

**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

CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1. Overview of Chapter 1

This chapter begins with the introduction of the research topic. It continues with an explanation of the aim of the research and the background to the study. The next section discusses the anticipated benefit of the research, the selection of the research topic is justified and the key questions the research seeks to answer are explained. To aid the readers' understanding, there are definitions of the key terms used throughout the thesis in relation to the subject under the investigation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief overview of the overall structure of the thesis.

1.1 Introduction to the Study

Continuous improvement is the key to organisations being competitive in their markets and this is particularly important in the current environment. One strategy organisations can utilize to ensure continuous improvement is organisational learning (Robinson, Clemson, and Keating 1997). A number of authors define organisational learning as a process of knowledge acquisition that involves continuous change to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge (Garvin 1993; Miller 1996; Williams 2001). Thus, new knowledge and insights influence the decision-making processes to aid organisations achieve

their goals. Implementing a learning strategy has benefits to offer modern organisations and nowhere is this more important than in Malaysia, where businesses are seeking to compete in the globalised marketplace.

Many Malaysian industries have already suffered negative financial effects as the world's political and economic situation has become more fragile since the late 1990's. For example, in 2001 a Penang Hotel Survey Report (2001) showed an 8.3 per cent decline in total visitor arrivals compared to 2000 (*Penang Tourist Industry Protest Committee*). External pressures that caused a global economic slowdown and the crisis in the international air travel industry caused the decline. Admittedly, the downturns have broader repercussions. For example, the same scenario occurred in Australia, where a drastic drop of 25% in international visitors occurred in May of 2003 due to the Sub Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic (<http://www.industry.gov.au/impact>, 2003). Although hard to cost, these events had a negative effect on the financial profits of both the Penang hotel and Australian tourism industries and serve to show how vulnerable an industry sector can be in the globalized market.

In such a competitive environment, organisations protect themselves to some extent by implementing Organisational Learning strategies so they can adapt or change and make continuous improvements. Organisational learning helps employees work together toward the organisations vision and mission, which in turn, improves sales growth and profitability. Apart from the benefits this

strategy offers the organisation, proponents of OL claim learning strategies will foster positive employee behavioural outcomes such as job satisfaction (Jenkins, Antil, Wayne and Vadasy 2003; Ozuah, Curtis and Stein 2001), commitment (Becker 1997; Lancaster and Strand 2001) and loyalty, thereby reducing absenteeism and turnover (Bowman and Ambrosini 1997).

A common view held by the Malaysian government is that the more knowledge is acquired the better the results will be in terms of performance and self-achievement. Therefore, there is a need to highlight and promote the importance of being knowledgeable and skillful to all Malaysian organisations. This can be achieved through a variety of learning strategies, especially in the Information Technology era.

Given the opportunities created by globalization and advances in information technology, Malaysian organisations need to be well equipped with global information and the latest knowledge to remain competitive in their industry both at home and in the global marketplace. This view is evident in the ninth (9th) Malaysian Plan, 2006-2010, which states that,

“The quality of the nation’s human capital will be the most critical element in the achievement of the National Mission, and thus human capital development will be a key thrust in the Ninth Plan period. Human capital development will be holistic; encompassing the acquisition of knowledge and skills or intellectual capital including science and technology (S&T) and entrepreneurial capabilities as well as the internalisation of

positive and progressive attitudes, values and ethics through education, training and lifelong learning” (Ch 11, page 237).

The above statement supports the significance of this research, which aims to explore the understanding and readiness of Malaysian organisations for implementing Organisational Learning. This research involved representatives from a variety of fields to harvest their views on the understanding of and level of implementation of Organisational Learning within Malaysian Industry. A qualitative approach was taken in the study, which was primarily conducted by using in-depth interviews. In an attempt to understand how Organisational Learning is perceived in Malaysia the study included representatives from Academia and Government organisations as well as the two industry sectors of Health and Manufacturing. A previous study of the Hotel Industry in Penang showed that managers in that industry believed OL was important for them to remain competitive (Arshad and Scott-Ladd 2005). Nonetheless, the study reported limited approaches to implementing OL. This research is aimed at a more in depth and wider level exploration of the understanding and implementation of organisational learning within Malaysia as will be further explained in Section 1.3 of this Chapter.

1.2 Background to the Study

With the rapid expansion of globalisation and the economic pressures this brings, many industries struggle to survive as profit margins are threatened. In this climate, small incremental improvements in customer service and

satisfaction can provide competitive advantages. A growing body of literature suggests that improved learning is one internal factor that can positively affect organisational performance and effectiveness (Orr 2000; Robinson et al. 1997). The literature on organisational learning suggests it best provides this edge when the concept is embedded into an organisation's culture. Organisational learning is perceived as a tool that organisations can use to keep themselves competitive and up to date (Orr 2000). This requires groups of people being involved at every stage of the transfer of knowledge into the organisation's operations. The knowledge transfer can occur either from within the organisation among employees who share knowledge, or from external sources, such as an external trainer (Poell, Chivers, Krogt, and Wildemeersch 2000). However, there must be a network for the knowledge acquisition process to happen (Poell et al. 2000).

According to learning network-theory, the integration of employees, managers, training consultants and other learning actors plays the most important role in designing effective learning mechanisms that will lead to greater job efficiency (Poell et al. 2000). Additionally, Poell and colleagues (2000) emphasize that change in workplaces or industries requires fast action and knowledge if the organisation is to remain competitive in the market and using network theory facilitates this.

To remain competitive, individual organisations seek to be the customer's first choice so they can get the best profit; which means they have to provide the

best service with high quality products, as well as good prices and rates. Another perspective that focuses on organisational change is resource-based theory, which claims organisation's need to provide the resources for change to happen. This means organisations need to be serious in equipping their employees with the knowledge, skills and expertise to enhance their work performance through behavioural change. As Orr (2000) stresses, incremental improvements in the knowledge, skills, and expertise of the organisation's people generates better performance and effectiveness within the organisation. Organisations that seek to stay competitive need to continuously improve and adapt to maintain progress (Brown and Brudney 2003) and ensure all their resources are used to produce the very best quality products and services for their customers. In contrast to the emphasis placed on behavioural change by network theory, resource based theory identifies knowledge and information as the key ingredients for success (Farrel 2000).

Knowledge, expertise and hands-on skills are considered critical inventories to produce high quality products and services in all industries. However, as Bohmer and Edmonson (2001) point out, such inventories are often the fastest to become obsolete in a world where knowledge is growing rapidly. Therefore, organisations who want to stay competitive and ahead of their rivals need to search for weapons or strategies that will protect them, or at least help to defend them, from the negative impacts of unforeseen events in the external environment.

1.3 Purpose of this Research

This thesis has two aims. The first is to explore the level of understanding of the concept of organisational learning, and the second is to explore which learning strategies are implemented in Malaysia.

Exploring the Malaysian understanding on the concept of organisational learning is important especially when there are various definitions provided by the West. Therefore, this study is to identify whether Malaysian's understanding on OL is as deep as that discussed and presented by the West, or do Malaysians have their own understanding and view on the concept of OL with little influence from the West.

The literature demonstrates evidence that the OL concept is widely accepted and implemented by Western organisations although little exploration has been undertaken into the Malaysian understanding of organisational learning. Therefore, this study also aims to explore how Malaysians perceive OL and the importance of the concept. A correct understanding and perception of OL is necessary if Malaysian organisations are to be proactive and motivated to implement OL, for without understanding, organisations are unlikely to see the benefit of adopting OL. Given that Malaysia is working toward Vision 2020, (which is a vision of what the nation wants to achieve by 2020) that stresses the importance of being ever ready to respond to any challenges, strategies that promote learning and the ability to change have a lot to offer.

The second aim of this study is to develop a model that links the learning strategies and mechanisms that Malaysian organisations' utilize in the learning process. Looking at different ways of living, culture, geographical landscape and customs between the West and Asia, the use of learning strategies are presumably different too. The Western literature identifies that organisational learning can be facilitated through approaches such as action learning (Bourner 1999; Dotlich and Noel 1998; Miller 2003; Robinson 2001; Stata 1989; York and Marsick 2000), active learning (Becker 1997; Boyer 2002; McGoldrick, Battle and Gallagher 2000; Salemi 2002; Thomas 1998), experiential learning (Hickox 2002), cooperative learning (Jenkins et al. 2003; Lancaster and Strand 2001), problem-based learning (Ozuah et al. 2001), coaching (Brocato 2003), and mentoring (Clawson 1996). Whether the same approaches are applied and used in the process of learning within Malaysia, or another model needs to be developed, needs to be tested and confirmed and this is the aim of this study.

