectives; however, the learning principles have to be the same.

Torrington and Hall (1991, p. 463) identified four different ways to differentiate management development from training. We do not need to go into much detail on this discussion; however, what managers do is an interesting topic. There are substantial theoretical concepts and investigative research exploring managers' role. We present a few concepts from the gurus of management development to develop an integrated approach for retaining knowledge through learning processes.

Scholefield (1968) sees managers undertaking three tasks, i.e. operating firms, making innovations and stabilizing organizations. Apparently, Scholefield's (1986) version of managers' role is oversimplified; nevertheless, looking deeply into the three areas of managerial function, we come across various strategies requiring specific skills to fulfill managerial responsibilities. This role cannot be performed without an individual's learning (Torrington and Hall 1991, p. 463).

Following Scholefield (1968), Mintzberg (1973) divides managerial role into three categories; decision making, interpersonal relations and information processing. As a matter of fact, this concept applies to all levels of the organization. Every employee makes decisions, interacts within the group and across the groups and processes information at his/her level of operations. What is different for managers is the scope of these activities and their impact on the overall organizational performance. Managers' learning with a wider scope is in fact imperative and in this way management development becomes essential for an organization to be a learning organization. We therefore deduce that the learning principles provided by Werther and Davis (1986) are equally applicable to the management development.

Stewart (1976) describes the managerial role as one of liaison, maintenance of work processes, innovation and setting boundaries for jobs. Here the manager's role has more of an administrative nature, except innovation, which calls for a change in behaviour and continuous learning by exploring new avenues for operations, product design, developing alternative products, etc. The change in behaviour requires managers to be open-minded in order to delegate some functions of a purely routine and administrative nature and concentrate fully on innovation. The discussion by Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 806) about the contents of learning makes the point that knowledge may be gained however required change may not take place. For example a manager gaining knowledge of organizational change through shared responsibility may not be willing to share responsibility with his/her junior managers—thus hindering organizational learning. Organizational learning is imperative for business success and that is only possible when an organizational culture is indeed supportive of it.

Leavitt (1978) refers to the managerial role as one of problem solving, problem finding, influencing, and implementing plans. According to Leavitt (1978), managers operate in a position that is peculiarly dependent while seemingly independent. Here the role of managers again seems to be quite complex and requires special skills that would not be gained through specifically designed courses. There is a need for lifelong learning throughout the career.

From the foregoing discussion and evidence, we conclude that management development is a learning process, like training, and that it needs to be designed, implemented and evaluated using five learning principles as in the case of training. However, the scope here is wider. This means that the culture, organizational strategy, organizational structure and environment have to be supportive if learning is to take place – both at the managerial and at the non-managerial level. According to Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 804), these are contextual factors affecting the probability that learning will occur. Their view further suggests that these factors have a circular relationship with learning in that they create and reinforce learning and are created by learning. This calls for an integrated model for continuous learning (CLM), which we are proposing. This model has to be imbedded in the organizational culture, strategies, structure and environment in order to ensure that appropriate learning takes place at every level of the organization. We can further argue that the retention of knowledge will not be achieved simply by training

individuals or developing managers unless CLM is implemented. We intend to show this in the case of Saudi Arabia, where learning is happening on quite a large scale, but we can seldom find any learning organization.

2.4.1) Objectives of management development

As we suggested, there are certain differences in training and management development approaches; nevertheless, there are obvious similarities between management development and training management. Both need to be designed, implemented and evaluated to achieve the required results. Bearing managers' role in mind, Torrington and Hall (1991) assert that management development opportunities should be available for all rather than for an elite group, i.e. it should not be a selective process for a few. They further emphasize skills development rather than giving knowledge, and focus on enhancing individual managers' capacity to evaluate information for making choices among alternatives.

We wind up our discussion on implementing the management development process by noting that management development is slightly different from implementing training. Management development takes place systematically involving several steps, as suggested by Torrington and Hall (1991). The most important steps are the selection of managers for the MD programme, putting in place an appraisal and individual development system, providing appropriate education and training courses, and involving action learning, coaching, mentoring, peer relationship, natural learning and self-development, a management learning group and management by objective (MbO), all of which can contribute to the development of managers. One must not forget Revans's (1974) statement that managers do not need education but need to have the ability to solve problems and we argue that the same applies to lower-level management, i.e. action learning. All these strategies converge to a focal point that is organizational development as an end result of learning.

