

**Organisational Learning:
An Exploration of Learning Strategy
Practices in Malaysia**

**A Thesis
By**

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who directly or indirectly were involved in accomplishing this study and most especially, my wife, children, my own family and in-laws and my very supportive supervisors, A/P Dr. Lanny Entrekin and Dr. Brenda Scott-Ladd for their relentless support, encouragement and advice throughout my dissertation.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my account of my research and contains work that has not been previously submitted for a degree or award, either in whole or in part, at any tertiary education institution.

Mohd Anuar Arshad

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the Malaysian understanding and definition of the concept and terminology of organisational learning (OL) as well as the learning strategies and practices Malaysian organisations use to implement learning. As part of Malaysia's Vision 2020, the government has made a substantial and public commitment to promoting organisational learning to assist industry move to a first world economy status. A number of authors have defined organisational learning as a process of knowledge acquisition that involves continuous change to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge (Garvin 1993; Miller 1996; Williams 2001). The objective is to explore if this conceptualisation has been accepted and implemented within Malaysia and if not, where opportunities exist to improve both the understanding and practice of Organisational Learning.

The study explores the understanding of OL and the learning strategies practiced by Malaysian organisations. In-depth interviews were conducted among human resources managers, executives, professors and lecturers from the manufacturing, health, government and academic sectors in Malaysia. The information gathered was analysed using Nudist (v6) software to interrogate and explore similarities and differences in responses within and across the sectors. Trends emerging from the data were drawn together to present a picture of what happens in practice and to identify opportunities to improve and better manage the implementation of organisational learning and knowledge management strategies.

The results suggest Malaysian industry representatives were, in general, able to define OL as a concept, however there was variable evidence that it is being implemented effectively in organisations. The manufacturing respondents had a higher level of understanding of OL than other industries. In practice, learning strategies also vary; health organisations emphasize seminars and conferences, the manufacturing sector emphasizes experiential learning, government departments focus more on attachment and exposure, whereas academic respondents were more reliant on self-learning. Overall, the most popular learning strategy is structured training and development programs, which suggests more needs to be done to inculcate learning strategies within the various industries. Those industries with stronger implementation patterns favoured a specialist department to provide a hub for handling knowledge and skills acquisition, for both internal and external learning sources. In contrast, the understanding of knowledge management was much lower, and indeed, the term was unfamiliar to some respondents.

These findings may be limited due to the small size of the sample and the findings being from a management perspective. Nonetheless, given the government's strong commitment to organisational learning and the current lack of empirical industry studies within Malaysia, this study serves as a benchmark. It does identify that the uptake of OL is still relatively limited and more needs to be achieved to promote a greater understanding of OL if it is to be successfully implemented in Malaysia.

Keywords: Organisational Learning, Learning Strategy, Knowledge Management, Malaysia