From another perspective, there is also evidence to suggest that employees' behavioural performance improves regardless of whether the learning is formal or informal (Boyer 2002; Dowd 2000; Orr 2000), and this can be seen in reduced absenteeism, turnover (Bowman and Ambrosini 1997) and improved job performance and satisfaction (Jenkins et al. 2003; Ozuah et al. 2001), job commitment, and intention to stay (Lancaster and Strand 2001). Given such potential benefits, this study will attempt to identify which types of learning and which learning mechanisms are most effective for promoting positive

behavioural performance outcomes, which is an area of study given little attention in past research.

In Malaysia, the value of knowledge acquisition is strongly promoted by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Abdullah Hj Ahmad Badawi, who recognizes and promotes the value of Malaysians engaging in a continuous, lifelong learning (Bernama 2005). The Prime Minister claims that lifelong learning will produce a nation with greater potential, particularly if embraced as part of the culture, as this will benefit the material and human development of the country. Therefore, not only is it essential to use various and multiple-learning strategies, it also requires an awareness of the suitability of each strategy, to the time and targeted group. It is hoped this research will help increase awareness among Malaysian organisations about the importance of Organisational Learning, not only for the benefit of industry, but also for the benefit of the nation so that Malaysians make learning a part of their culture.

1.4 Justification for the Study

For any organisation to perform well in terms of dollars and cents, it has to make sure the employees are performing well in their jobs. Clearly, the ability to perform well is assisted by knowledge acquisition through a reliable learning strategy. Therefore, understanding the learning strategies and mechanisms used to enhance and positively shape employees' behavioral performance in Malaysia will allow them to be better promoted and targeted. If organisations understand which strategies and practices are practical, useful, reliable and

beneficial, they can adopt these tried and proven strategies and achieve better results, as well as save costs and time. Given the degree of competition in the current environment, companies need to choose the best way, the first time round, to avoid making mistakes.

The importance of Organisational Learning has been highlighted among Malaysian leaders since 1996, and a speech by Tan Sri Abdul Halim bin Ali, a former national secretary, on the 7th of October 1996 shows that Organisational Learning has been discussed at the national level. According to Tan Sri Abdul Halim bin Ali (1996:1-2),

“Organisational learning demands a shift that goes all the way down to the core of our organisation culture. Its purpose is continuous transformation and the process is through collective thinking and working together. Knowledge that we create through organisational learning allows us to reframe and re-conceptualize issues in the organisation’s working environment, as the two factors learning and change reinforce each other... Organisational learning when successful should pave the way towards the creation of an intelligent organisation. Members of the organisation demonstrate their highest commitment for quality and integrity through self-directed teams. Everyone exercises their intelligence to co-create products, improve services, solve problems, enhance each other’s skill, and work with each other to ensure the whole system operates smoothly.”
(1996:1-2)

Despite the demand to increase organisational learning within Malaysian organisations, the level of implementation is still unclear. So far, there appears to be no evidence of attempts to evaluate if or how organisational learning is being implemented. Organisational learning emerged in Western organisations and whether or not it is an appropriate concept to be implemented in the same way within the Malaysian context is open to question. Therefore, this study seeks to redress this situation by researching whether organisational learning is being implemented and if so, how it is being implemented.

There is also an opportunity to identify if OL is accepted by business as an opportunity to enhance their ability to compete in a more globalised environment. A critical question for this study is how learning strategies are operationalised in Malaysia to see if there is a match between theory and practice. The first step is to investigate Malaysian managers' and senior academics' understanding of OL and then ascertain the learning strategies Malaysian organisations use to acquire and implement learning and knowledge. The next objective is to know how well OL is understood or implemented, and at what level this is occurring. The third objective is to understand what current strategies are being used to implement OL and the fourth is to understand what strategies and processes will lead to the most effective implementation of OL.

Another central question for the research is to investigate whether concepts constructed by Western theorists are easily transferred into another cultural

setting. At one end of the continuum it may well be that practitioners in Malaysia have not yet implemented any strategies that would make them a learning organisation; whereas at the other end they may have unconsciously adopted, or partially adopted, strategies that make them learning organisations in practice. If OL is to have a role in helping Malaysia become an industrial economy, then the role OL plays warrants understanding. The outcome should allow organisations to distinguish the status of their organisation in terms of the organisational learning implementation process and the strategies that are most effective in their environment.

1.5 Methodology

Several strategies were used to gather data on organisational learning in Malaysia. First, there was a preliminary industry survey where respondents were required to answer five central questions. The questions were posted to the respondents via e-mail and their responses returned through the same medium. The industry survey was a preliminary methodology aimed at gauging the level of understanding and depth of knowledge from a group who could be expected to know about the research topic. The results were used to clarify the questions and focus of the next phase of data collection through in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews targeted respondents across a multi-industry spectrum, from manufacturing industry, health, government and academia.

Respondents were asked to identify their level of understanding of the concept of organisational learning prior to identifying which learning strategies they were using or had seen used. The final theme was whether the respondents believed organisational learning strategies were used to promote employee knowledge, motivation and performance, and if so, how these linked to organisational effectiveness, either conceptually or in a practical sense? The adoption of an industry survey and in-depth interview methodology to collect data is inline with the basic research purpose of understanding and explaining a specific phenomenon as recommended by Patton (2002).

1.6 Research Questions

Even though the importance of OL has been highlighted in Malaysia since 1996 and the Malaysian government is encouraging its adoption, so far little research has been undertaken. One concern is that many Malaysian organisations still rely on Training and Development rather than adopting a learning philosophy and the need to draw a line between what is OL and T&D is one of the objectives of this study. This preliminary review of the literature has led to the following research questions.

The literature identifies that There are various strategies to obtain knowledge, and this thesis also seeks to identify the best and most popular strategies suited to the Malaysian environment.. The answers will assist Malaysian organisations save costs, time and energy in choosing and selecting learning strategies.

To gain a better understanding of what is happening in Malaysia and how this can be improved the fundamental research question sought to explore the Malaysian understanding of the differences between OL and KM as well as the connectivity of both terms. This research takes a qualitative approach to understanding what is occurring and how this can be improved. Systematic research questions were designed to explore and obtain a real understanding of what is happening in practice and where OL can be improved and better integrated into organisational practices. These questions were also use as a guideline for the interview session.

1. What is the Malaysian understanding of Organisational Learning"? Based on their understanding, do respondents distinguish training and development from organisational learning?
2. Is the concept of Organisational Learning important within their organisation?
3. How should an organisation acquire knowledge?
4. What learning strategies are used in their organisation to acquire and disseminate knowledge? How do employees acquire knowledge? Do they think that the selections of specific learning strategies are crucial to their organisation?
5. Do Malaysian managers / organisations make a distinction between Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management?

1.7 Definitions

Organisational Learning

Organisational means the act or process of organising (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1985, Pg 279). Whereas, learning is the acquiring of knowledge or skills by study, instruction or experience (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1985, Pg. 229)

Strategy

Strategy means the method of conducting operations, especially with the aid of manoeuvring or stratagems. (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1985, Pg. 399)

Action learning

“Action learning is an educational process whereby the participant studies their own actions and experience in order to improve performance. This is done in conjunction with others, in small groups called action learning sets. It is proposed as particularly suitable for adults, as it enables each person to reflect on and review the action they have taken and the learning points arising. This should then guide future action and improve performance.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_learning

Active learning

“Active learning is an umbrella term that refers to several models of instruction that focus the responsibility of learning on learners.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_learning

Experiential learning

“Experiential Learning is the process of making meaning from direct experience.” Bynum and Porter (2005)

Problem-based learning

“Problem-based learning (PBL) is a student-centered instructional strategy in which students collaboratively solve problems and reflect on their experiences.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem-based_learning

Cooperative learning

"Cooperative learning (CL) is an instructional paradigm in which teams of students work on structured tasks (e.g., homework assignments, laboratory experiments, or design projects) under conditions that meet five criteria: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, appropriate use of collaborative skills, and regular self-assessment of team functioning. Many studies have shown that when correctly implemented, cooperative learning improves information acquisition and retention, higher-level thinking skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and self-confidence ." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative_learning

Coaching and mentoring

“Both coaching and mentoring are processes that enable both individual and corporate clients to achieve their full potential. Coaching and mentoring share

many similarities so it makes sense to outline the common things coaches and mentors do whether the services are offered in a paid (professional) or unpaid (philanthropic) role.”

<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/ResourceCentre/WhatAreCoachingAndMentoring.htm>

Formal and informal learning

“Informal learning is the unofficial, unscheduled, impromptu way most of us learn to do our jobs. Informal learning is like riding a bicycle: the rider chooses the destination and the route. The cyclist can take a detour at a moment’s notice to admire the scenery or help a fellow rider.”