2.5) Learning outcome: organizational development (OD)

We mentioned earlier that OD involves processes for bringing about and implementing change (Purves, 1989 cited in Torrington and Hall, 1991 pp. 476), since training and management development are also processes of bringing about change we therefore argue that OD is an end result of CLM. This is in view of the definition given by behavioural scientists that OD results from planned development (DeCenzo and Robins 2007; Byars and Rue 2008; Alagi, 2009). In this respect, our argument is that learning is one of the important factors contributing to OD. We briefly review some popular definitions of OD to examine whether OD is driven by learning through training and management development processes.

According to Beckhard (1969,p9), OD is a planned effort carried out organization-wide and managed from the top in order to increase organizational effectiveness. French and Bell(1995, p28) elaborate OD as "a long-term effort, led and supported by top management, to improve the organizational vision, empowerment, learning and problem-solving processes". Here we gather that learning and problem-solving, generally acquired by training and management development, are an integral part of organizational effectiveness. Similar views are later presented by Cummings and Worley (2008),describing OD as a system-wide application of behavioural science to the planned development and reinforcement of organizational strategies, structure and processes for improving an organization's effectiveness. This justifies training and management development as major processes to enhance organizational effectiveness and development.

Organizational development generally relies upon quality circles, TQM, team building and sensitive training to establish a system that is robust and effective in its own domain (Cummings and Worley 2008). The mechanisms used by OD refer to the outcome of various learning processes as argued by Klatt, Murdick and Schuster (1985, p. 271): 'once an overall OD strategy has been determined, it may be decided a part of this strategy should include the training and development of individuals'. Accordingly, we propose OD as an outcome of CLM, which is a great deal more than just training and management development. Through CLM, our focus is to integrate all learning techniques together with strategic management in such a way that an organization becomes a truly learning organization that facilitates OD by means of learning of all its members and manages to retain knowledge for its effectiveness. This objective is in line with Pedler et al.'s (1991) definition that 'A Learning Company is an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself'. This helps us to complete our discussion and set forth a theoretical framework for CLM.