“Formal learning is like riding a bus: the driver decides where the bus is going; the passengers are along for the ride. People new to the territory often ride the bus before hopping on the bike.”

“Traditional training departments put almost all of their energy into driving busses. For experienced workers, most bus rides are as inappropriate as kindergarten classes. Mature learners, typically a company’s top performers, never show up for the bus. They want pointers that enable them to do things for themselves. They are filling in gaps in what they already know, and they’re in a hurry to do so.” <http://informl.com/the-informal-learning-page/>

1.8 Overview of the Thesis Structure

This thesis contains five chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses the introduction of the issues relating to the research topic, followed by the background of the research. The purpose and focus of the research are explained, followed by a justification of why the research is required in terms of the benefit to industry, knowledge and the community. A brief explanation of the methodology is provided and the chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the research questions. The chapter has also defined the keywords and concludes by providing an overview of the thesis structure and a conclusion.

Chapter 2 discusses the Literature Review, which relies heavily on the Western understanding and interpretation of Organisational Learning. The literature findings have led to the construction of a theoretical research framework and development of the interview questions. This chapter provides a discussion of the OL definitions, the concept and understanding of OL, the learning strategies and a brief discussion on knowledge management.

Chapter 3 explains the paradigm of study and research methodology. In sequence, this chapter starts with an introduction, followed by the paradigm of the research. It continues by discussing the research philosophy, ontology, epistemology and the methodology. Further, this chapter explains the scope and sample of the study. Finally, the two methods used for data collection, the industry survey and in-depth interview, are discussed.

Chapter 4 discusses the results obtained from the data analysis. Firstly, the chapter describes how the data was gathered for the Industry Survey and then explains how data was gathered for the in-depth interviews. The discussion and analysis of the data are described in the sequence of the interview topics as follows: Question one explores the understanding of OL; Question two is about the Organisational Learning Concept and Importance; Question three seeks the proposed learning strategy and methodology; Question four finds the practised learning strategy; and, Question five looks at the distinction between Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter and discusses the findings reached from this study. The chapter starts with an introduction, which is followed by a discussion of the research findings, based on the research questions, and the implications of the study. The research limitations, in terms of respondents' willingness to discuss the topic openly, the limited number of industries and the concerns about generalisability are discussed. Recommendations for future research, including the need for a follow-up quantitative survey to help understand the usage patterns and various methodologies of OL strategies, as well as to study employee satisfaction, productivity, commitment and innovation, are next included. Future research could also increase the number of respondents and explore a wider range of industries and issues, such as the different roles of OL and KM issues. Finally, the chapter finishes with the conclusions drawn from this study and summarises the research contribution.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the topic and rationale for the thesis. It has also directed the focus of the reader to the research purpose and objectives, briefly explained the methodology and the keywords of the research. Demand for this research is based on the need for Malaysian organisations to implement learning strategies to help them compete in the globalized marketplace. This is reinforced by the Malaysian government's emphasis on human capital development and the role knowledge plays in assisting the transition to a developed country. The next Chapter discusses the literature on organisational learning.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Overview of Chapter 2

This chapter reviews literature pertaining to Organisational Learning and learning strategies to present an overview of the research topic. The literature review also helps to construct the research questions that lead to the five main themes of the interview questions. These questions are the backbone of this research and relate to the understanding of organisational learning, the knowledge of available and practiced learning strategies, the importance of OL as a concept, and the understanding of knowledge management. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and the conceptual framework for the study.

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

A review of literature pertinent to this study shows there are various forms of learning in that occur in formal and informal settings required for organisational learning. Learning can occur in a number of ways. It can be either from direct experiences or from the experience of others, and it can be achieved through a number of mechanisms: simultaneously or singularly. Previous research has categorized six different mechanisms for learning that occurs in organisations with these being; 1. Action learning; 2. Active learning;

3. Experiential learning; 4. Cooperative learning; 5. Problem-based learning; and, 6. Coaching and mentoring and these are explained below.

1. Action learning

Miller (2003), and York and Marsick (2000) described action learning as highly participatory, where learning is taken from other's experiences of how they relate to real life problems and the origin of actions others take (Rhodes and Shiel 2007). Learning occurs via the feedback given and the results of problem solving. As an example, Robinson (2001) and Bourner (1999) describe action learning occurs when a group of peers meet regularly to discuss where they are having trouble and then testing in action the ideas arising from that discussion. On the other hand, Williams (2001) suggests that just solving a problem is not sufficient as evidence of organisational learning but solving a problem by drawing on beliefs, which have worked in the past, is evidence of learning. In short, action learning is the combination of group discussion and experimentation whereby the knowledge gained from small group discussion about a problem leads to a result or action being taken on the recommended solution. This suggests that strategic decisions are often the result of the latent learning processes.

Dotlich and Noel (1998) recommend action learning is a useful educational methodology for equipping managers and organisational leaders with lifelong learning skills for managing change. The realization that a competitive advantage can only be sustained within our rapidly changing environment by

the progressive learning of individuals within the organisation, particularly in knowledge intensive industries (Stata 1989) provides a rationale for the adoption of an action learning approach.

2. Active learning

Thomas (1998) and Boyer (2002) explain active learning operates by allowing the learning process to take place through activities such as problem solving, teamwork, simulations, case study, feedback, small group discussion, brainstorming, reading, and writing. It is by actively analyzing present knowledge and understanding that people are able to synthesize their awareness and construct new knowledge. According to Boyer (2002), active learning is more effective for enhancing students' academic achievement than conventional methods and is thereby likely to lead to greater employee performance in organisations.

Becker (1997) also reported that students learn better and are more committed to learn when instructors use active learning. For example, active learning will locate students in a true learning situation and this will allow the students to learn by doing the job. Through that experience, the students will recall what they have done and reflect on their understanding (McGoldrick, Battle, and Gallagher 2000). Engaging in the process means students are more likely to involve their emotions and intuition, which in turn helps them achieve a higher level of expertise because of their engagement with these experiences. Another benefit is that knowledge is constructed in a collective way

(McGoldrick et al. 2000). While active learning is considered an affective learning strategy, Salemi (2002) suggests it is seldom used because “chalk and talk” is still the dominant pedagogy in colleges and institutions.

3. Experiential learning

Experiential learning is learning by doing, and can occur either in or outside the classroom (Hickok 2002). Outside learning emphasizes practical experiences and within the workplace is referred to as on-the-job training, whereas, classroom-learning tries to simulate the real situation and uses strategies such as role-playing or case study methods (Geertshuis and Fazey 2006). Experiential learning recognizes the link between personal experience and learning and suggests a reversal of the traditional “theory to application” mode of instruction (Hickok 2002; Cooke, Dunscombe, and Lee 2007). Students use their own experiences to formulate new models of thought through reflection and guided discussion. The models developed by the student can be compared and contrasted with the existing theories to provide an opportunity for further critique.

Foil and Lyles (1985) observed that organisations do learn from their experiences; therefore, past incidents will influence future actions. Thus, successful action in the past provides a guideline in any similar circumstances. Most organisations use post-project reviews, internal audits and /or oral post-mortems to learn from their own experiences. In line with the concept of organisational learning, the organisation has to learn and practice collectively

in order to achieve the desired performance. Gustafson and Haring (1994) argue that the level of collective consciousness determines the quality of life and the level of performance of an organisation. Therefore, learning aims to facilitate a greater awareness of the capacity for organisational development.

4. Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning occurs in a learning group because individuals assist others to learn and that are empowered to make decisions that contribute to the groups' success (Jenkins, et al. 2003). This approach has the benefit of allowing the learner to feel responsible and accountable (Lancaster and Strand 2001) for their own learning. For example, Jenkins and colleagues (2003) found that the instructional arrangement of cooperative learning encouraged classroom involvement and lead to increased self-esteem and success rates for students. Overall, the three most frequently named benefits of cooperative learning are; improved self-esteem; a safe learning environment, and improved success rates on classroom tasks and/or products (Jenkins et al. 2003). These findings are supported by other research findings.

Lancaster and Strand (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of three hundred studies to investigate academic achievement when comparing the relative effectiveness of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning on individual achievement in college and adult settings. The results of one hundred and sixty eight studies strongly favoured cooperative learning as

promoting higher individual achievement when compared to competitive approaches or individual efforts.

5. Problem-based learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning (PBL) is self-regulated learning and occurs where a group or team are given a problem to solve and each member has to come up with a solution (Ozuah et al. 2001). According to the Wikipedia (2007), PBL is defined by the following characteristics; learning is driven by challenges and open ended problems; students work in small collaborative groups and teachers are facilitators of learning. Torp and Sage (2002) defined Problem-based learning (PBL) as:

“...is focused, experiential learning (minds-on, hands-on) organised around the investigation and resolution of messy, real-world problems... ...PBL curriculum provides authentic experiences that foster active learning, support knowledge construction, and naturally integrate school learning and real life; this curriculum approach also addresses state and national standards and integrates disciplines [pg. 15-16]”.

Results of studies into PBL are positive. For example, a study conducted by Ozuah and his colleagues (2001) with eighty paediatric residents at a large urban academic medical centre found that problem-based learning significantly increased levels of self-directed learning, satisfaction, performance and motivation to learn. Similarly, a study undertaken by Stroulia and Goel (2007), found that in problem solving, the needs of the learner defined the

knowledge gained. In other words, the learner finds the knowledge they need to solve the problem or to enable improved problem-solving performance. Therefore, improvement in problem-solving performance is one way of evaluating the quality of learning. In addition, different models of problem solving recognize different kinds of knowledge needs, and, as a result, set up different learning tasks and enable different kinds of performance improvement (Gustavsson 2007). Advocates of PBL claim it can be used to enhance content knowledge and foster the development of communication, problem-solving, and self-directed learning.

6. Coaching and Mentoring

Brocato (2003) defines coaching as the process used when leaders want to help a team member improve a specific work behaviour or skill. Therefore, coaching and mentoring are 'one to one' learning processes that give guidance and prepare others to be self-reliant. This can be conducted either as 'top-down' or by peers. It involves the transmission of skills, knowledge and expertise in relation to an individual's present and future tasks, from one person to another. According to Hutchinson, (2007), effective coaching and guidance from the line manager has a significant relationship with employees satisfaction, commitment and motivation.

Wikipedia (2007) defines a coach as a person who supports people (clients) to achieve their goals, with goal setting, encouragement and questions. Unlike a counsellor or mentor, a coach rarely offers advice. However, the term coaching

is often misused in situations where the “coach” provides expert opinions and “how to” answer and advice. Coaching does not include giving a solution for a problem, but will energize the coachee to solve the problem. The coach helps clients find their own solutions, by asking questions that give them insight into their situations. The coach holds the client accountable, so if a client agrees to a plan to achieve a goal, the coach will help motivate them to complete that plan. In contrast, a mentor is a role model who offers support to another person (McBrien and Brandt 1997). The mentor has knowledge and experience in an area and shares this with the person being mentored. For example, an experienced teacher might mentor a student teacher or beginning teacher. Therefore, mentoring can be viewed as a ‘valuable form of social development and a vital support mechanism in the information age’ (Clawson 1996; pg. 6-15).

Quite apart from the above learning mechanisms, types of learning, such as whether learning is formal or informal, are also important to facilitate the success of the learning process. The difference between these two types of learning is explained below.

7. Formal and informal learning

Formal learning refers to formal training that is planned and scheduled by the organisation; for example, as a yearly, half-yearly or quarterly training program, which is conducted either in-house or outside the organisation. Apart from training that takes place within the organisation, the organisation can

support external learning programs, or Education Assistance Programs (EAP) to aid an employees' career development, and this is also part of the formal learning.

Most of the time formal training is viewed by the organisation as an effective way of imparting and obtaining new skills and knowledge. Without being fully aware of the difference between training and learning, some organisations even include training as part of their corporate objectives. Valley (1992) differentiated training as something that you have done to you while learning is something you do for yourself. This means that learning is more efficient in achieving performance compared to training.

On the other hand, informal learning occurs when learning takes place as part of an unplanned activity. This can occur when employees learn from others while 'on the job'. The assumption that learning only occurs through formal training is narrow in scope and fails to recognize the significant contribution that occurs through less formal means. Learning can come from observing others, or getting feedback or advice from co-workers or even during a discussion over the lunch or tea break. In reality, informal and formal learning are both affected by the formal training that happens in organisations.

Another viewpoint, proposed by Oxtoby (1992) is that corporate learning comes from sharing and applying knowledge and the experiences of people eliminating waste at work. Williams (2001) claims, organisational learning is

not necessarily a plan, because individual learning is often shaped by circumstances rather than by intention. Thus, sharing of information and beliefs about the interpretation of information are the two pre-requisites for this alliance. Linking learning to business changes provides the opportunity for continuous improvement, which leads to improved organisational performance.

To have a better picture and understanding of the learning strategies discussed earlier, a summary of learning strategies are tabled below in Table 2.1. overleaf.

2.2 Organisational Learning Definitions

Many of the articles on Organisational Learning discuss learning as a process, method or type of learning (Dixon 1992; Dodgson 1993; Fiol and Lyles 1985; and Huber 1991). This could easily create some confusion, so it is useful to consider the various definitions of Organisational Learning (OL) that have evolved in the literature since 1977 (Farrel 1999).

Initially, Argyris (1977), Argyris and Schon (1978), considered OL as a tool to detect and correct errors in the organisation. The meaning has gradually evolved, widening in scope, so that OL is now considered a tool to facilitate the action improvement process (Fiol and Lyles 1985). As the organisation grows, OL allows learning from the past (Nevis, DiBella and Gould 1995;

Table: 2.1 Summary of Learning Strategies

S/N	Learning Strategies Description	Learning Activities	References
1.	<p>Action Learning</p> <p>* Highly participatory, learning from the experience, feedback and result of problem solving by others. Lifelong learning skills for managing change. Rapid adoption due to knowledge intensive industries.</p>	<p>1. Group of peers meeting. 2. Group discussion. 3. Experimentation</p>	<p>Miller, (2003); York & Marsick, (2000); Robinson (2001); Bourner (1999); Williams (2001); Dotlich & Noel (1998); Stata (1989)</p>
2.	<p>Active Learning</p> <p>* Learning happens via activities. By actively analysing present knowledge and constructing new knowledge collectively. Effective in enhancing student’s academic achievement and employee’s performance. Real world learning situation. Seldom used because ‘chalk and talk’ a dominant pedagogy.</p>	<p>1. Problem solving. 6. Brainstorming 2. Teamwork. 7. Reading 3. Simulation. 8. Writing 4. Case work 9. Feedback 5. Small group discussion</p>	<p>Thomas, (1998); Boyer, (2002); Becker, (1997); McGoldrich, Battle & Gallagher, (2000); Salemi (2002).</p>
3.	<p>Experiential Learning</p> <p>* Learning by doing in and out of the classroom. Link personal experiences and learning of the theory to application. Formulation of new models of thought through reflection and guided discussion.</p>	<p>a. Outside Classroom 1. Practical experiences 2. On-the-job training b. In-side Classroom 1. Role-playing 4. Internal audits 2. Case study 5. Oral post mortem 3. Post-project reviews</p>	<p>Hickox, (2002); Fiol & Lyles, (1985); Gustavsson & Harung, (1994)</p>
4.	<p>Cooperative Learning</p> <p>* Team learning via empowerment in making the decision to determine success. Instils responsibility, accountability and increases self esteem. Creates a safe learning environment and high success rate with higher individual achievement.</p>	<p>1. Small Group Learning 2. Classroom</p>	<p>Jenkins, Antil, Wayne & Vadasy, (2003); Lancaster & Strand, (2001)</p>

S/N	Learning Strategies Description	Learning Activities	References
5.	Problem based learning * Group or team solve the problem and come out with the solution. Heightened level of self directed learning, satisfaction, performance and motivation.	1. Problem solving group	Ozuah, Curtis & Stein, (2001)
6.	Coaching and Mentoring * To improve specific work behaviour or skills. One to one learning process and involves the transmission of skills, knowledge and expertise	1. Top down 2. Peers	Brocator, (2003); Clawson, (1996)
7.	Formal Learning * Planned & scheduled training, in house or outside the organisation	1. Training program 2. Education Assistance Program	Researcher, (2006)
8.	Informal Learning * Unplanned learning activity	1. Observation 2. Advice 3. Feedback 4. Discussion over lunch or tea break	Researcher, (2006)

Source: The Researcher, 2007

Levitt and March 1988) to sustain or upgrade the organisation's performance (Nevis, DiBella and Gould 1995).

Besides learning about aspects of technical and material operations, Huber (1991) suggests OL also assists behavioural change. Employee's behaviour is modified through a process of creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge (Garvin 1993) and through sharing knowledge among the organisation's members (Stata 1992). Organisational Learning is also perceived as a process of knowledge dissemination (Sinkula 1994; Slater and Narver 1995). Each of these processes aid continuous learning for individuals, teams and the organisation (Bennet and O'Brien 1994; Jashapara 1993). Miller (1996) extends the scope of OL by involving the implementers and decision makers in the knowledge acquisition processes. When this occurs, OL allows for consistent changes and interpretation of strategies so the organisation can achieve its targets (William 2001). The evolution of the definitions of Organisational Learning are presented in Table 2.2 overleaf.