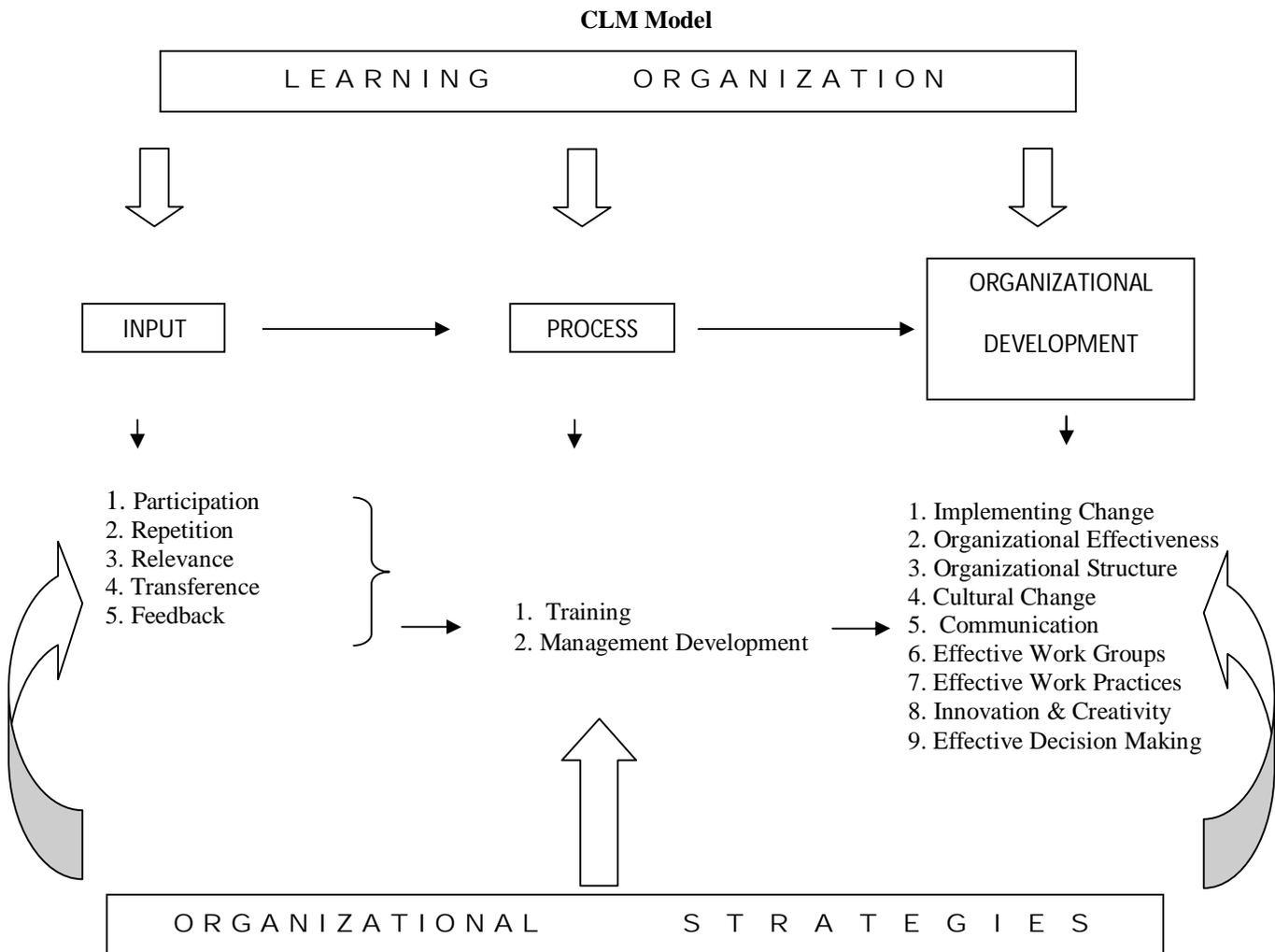
2.6) Theoretical framework for CLM

We know that learning is a complex phenomenon and there is little consensus on the definition of learning. Bearing that in mind, we focus on two major issues in this research: first, learning will be affected if training and management development programmes are not implemented properly, second, how individuals' learning contributes to organizational learning. In this respect, understanding individuals' learning and its impact on organizational

learning and linking learning with business success are important elements of this research. Without integrating these elements, continuous learning will not take place. Starting from Hedberg (1981), learning should not be confused with adoption. Hedberg further argues that there are behavioural aspects to be taken into consideration and cognitive systems to be developed. According to Mitroff and Kilmann (1976), Martin (1982) and Lawrence and Dyer (1983), individual learning does not mean that organizational learning will take place and there are obvious differences between individual learning and organizational learning. Organizational learning requires the development of associations, cognitive systems, memories and history. Thomas and Allen (2006), on the other hand, raise the very important issue that there is a lack of a link between learning and business success. Bearing that in mind, especially Thomas and Allen's (2006) view of linking learning and business success, accepting Edberg's (1981) proposition that individual learning is imperative for organizational learning, taking into consideration Fiol and Lyles's (1985, p. 804) contextual factors and accepting Pedler et al.'s (1991) definition of a learning organization as one that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself, we reach a conclusion and develop the following theoretical framework for CLM model.

“A continuous learning management model with learning principles as input, training and management development as processes and strategic management involvement as an integrating factor would drive organizational development that makes an organization a learning organization capable of acquiring, retaining, improving and transmitting knowledge to its workforce.”

The proposed model is expected to provide a mechanism for organizational learning where OD as proxy for business success becomes a phenomenon as shown below.



Based on above model we proceed for an empirical study with reference to Saudi organizations.

3) Methodology: An empirical research

Our empirical study with reference to Saudi Arabia is built upon the following hypotheses.

H₁: Organizational learning is possible without referring to learning principles. This hypothesis is further subdivided into two hypotheses as follows.

H_{1a}: Training of lower-level management alone can achieve the objective of organizational learning.

H_{1b}: Management development alone can achieve the objective of organizational learning.

H₂: Strategic management involvement alone is sufficient to acquire and retain knowledge.

In order to test the above hypotheses, we surveyed 18 large and medium-sized organizations through a questionnaire and present general information in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Organizational survey – general information				
Sector	Number of organizations	Number of employees	Operative* (%)	Management** (%)
Energy	5	1000+	50%+	10%–20%
Transport	1	1000+	50%+	<10%
Service	4	1000+	50%+	20%
Petroleum and petrochemical	4	1000+	50%+	20%–30%
Communication	1	500	20%	31%+
Tourism	1	1000+	50%+	20%
Government	1	500	50%+	31%+
Manufacturing	1	1000+	50+	10%
* Operative and lower-level management employees				
** Middle- and top-level management employees				

Our questionnaire comprises four major parts: 1) obtaining information about the organization, 2) the approaches used in training management, 3) the approaches used in management development and 4) the systems in place to integrate training and management development. Table 1 suggests that the data were collected from fairly diverse sources covering major industries in Saudi Arabia. Since energy, services, and petroleum and petrochemicals are major employers in Saudi Arabia, the data collected from these three industries comprise 72% of the total organizations (13 out of 18 organizations). Looking at the size of the organizations, we see that around 16 (89%) have a workforce of over 1000 operatives and lower-level management. This implies that our survey covers fairly large-sized organizations. We assume that the data collected are reasonable and representative of the Saudi Arabian culture of learning and management development.