Table 2.2: Definitions of Organisational Learning

Author	Definition
Argyris (1977); Argyris & Schon (1978)	“the detection and correction of errors’
Fiol & Lyles (1985)	“the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding”
Levitt & March (1988)	“Organisations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour”
Stata (1992)	“organisational learning occurs through shared insights, knowledge and mental modelsand builds on past knowledge and experience”
Huber (1991)	“an entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviours is changed”
Garvin (1993)	“an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights”
Jashapara (1993)	“a continuously adaptive enterprise that promotes focused individual, team and organisational learning...”
Bennet & O’Brien (1994)	“an organisation that has woven a continuous and enhanced capacity to learn, adapt and change its culture...”
Nevis, DiBella & Gould (1995)	“the capacity or processes within an organisation to maintain or improve performance based on experience”
Sinkula (1994); Slater & Narver (1995)	“organisational learning is a three stage process that includes information acquisition, information dissemination and shared interpretation”
Miller (1996)	“the acquisition of new knowledge by actors who are able and willing to apply that knowledge in making decisions or influencing others in the organisation”.
Williams (2001)	“organisational learning is a process in which relatively stable changes are brought about in the way we see things and behave in pursuit of our goals”

Source: Williams, 2001; Farrell, 1999; Miller, 1996

The enrichment of the definition of OL over the years is inline with global knowledge and technology developments that have made people become more creative and innovative. The scope of OL has extended from being a means of error detection to it now being perceived as a core strategy for achieving the organisation's mission, vision and goals. Nevertheless, understanding the theory of OL is not sufficient to ensure its successful operation and implementation. Understanding on how OL can be implemented in practice is also required.

In the 1990's John Denton (cited in Orr 2000) outlined nine characteristics needed to integrate OL into the business strategy. The nine (9) characteristics outlined were: 1. Vision; 2. Learning strategy; 3. Flexible structure; 4. Blame-free culture; 5. Supportive atmosphere; 6. Teamwork; 7. External awareness; 8. Knowledge creation and transfer; and 9. Quality. These characteristics are explained in the Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: The Organisational Learning Characteristics

S/N	CHARACTERISTICS	DESCRIPTIONS
1	Vision	The organisation has a clearly communicated and understood vision, goals and objectives that provide a framework and guide for learning across the organisation. Organisational learning is only helpful if it helps the organisation achieve its vision.
2	Learning strategy	The organisation embraces organisational learning as a conscious part of its behaviour within the organisation's overall strategy.
3	Flexible structure	Includes the abandonment of traditional rigid organisational and job structures: emphasis on flexible roles and a focus on cross-functional work practices.
4	Blame-free culture	A climate in which learning is valued and encouraged, mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and improve, and assignment of blame is de-emphasized. The focus is on encouraging and supporting people to come forward to identify problems and mistakes in order to learn how to improve operations and avoid similar problems in the future.
5	Supportive atmosphere	There is a balance between the needs of the organisation for productive employees and the needs of people for quality of work life. This also includes the balance between production and development of the productive capacity of staff. One of the investments required is "slack time" for staff to invest in learning so they will be more productive through teamwork.
6	Teamwork	There is a focus on teamwork, including the use of teams to carry out ongoing work, as well as in projects. The focus needs to be on enhancing the learning experience through the sharing of experiences and talents of team members as well as on improving productivity through teamwork.
7	External awareness	The organisation has systematic processes to scan, track and understand developments in its external environment that may impact it in the future. This includes practices to influence or impact on its environment.
8	Knowledge creation and transfer	The creation and seeking out of knowledge from external sources is seen as an important part of the work of all operations and functions within the organisation. There are also mechanisms that promote and support the sharing of knowledge across the organisation as well as with customers and suppliers as appropriate.
9	Quality	A commitment to the application of comprehensive quality management and improvement practices across the organisation.

Source: Orr, 2000

2.3 The Development of the Organisational Learning Concept

In the West, Organisational Learning (OL) has been in discussions since the 1970's (Argyris and Schon 1996), however, it has only been a topic of interest in Malaysia since 1996 (Ali 1996). Despite the restriction of national boundaries, cultures and environments the Malaysian Government views the western concepts as broadly applicable. This is mainly because the implementation helps an organisation develop shared values and knowledge, based on personal or explicit experiences (DiBella 1995; Garvin 1993; Miller 1996; Robinson et al. 1997; Williams 2001). As a concept, OL begins with the formulation of an organisation as a thinking system that will monitor its own operations and determine its direction, strategy and decision processes (Senge 1990). Indeed, Senge (1990) envisaged OL as a composite of five aspects that include systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision, and collective learning and these are now discussed.

a. Systems Thinking

Contemporary Western organisations mirror the cultural roots developed from Greek philosophy and based on logic, hierarchy and order (Senge 1990). This is a liability because people see organisations as a set of parts that are interchangeable and replaceable, rather than a highly interrelated system (Semler 1993; Chee and McDermott 1996; Saul 1997; Dunphy 1998; Evans 1999). This has been reinforced with the specialization of work concept, especially mental work, and the division of labour, that was espoused by both Adam Smith (1776) and FW Taylor (1911). This approach is reinforced by rigid hierarchies, the centralization of power and chains of command that allow the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of the managers (Semler 1993; Saul 1997; Dunphy 1998; Evans 1999; Denton 2000).

In the context of developing industrialized societies, organisational members were encouraged not to think beyond the rigid confines of their 'job' and thus saw things in pieces and fragments (Senge 1990; Hale 1993; Hames 1994; Bridges 1994, 1998; Stewart 1998; Saul 1999). Senge (1990) argues that the lack of ability to see the interconnectedness of systems means organisational members will continue to work against their own and the organisations best interests, as they are unable to see that everything is linked to everything else. Prior to being able to master systems thinking, the individual must have personal mastery over themselves. This requires powerful mental models that help them envision the future of the organisation. A contrast can be seen in comparisons with Eastern societies and cultures. Chee and McDermott (1996) note that the ability of these societies to see and enact the interconnectedness of systems. This provides businesses operating in those cultures with significant advantages in the way they act and approach problem solving (Rafferty 1995).

b. Personal Mastery

Personal mastery is about being able to control one self, to ensure that achieving individual interests and objectives does not become more important than achieving the organisation's interests and objectives (Senge 1990). To achieve a high level of personal mastery organisational members need the ability for self-reflection and criticism and should be willing to fit in with the organisation, yet at the same time maintain their individuality (Baker 1997; Bartlett 1996). This requires personal mastery to become what Collins (1999) terms a '*learning person*'. In this manner they are more likely to master the art of systems thinking and become more capable of

seeing the whole and not just the parts (Chee and McDermott 1996). In turn, as the individual becomes more proficient at systems thinking, they are more likely to share the same view of the organisation as others.

c. Mental Models

This commonly held view of the organisation is what Senge (1990, 1996) refers to as a mental model. The mental model is the individual's implicit and explicit assumptions about the organisation and the environment in which it operates. These assumptions are so innate and so deeply held that they are rarely, if ever, challenged (Baker 1997; Covey 1997; Hoffman and Hegarty 1993). These assumptions are the truth of how organisational members see themselves and their organisation (Ali, Azim and Krishnan 1995; Morgan 1986).

Any shift in the implicitly favoured mental model can threaten the entire stability of the organisation (Gartside 1998; Morgan 1986; Saul 1997; Semler 1993; Senge 1996). Those who challenge the shared mental model are likely to find the organisational culture, processes, rules, regulations and systems aligned against them. Those who feel threatened will defend the status quo and try to keep the organisation as it is (Ali 1992; Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung and Terpstra 1993; Ralston, Gustafson, Terpstra and Holt 1994; Saul 1997, 1999). To this end, those who currently have the power to do so, be it legitimate, expert or referent, need to define explicitly what the shared mental model needs to be and find ways to encourage others to adopt this. Moreover, these people also need to ensure that there is a high level of congruence between the accepted mental model and the way the organisation operates to ensure the model is adopted (Morgan 1986; Saul 1997, 1999; Senge 1990).