3.1) Testing of H_{1a}: training of operatives and lower-level management

In order to assess whether an organization is a learning organization with reference to providing training to its operatives and lower-level management, our questionnaire concentrated on five learning principles, i.e. participative, repetitive, relevant, transference and feedback. For analysis purposes, 20 marks were allocated to each learning principle, making a total of 100. The questions asked were indirect to avoid biased responses, for example in order to assess whether the training programme designed has any relevance to their job, the question asked was:

How does selection for CPD take place? The respondents were required to select one of the following:

- a. on the basis of seniority
- b. as required by the job
- c. complaints of poor performance

In this case, selecting ‘b’ implies that the training given is relevant to the job requirements. Though ‘c’ could give a nearly correct answer, we omitted it because this has more to do with appointment than selection for training. Similarly, four other questions were asked to establish whether the training procedures follow the learning principles. The responses that emerged are shown in Table 2.

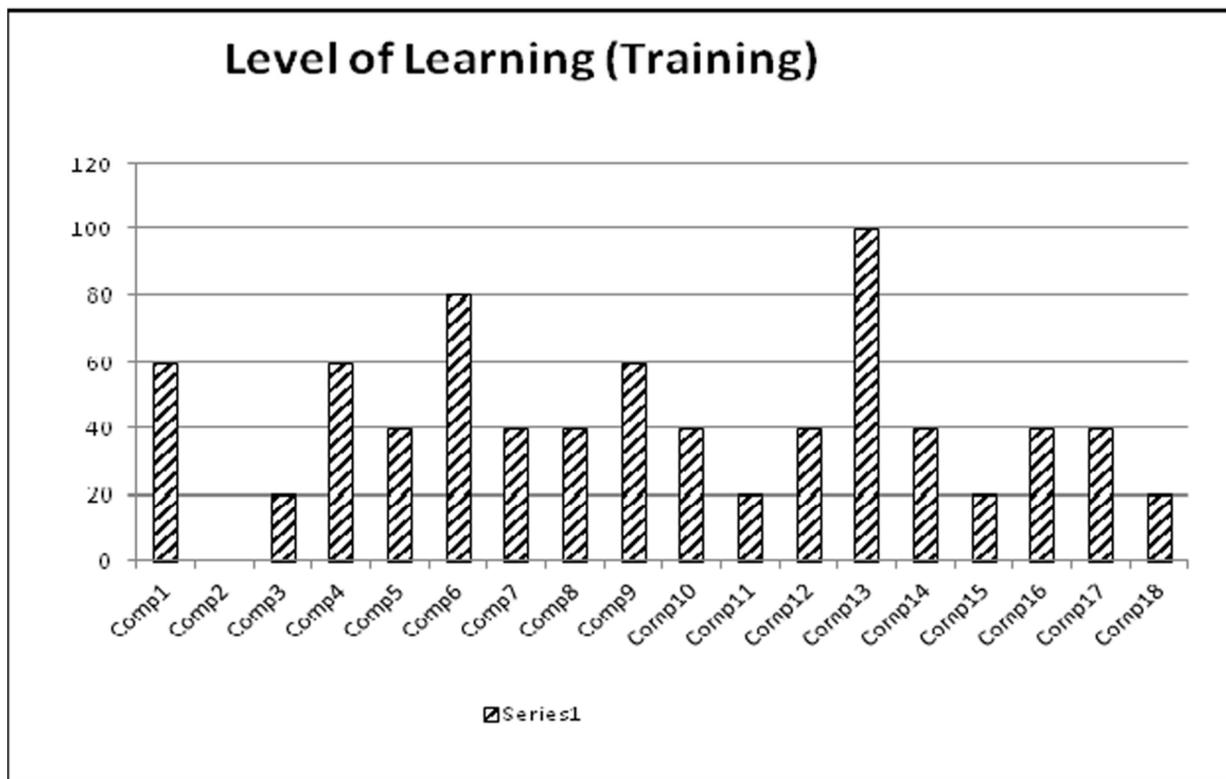
Table 2. Responses concerning learning principles (operatives and lower-level management)					
No. of companies	Scores in %	No. of employees			Training budget (% of employment budget)
		50–300	301–1000	>1000	
1	0	1	-	-	20
4	20	1	3	-	20,5,10,10
8	40	1	1	6	5,20,5,15,15,5,5,5
3	60	-	3	-	20,10,10
1	80	-	-	1	5
1	100	-	-	1	20