It is only when all, or at least the majority of organisational members, adopt a mental model that views their organisation as a Learning Organisation that it can start to become one. When the organisations vision and mission are shared by everyone, and the organisation is perceived as one entity, the adoption of OL can be successful.

d. Shared Vision

Callus (1999), Gately (1999), and Gettler (1998) are just some of the management writers and theorists, who argue that developing a commonly held and defined vision is crucial to the long-term success and viability of an organisation. Having a common and defined vision is critical to inculcate a shared mental model so employees can be part of the process and organisational learning can achieve its objectives (Senge, 1990). Further, Senge (1990) argues that the lack of a shared vision means organisational members will likely be working at cross purposes as they do not see the system as a whole or the effects their decisions have on others. It also means that they do not have a mental model of what the organisation is or what it needs to be or become (Hetzl and Clarke 1996; Morgan 1986).

James (1999) contends that leaders need to have a holistic vision that focuses on the long-term rather than just on the short-term (Christy 1998; Clemmer 1999; Deavenport 1999; De Crane 1997; McLendon 1995). Even though many organisations have adopted organisational visions, most senior managers see it as their responsibility, which implicitly favours Taylor's approach and reinforces the separation of thinking and doing. To these managers the involvement of lower-level organisational members is seen as unnecessary and an infringement of their

managerial prerogatives (Amburgey and Rao 1996; Barker 1993; Carrel, Heavrin and Jennings 1997; Eastman 1999; Hamel 1999). Consequently, it is from this new paradigm (Morgan 1986), from this commonly held mental model (Senge 1990) that people can then harness the synergy of working and learning collectively.

e. Collective Learning

Collective learning is crucial for as Lepani (1999) contends, the world has become a global village where people will try to work in their own neighbourhood or village. This means they will avoid large organisations in favour of community based organisations, where they can live, work, play and learn collectively. Senge (1990) also argues that learning collectively, not just individually, is another key element in developing Organisational Learning. This is because no one person can ever learn all that the organisation knows collectively, nor do people live long enough or stay with an organisation long enough to be there when that knowledge is needed (Drucker 1993, 1997; Morgan 1986; Semler 1993).

Not only must people keep learning, they also need to act as an organisational 'memory' for society at large if the learning process is to be ongoing (Keys, Denton and Miller 1994; Nutt and Backoff 1993; Reece 2001). This is achieved when both new and old organisational members are able to draw on the individual and collectively held knowledge, so they can make new and fresh applications of this knowledge. By sharing knowledge, members develop new ways of seeing things and can create new goods and services which add value to people's lives (Bathgate 1999; Elliott 1999; Fairbrother 1999). Thus, team learning is crucial for developing Organisational Learning.

Senge (1990) stresses the importance of systems thinking as an ability to view things in full, instead of partially or in pieces. Employees need personal mastery, so they can organise themselves and learn continuously and they also need the mental model that allows them to perceive the organisation as it is and what it can become. Having a shared vision engages so they can strive as a team, to learn individually and collectively to achieve the organisation's mission and vision.

As people begin to develop and use systems thinking they gain personal mastery and hold the same mental models. However, Senge (1990) did not develop an explicit model that would enable an organisation to fully map out exactly how this could be achieved. Although the concept is crucial, it lacks a truly explicit approach that can be readily defined and developed (Arthur 1999; Gephart, Marsick, Van Buren, Spiro and Senge 1996; Lei, Slocum and Pitts 1999). Therefore, implementing OL requires strong and reliable support from systems thinking, well nurtured individual expertise or personal mastery, ideal mental models, a realistic shared vision and strong collective learning among the employees for it to be successful.

2.4 Organisation Learning and the Learning Organisation

In discussing OL it is important to clarify learning organisation terminology. At first glance, it could be assumed that organisational learning and the learning organisation means the same. In reality both terms are different in meaning as well as in application. For example, OL is a strategy for continuous improvement through knowledge acquisition, utilization, creation and knowledge transfer, whereas the learning organisation is where the learning happens as a continuous sequence that

facilitates the learning activities. What distinguishes a Learning Organisation is that it applies and uses knowledge to benefit the organisation and its members (Dove 1999; Hall 2001; McKenna 1999; Selen 2000; Senge 1990; Sun and Scott 2006; Zack 1999).

Cook, Staniforth, and Stewart (1997) stress that a learning organisation always facilitates learning activities so that members can transform themselves continuously. According to DiBella (1995), Mohd. Amin and Poon (1998) a learning organisation is where learning happens as a continuous consecutive cycle that enables members to collectively and effectively learn from both direct and explicit experiences. This occurs when members are empowered to use the information and knowledge acquired to improve the organisation. Other researchers, such as Davies and Nutley (2000), Dowd (2000), Hebard (1999), Smith (1999), note that organisations need more than learning to become a Learning Organisation (LO). Denton's (1998) research in five British based organisations; 3M, Coca Cola Schweppes Beverages, Siebe PLC, Morgan Crucible and Mayflower PLC suggests that organisations need to institutionalise three common attributes of organisational learning: organisational strategy, structure and culture.

Gore and Gore (1999), and Mueller and Dyerson (1999) argue that expert systems, rather than the humans who utilize them are what constitute Organisational Learning. While it is argued that knowledge management is a crucial part of an organisation's overall development into Organisational Learning, managing the knowledge is insufficient on its own even in conjunction with expert systems (Anonymous 1997a; Dove 1999; Kotnour 1999; McKenna 1999). Although expert systems can act faster and are more consistent decision makers for programmed and highly routine

activities, they do not have the capacity to think, learn from experience or apply that learning or make decisions outside their current programmed instructions (Kotnour 1999; McKenna 1999).

The view that expert systems make up Organisational Learning is refuted by those who recognise the need for humans to synthesize acquired data and then make intuitive connections between the pieces of data so it is turned into useful knowledge (Hall 2001; Loermans 2002; McElyea 2002; Okes 2003; Selen 2000). Organisational Learning comes from creating the desire, means and opportunities for learning so that the users can use the knowledge (Ellerman 1999; Lei, Slocum, and Pitts 1999; Mariotti 1999; Pearson and Chatterjee 2002). Consequently, merely managing knowledge, linking it to or developing expert systems is not the full measure of Organisational Learning.

A learning organisation is one that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself. The number of organisations considering OL in relation to strategic planning has been consistently growing. In the 1980's, Marquardt (1996) identified that Shell was one of the first to link OL with strategic planning. Interest in OL increased throughout the 1990's with organisation such as General Electric, Johnsonville Foods, Quad Graphics and Pacific Bell in the United States; Sheerness Steel, Sun Alliance, and ABB in Europe; and Honda and Samsung in Asia were among the early pioneers adopting the concept.

Dirkx (1999) argues that the manager's role in fostering organisational learning is crucial to develop an organisation into a Learning Organisation (LO). This view is

supported by Ellinger, Warkins and Bostrom (1999a), who also note the impact managers have on encouraging, promoting and developing organisational learning. However, Black and Synan (1997), Cathon (2000), Salner (1999), Tichy and Cohen (1999), and Withers (2002) contend that even effective managers are hindered if the organisations' culture is not aligned. Where there is lack of trust in the way decisions are made and communicated, the perceptions of those expected to do the learning will be negative. Consequently, organisational learning is not a process that can be effectively implemented on its own; it requires the support of a knowledge management system.

2.5 Knowledge Management

There are many who argue that the key to Organisational Learning is to effectively manage the knowledge possessed by the organisation (Gore and Gore 1999; Hong and Chuo 1999; McAdam and McCreedy 1999; Zack 1999). Information and Communication Technology can be used to capture organisational knowledge and make information available to all, so that the organisation becomes a Learning Organisation (Brown and Brudney 2003; Caddy 2001; Gore and Gore 1999; Loermans 2002). For example, KM is an affective way for teams or organisations to capture and convey tacit knowledge on software testing (Nogeste and Walker 2006). The immediately apparent weakness in this approach is that not all knowledge is explicit. The greater portion of a person's knowledge is tacit and often not immediately accessible by the person, let alone the rest of the organisation (Gwynne 1999; Mac Donald 1995; Rooney and Hearn 1999). Gwynne (1999) highlights seven implicit assumptions that may not be accurate about knowledge.

The first assumption is that knowledge is explicit (Gwynne 1999; Loermans 2002). The second assumption, the knowledge can be easily captured and placed within the organisations Information Communication Technology (Brown and Brudney 2003; Gwynne 1999; Loermans 2002; McElyea 2002). The third assumption is that everyone knows what the knowledge is, where it is located, and how to access it (Brown and Brudney 2003; Gwynne 1999; McElyea 2002). The fourth assumption is that gaining access to the knowledge provides the required knowledge (Caddy 2001; Hall 2001; Gwynne 1999; Thomsen 2000). The fifth assumption is that knowledge can be captured by Information Communication Technology in the first place and everyone will have equal access to the same knowledge (Gwynne 1999). The sixth assumption is that the required knowledge is already known and available, yet this may not be the case (Beeby and Booth 2000; Bhatt 2000; Gwynne 1999). Finally, it is assumed that there is an ongoing commitment, ability and resources available to keep capturing, upgrading and storing this organisational knowledge (Caddy 2001; Gwynne 1999).