The data given in Table 2 are presented in Figure 1, showing the level of company-specific learning based on learning principles.

From Table 2 and subsequent Figure 1 it appears that Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) is the only one organization that completely follows the learning principles as far as training is concerned. SABIC from petroleum and petrochemical sector is one of the world’s leading manufacturers of chemicals, fertilizers, plastics and metals (SABIC, 2012). It is an undisputed business in Saudi Arabia that has a global presence through its outstanding innovative business approach and is truly recognized by our research as the only business that completely follows the learning principles in providing training. The second business we found with a score of 80% is also from the petrochemical sector – the Saudi Yanbu Petrochemical Company (YANPET), which is linked to SABIC.

Further three companies scored 60%. Of them, one from the energy sector and two from petroleum and petrochemical sector, which means that learning is predominantly taking place in the petroleum, petrochemical and energy sectors. One of the reasons could be that in these businesses Saudization is taking place on a large scale; therefore, the learning budgets are fairly large. As we can see from Table 2, the training budget stands between 10 and 20% of the total employment budget in these organizations.

Figure 1: Learning based on learning principles



Based on the above analysis, we reject H_{1a} that training alone can achieve the objective of organizational learning. Almost all of the 18 organizations provide training in some form; nevertheless, only one organization appears to follow the learning principles. Hence, we conclude that learning organizations are those that acquire knowledge, provided that the learning principles are followed. It is also obvious that learning organizations can be truly innovative businesses and learning has a great impact on business success, as is the case of SABIC.

3.2) Testing of H_{1b} : management development alone can achieve the objective of organizational learning

In order to test the above hypothesis, our questionnaire concentrated on five learning principles already explained. For the analysis, we allocated the same marks to each learning principle as we did in the case of training. The questions asked were indirect to avoid biased responses. For example, in order to assess whether the management development programme designed has any relevance to the job, the question asked was:

How does selection for MD take place? The respondents were required to select one of the following:

- a. on the basis of seniority
- b. as required by the job
- c. as recommended

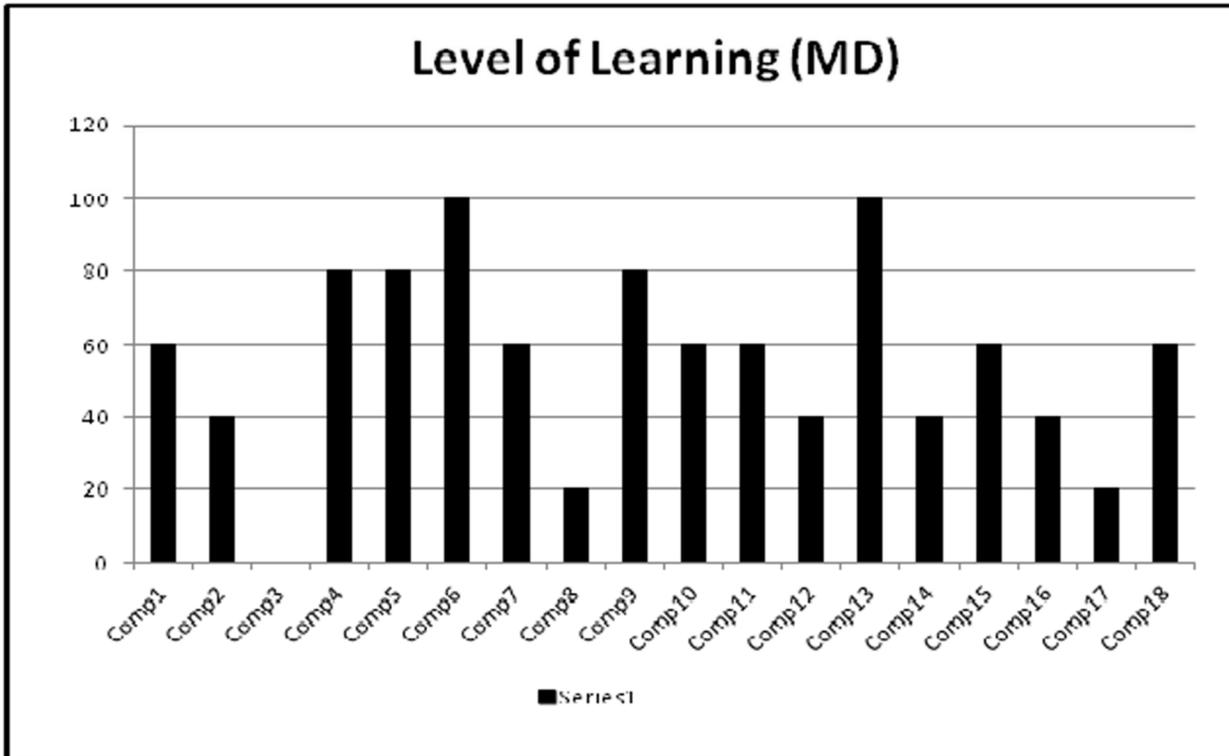
In this case, selecting ‘b’ implies that the MD provided is relevant to the job requirements. Similarly, four other questions were asked to establish whether MD procedures follow the learning principles. It may be mentioned here that the questions asked to determine the learning level were modified slightly to make them appropriate for a management development programme. The responses that emerged are shown in Table 3.