From another perspective, Bhatt (2000) and Stevenson (2000) note that access to and possession of information does not mean that learning takes place within the organisation. It may be that the organisation that focuses on capturing data is an information organisation, or it might simply be a knowledge warehouse. Similarly, McKenna (1999) and Thomsen (2000) argue that increasing the level of information within an organisation does not necessarily lead to organisational learning as people can be overwhelmed by useless knowledge, which actually impedes learning. As a result, there is so much information people cannot make sense of it and then they are

paralysed by indecision, because they cannot sort through it all and reach a meaningful conclusion and basis for action (McKenna 1999).

A number of researchers (Harris and Gokcekus 2000; Hayes and Allinson 1998; Jankowicz, 2000; Johnson, 1999; and Smith, 1999-1st) recommend a clear linkage between organisational needs and individual needs for organisational learning outcomes to be effective. When this occurs, not only the processes, practices and procedures of the organisation benefit, but there is a flow on benefit to all stakeholders and society as a whole (Reece 2001).

In conclusion, the learning organisation and organisational learning support the same objective, which is to improve the organisation (Argyris and Schon 1996:180; Hawkins 1991). Popper and Lipshitz (2000) identify that organisational learning is not a single process performed by the entire organisation uniformly. In reality, it involves assembling loosely coupled sub operations of different organisational units in different fashions and at different levels of intensity. This suggests OL needs to be viewed as part of the organisation's strategy to continuously improve and develop its operations and this relationship is the focus of this research.

2.6 Organisational Learning and Continuous Improvement

Organisational Learning (OL) is a strategy that has been promoted as a means for ensuring continuous improvement in organisations (Robinson, et al. 1997). Continuous improvement results from implementing Total Quality Improvement plans for the betterment of the organisation. When OL is at the heart of the

organisation's operations, the organisation and its people are required to learn new things as time goes by. The faster the organisation tries to learn, the faster it matures at handling unexpected events which may come from all directions (Bryson, Pajo, Ward, and Mallon 2006). These can be as diverse as sources of variability in administrative, manufacturing, and service processes that can detract from a quality output, and improving the processes to eliminate undesirable outputs (Joseph 1995).

From another perspective, continuous improvement leads to organisation-wide change and organisational learning can bring about these changes (LeBrasseur, Whissell and Ojha 2002). Learning is the medium for continuous improvement and requires a holistic effort. As already stated, learning is often shaped by circumstance rather than intention (Williams 2001). Regardless, the ability to achieve continuous improvement has been a characteristic of successful organisation in the 1990's (Ditcher 1991).

2.7 Organisational Learning and Performance

Measurement of performance is subjective. It is not just about increased income, but also the worth of money invested. Increasing emphasis on low price, least cost and quality service makes performance measurement more important (Southern 1999). Thus, the vital objective of organisational learning is to ensure better performance of products or services for the customer. The learning-organisation paradigm is predicated on the assumption that organisations collect, retrieve, and learn from information to achieve superior performance (Brown and Brudney 2003). Employees' performance leads to organisational performance as part of a causal relationship, although ultimately performance depends on the standard set by management to identify whether employees are performing or not.

Organisations are progressing when there is an increase in shared understanding involving the organisation, its environment and the relationship between the two (Inkpen and Crossan 1995). Companies that learn faster than their competitors have little to fear because organisational learning is a dynamic and ongoing process (Williams 2001). Information dissemination occurs when information is shared and diffused horizontally and vertically throughout the organisation (Argyris and Schon 1978; Jelinek 1979). Learning and listening from the people they serve allows the organisation to offer superior value to both internal and external customers (Slater and Narver 1995).

When employees' skills are developed the organisation has a competitive advantage as it is able to offer superior value to customers (Slater and Narver 1998). This occurs because responding to individual needs means that quality, service and reliability can be improved in response to feedback. This shared information leads to what Slater and Narver classify as a high performance organisation. Such organisations are customer driven, with mission statements centred on customer satisfaction. They continuously listen to their customers; prioritize their needs and expectations and respond accordingly in a creative and timely manner.

Financial performance is the measure most widely recognized for gauging the operational performance of an organisation (Southern 1999; Daniels and Burns 1997) and the most commonly identified measure of overall performance is sales growth (Weinzimmer, Nystrom and Freeman 1998). Nonetheless, organisations rate their firm's performance in a variety of ways, including profitability, wages, absenteeism,

services, and sales performance (Bowman and Ambrosini 1997) as well as employee and customer satisfaction.

Effective management of human capital, even more than physical capital, might be the ultimate determinant of organisational performance and survival (Snell and Youndt 1995). A number of researchers claim that HRM practices such as selection, training, performance appraisal, and reward systems all influence firm performance, particularly as employees are they key actors for implementing and managing the learning activities.

According to Inkpen and Crossan (1995), organisations that learn more effectively than their competitors will perform better in the end. However, this can be difficult to prove as time-lags make the link between OL and performance difficult to observe empirically. Another problem they cite is that increased knowledge associated with a learning process may reduce the variability of performance rather than increase it. On the one hand, learning makes performance more reliable; on the other hand, the risk associated with reduced variability is that the organisation becomes resistant to contradictory information. Performance provides important feedback about the efficiency and effectiveness of a learning process and the organisation's strategy should reflect the accumulated learning. Nonetheless, the expectation that incremental learning should always lead to incremental performance improvements is misleading. Specific performance enhancements may result because of learning, but may also be attributable to efforts of imitation, regeneration, or technological development. Therefore, the creation of individual and organisational systems thinking is necessary in the implementation of OL.

2.8 The Significant Impact of Organisational Learning

Over the past 10 years, organisations have adopted OL because of the significant benefits offered for improving performance (Orr 2000). Garvin (1993), Miller (1996), and Williams (2001), all identify that Organisational Learning is a process to create, acquire and transfer knowledge, which involves continuous changes that influence decision-making processes. This indicates that OL should be part of major and minor decision-making process as well as the core operations in any organisation that wants to use new knowledge and insights to aid the organisation achieve its goals. Advocates of organisational learning suggest that learning facilitates the behavioural changes of the employees and this is what leads to improved organisational performance. In the long term, this helps a learning organisation compete successfully (Slater and Narver 1995) and provides competitive advantages (Bierly and Hamalainen 1995; Heracleous 1995; Kim 1993; Schein 1990; Stata 1989).

Organisational learning is believed to be essential for survival in a rapidly changing and competitive environment (Schein 1993; Senge 1990). It promotes the use of information that is easily accessible in all directions - vertically, horizontally, and diagonally (Brown and Brudney 2003). Therefore the greater the environmental uncertainty, the more need there is for learning to take place (Dodgson 1993). Subsequently, proper management of the learning process is necessary to overcome the uncertainties and unexpected negative impacts. Williams (2001) claims that a competitive organisation is more likely to be one where the learning process is properly managed, with a choice of valid strategies and a provision for quality feedback. It is essential to understand the supporting elements of organisational

learning to manage the learning process. Inkpen and Crossan (1995) identified four key elements of organisational learning these being the nature of managerial learning experiences, the sharing and integration of managerial learning within an organisation, the institutionalisation of learning, and the relationship between organisational learning and performance. Nonetheless, the relationship between OL and performance is always the top priority of the top management to justify their return on investment.

In terms of performance, the concept of organisational learning provides a new agenda for organisations to keep themselves competitive. Whether learning is individual or organisational, tacit or explicit, there should be evidence of some change in the person or organisation as an outcome of the knowledge gained. When the process of learning takes place consistently, it leads to consistent and incremental change in the organisation as a whole (Robinson, et al. 1997; Williams 2001). Although the learning takes place inside individuals, the organisation learns in two ways. First, by the learning of its members and second, by the inclusion of new members who bring knowledge the organisation previously did not have (Simon 1991:125). Regardless, individual learning and organisational learning are similar in that they involve the same phases of information processing; namely, collection, analysis, abstraction and retention (Popper and Lipshitz 2000). Since learning is an interactive process that involves these various elements or dimensions, Mohd. Amin and Poon (1998) suggest that the desired organisational learning outcomes are best achieved by improving the fit among these dimensions.