No. of companies	Scores in %	No. of employees			MD budget
		50-300	301-1000	>1000	(% of employment budget)
1	0	-	-	1	0*
2	20	-	-	2	0*,5
4	40	1	1	2	20,15,15,5
6	60	1	1	4	10,15,15,5,5,5
3	80	-	-	3	5,5,10
2	100	-	-	2	5,20
* Organizations with no MD programme in place					

Based on the data from Table 3, Figure 2 shows the level of company-specific learning based on learning principles.

It becomes clear both from Table 3 and Figure 2 that there are two companies that follow the learning principles in the case of MD. These are SABIC and YANPET. Both businesses are innovative and have a global presence. From our analysis, we can conclude that learning can make organizations truly innovative and will have a great impact on business success, as we see that both SABIC and YANPET are top Saudi businesses. YANPET scored 80% in the case of training, meaning that more attention is given to MD than to training. From Table 3 we see interesting variations in the scores for MD and training programmes. For example three companies scored 80% for MD but their scores for training varied between 40 and 60%. This shows uneven approaches to learning at the managerial level compared with that at the lower levels.

Figure 2: Learning based on learning principles for MD



One good point emerges from this analysis is that six companies scored between 60% and 80% are fairly scattered across the Saudi industries, i.e. petroleum, petrochemical, energy, public sector, services and transport. We can say that learning is taking place significantly across Saudi industries; however, for enhanced learning, equal attention must be paid to learning principles when deciding on learning strategies for training and MD programmes.

Based on the above analysis, we reject hypothesis H_{1b} . Having rejected hypotheses H_{1a} and H_{1b} we reject hypothesis H_1 . Thus we conclude that the learning principles are the main ingredients for the learning of middle and higher-level management, as in the case of training for operatives and lower-level management. In this respect, our argument is that learning principles serve as input to the proposed CLM.

We now concentrate on the institutionalization and integration of training and MD into organizational learning, which would help to turn an organization into a successful venture.

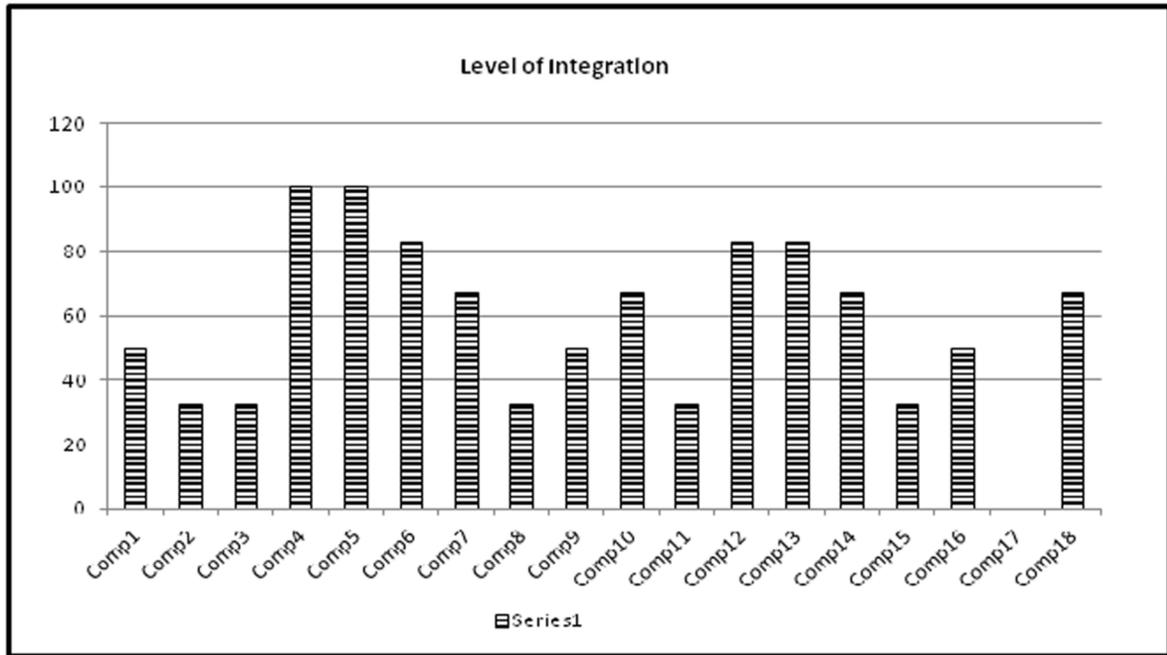
3.3) *Testing of H_2 : strategic management involvement alone is sufficient to acquire and retain knowledge*

The final aspect of our research is to determine whether organizational support alone could help to retain knowledge without institutionalizing and integrating learning processes. In this regard, we first determined whether an organization is supportive of the learning process based on learning principles and second whether those businesses achieving 100% scores for institutionalizing have the same score for training and management development. For this purpose, we asked the following questions:

1. Does your organization support training and MD in its mission statement? (Y/N)
2. Is your organization's top management involved in developing training and MD strategies? (Y/N)
3. Is there any formal organizational structure for learning management in your organization? (Y/N)
4. If yes, what role does this structure play in learning management? (Mandatory/advisory/informal)
5. Does your organization provide any library or learning resource center facilities? (Y/N)
6. Is there any operational manual in your organization? (Y/N)
7. How often is this manual reviewed and updated? (Every year/every three years/every five years)
8. When was this manual last reviewed? (MM/YYYY)

The analysis of the responses to the above questions presents an interesting scenario, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Integration of training and MD programs

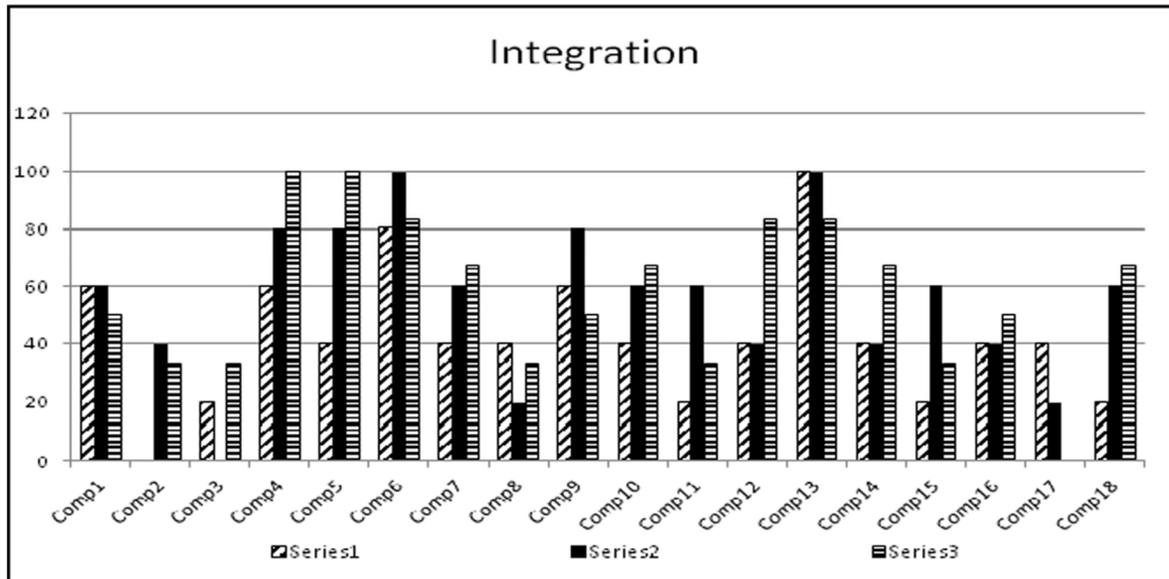


Here we see that the strategic management of companies number 4 (Petrorabigh) and 5 (Supreme Commission for Tourism & Antiquities) are 100% supportive of training and MD programmes. From our understanding, the top management of both businesses' is highly professional. It is evident from the analysis that the management of both companies' is strategically aligned with learning; however, there is a lack of institutionalization of learning processes as their scores for training trail at 40% and 60% and 80% each for MD. Figure 4 summarizes the inconsistencies in all three aspects, i.e. training, MD and top management support, for all the organizations we surveyed.

It emerges from Figure 4 that almost all the organizations studied in Saudi Arabia have a great deal of interest in continuous learning; nevertheless, there are gaps. These gaps hinder the integration of training, management development and strategic management involvement to establish a coherent organizational learning system. For example, companies 4 and 5 have formal management strategies in place for learning; however, their scores for learning through training and management development fall behind. Similarly, we can see that company 13 (SABIC) has a 100% score for training and management development; contrary to that, there is a lack of support through top management. In brief, we see that companies 4, 5, 6 and 13 attain 100% scores for some learning strategies while falling behind in other factors.

Following this analysis, we reject hypothesis H₂ and conclude that strategic management involvement alone would not ensure the retention of knowledge. Accordingly, we reach the result that none of the Saudi organizations fulfill the criteria for learning organizations on three counts, i.e. training, management development and strategic management involvement. This proves that integration between the two learning processes and strategic management is imperative for organizational learning, organizational effectiveness and business success. Based on Chadwick and Raver's (2012) suggestion of institutionalizing learning, we draw the inference that learning through training, management development or strategic management involvement alone would not achieve the objectives of continuous learning. CLM has to be imbedded in the organizational strategies so that learning becomes everyone's concern at each level of the organization.

Figure 4: Combined training, MD and top management support for learning



4) Conclusion and contribution

The proposed CLM is influenced by the TQM model (Slack, Chambers and Johnston 2010), which argues that total quality management lies at the heart of organizational activities. Likewise, we consider learning to be a vital key to employees' performance and organizational effectiveness – thus, learning has to be at the heart of business activities. We have seen a great deal of discussion in the literature on learning strategies; nevertheless, vital issues related to sustained learning are yet to be resolved. The first problem that emerged from the literature survey is the lack of link between learning and business success (Thomas and Allen. 2006; Chadwick and Raver 2012). We did not come across any specific solution to that problem. Thus, our work makes a contribution in this respect we thus argue that CLM derives OD that eventually results in business success hence linking learning with business success. The second problem we encountered was a lack of institutionalization of learning (Chadwick and Raver2012). Again, there is apparently no specific model that makes learning a core element of organizational strategy. In this respect, we took advantage of the TQM model's thinking and presented a rudimentary CLM model that would help to institutionalize learning.

This work is based on a strong theoretical framework put together from the discussion in the literature in which the input (learning principles), process (training and management development and output (OD) are identified and made integral parts of the CLM.

The CLM model is validated through empirical study that brings us to the conclusion that it is imperative to integrate learning processes with managerial strategies or vis-à-vis to achieve a high standard of performance. The CLM model would provide a formal mechanism to integrate training and management development whereby learning would become essential part of the corporate mission, vision and operational strategies so that a consistent knowledge-based culture is developed.

Similar views are offered by Gupta and Lyer (2000) that KM (Knowledge Management) requires a major shift in organizational culture and a commitment at all levels of a firm to make it work. It must be borne in mind that in establishing a formal structure for CLM there is a need for further research and development. CLM is only an indicative of the new approach of taking learning seriously especially with reference to Saudi Arabia. The literature offers abundant learning methods (Fiol and Lyles 1985; Crossan, Lane and White 1999; Bunderson and Sutcliffe 2003; Edmondson, 2008) which we propose to be utilized for while establishing CLM mechanisms for retaining, improving and transmitting knowledge. The scope of the study has been limited to the Saudi organizations however recommend that the same can be applied elsewhere with more research on the issue.

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