2.9 The Organisational Learning Implementation

In the rapidly changing and competitive environment of the 21st century, organisational learning is needed to ensure the organisation is in line with changes in technology, customer expectations, product innovation and service efficiency, all of which are critical for survival (Armstrong 2000; Schein 1993; Senge 1990). According to Locke and Jain (1995) the competitive challenges of the 1980s and 1990s threatened many established management and organisational practices. Further, Cook, Staniforth, and Stewart (1997) suggest that for the individual, company or country to flourish, it needs to construct an internal learning culture. Organisational Learning benefits the organisation by promoting information that is easily accessible from all directions: vertically, horizontally, and diagonally (Brown and Brudney 2003), to help respond to uncertainties and unexpected events. Therefore, there will be increasing pressure on organisations to manage the process and incorporate feedback (Williams 2001).

Quality feedback can only occur if learning takes place in a way that allows an organisation to learn faster than rivals and apply new knowledge effectively (Prahalad and Hamel 1990). According to Prahalad and Hamel (1990), organisational learning builds the “core competencies” to make the organisation superior to rivals through the employees. This means employees need to learn and have a clear understanding of the organisation’s mission, strategies and goals for them to provide quality feedback about past and present performance. This first step in achieving competitive advantage is developing and shaping an appropriate mental model of OL (Williams 2001).

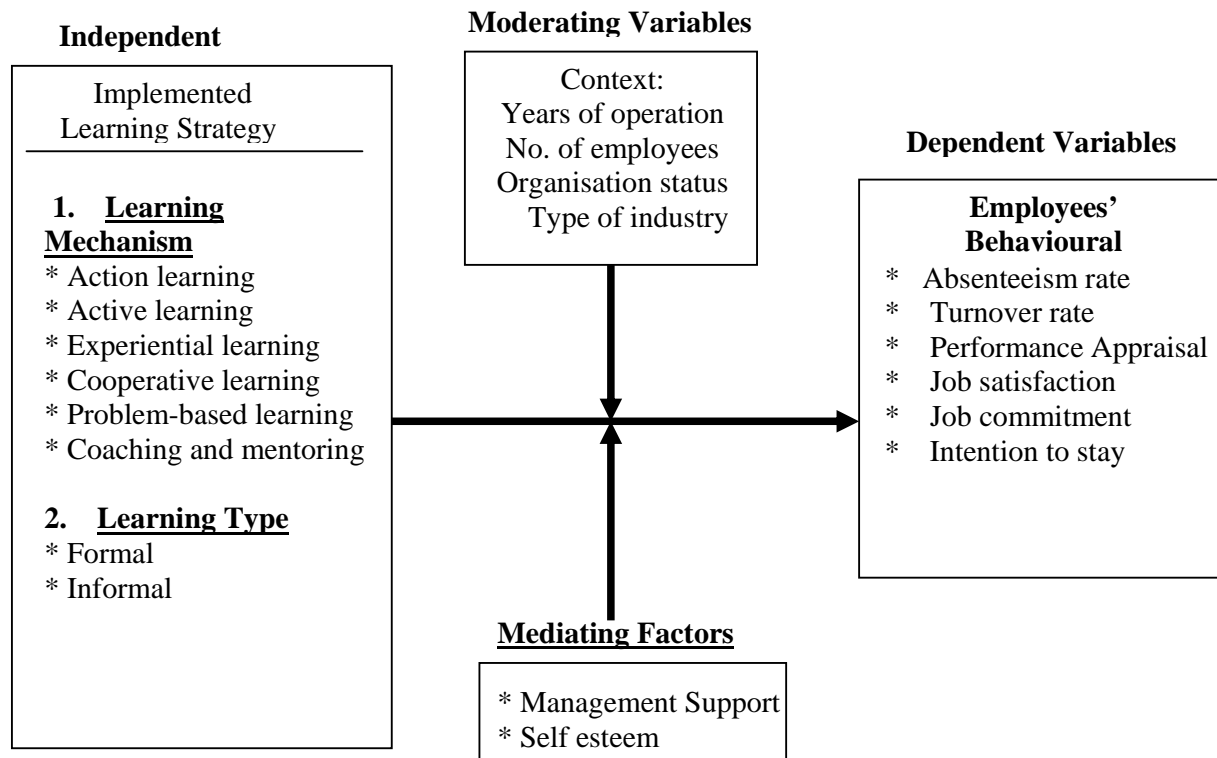
2.10 Conclusion

This literature review has explored the important issues related to Organisational Learning and identified that organisational learning is important to enhance organisational competitiveness. While organisational learning *per se* clearly has benefits, the notion that there is one best way is questionable. The reality is that there are a range of strategies to choose from, and the most successful are likely to be those that best relate to the organisations context. The literature does identify that the most important learning strategies affecting employees' behavioural performance are action learning, active learning, action learning, experiential learning, cooperative learning, problem-based learning, coaching and mentoring as well as both formal and informal learning. In addition, it must be remembered that these attributes represent a synthesised model based on the western literature. The aim of this research is to explore whether or not these attributes apply equally within the Malaysian context.

A model of organisational learning for Malaysian organisations can only be developed by acquiring knowledge about how Malaysian organisations acquire knowledge and promote employee performance. Therefore, this research takes a qualitative approach to exploring how 'Organisational Learning' is practised and implemented in Malaysian organisations. The conceptual framework, drawn from the literature, is a useful framework to inform the research approach and to help identify similarities and dissimilarities with the way organisational learning is understood and implemented in Malaysia. To achieve this, information will be garnered from Malaysian 'experts' who are either senior practitioners or academics, so a model of organisational learning that is relevant to the Malaysian environment can be developed. The study will make a significant contribution to the academic literature

and Malaysian organisations by helping to clarify the understanding of OL as it is practiced. This should also provide guidance on how organisational learning can be better implemented. This result will contribute to the general understanding of OL and may provide insights that any organization, and particularly those in developing countries, may learn from when seeking the best learning strategies to implement. The conceptual model of organisational learning drawn from the literature is presented below in Figure 1.1.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Model drawn from the Literature



This model shows that learning strategy can be categorised into six mechanisms: action learning, active learning, experiential learning, cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and coaching and mentoring. The researcher added formal and informal learning, to capture whether learning occurs as one of the learning strategies

practised by the organisation, or it arises from informal processes. It is also important to consider the environment an organisation works within, so four context factors affecting the organisation were included. These include years of operation, number of employees, organisational status (for instance local or multinational organisations), and the industry the organisation operates within. These environmental or contextual factors will moderate the learning strategy chosen by the organisation.

The research questions seek to understand how the OL concepts and learning strategies suggested in the literature are implemented within Malaysia. So far, no research has been conducted to explore the learning strategies or measure the understanding of OL within the country, despite that its implementation is an important Government supported strategy. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap and help identify ways Malaysian organisations can improve implementation and ensure there is a good fit between their chosen learning strategies and the environment, to enhance organisational and employee performance. Effective learning strategies can contribute to an organisations bottom line in many ways, by reducing absenteeism and turnover, providing a benchmark in the performance appraisal process, increasing employee job satisfaction and commitment as well as intention to stay in the organisation.

In conclusion, this review of the literature has revealed the learning strategies that are available and practiced within the business environment. The evolution of OL in terms of the characteristics, concepts, impacts, and importance have all been discussed. The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

PARADIGM OF STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Overview of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 starts with a discussion of the research paradigm and philosophical underpinnings of the study. Then the research approaches, including the industry survey and in-depth interview are discussed. The chapter provides information about the sample population in each of the phases before going on to describe the instruments, the data collection processes and the type of analysis carried out at each phase of the study.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology used for exploring the level of understanding of organisational learning and learning strategy practices within Malaysia. The research techniques used are explained as is the philosophical approach taken. The chapter also provides a rationale for the ontology and epistemology underpinning this approach. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the samples participating in the study and the methods used for data analysis.

3.2 Paradigm of the Study

An important early step in research is to define the “paradigm” or “world view” that guides the research. According to Gregg, Kulkarni and Vinze (2001) the paradigm is

the perspective taken when drawing knowledge from the physical and social world. In simple terms, the “paradigm” is the fundamental view of how we perceive our reality (Burrell and Morgan 1979) or in other words, the paradigm reflects the fundamental beliefs and assumptions we hold about the reality of something (Kuhn 1970). Guba and Lincoln (cited in Gregg et al. 2001) propose three questions that need to be asked when defining a paradigm.

The first, which is the Ontology, is; ‘What is the nature of reality that is addressed’; the second which is the Epistemology is, ‘What is the nature of knowledge’; and the third which is the Methodology is, ‘What is the best approach to obtaining the desired knowledge and understanding’.

In relation to research, the paradigm explains the philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge and it can be measured (Morgan 1983a; Smircich 1983; Guba and Lincoln 1994). Another point made by a number of researchers is that the term is used widely with a variety of meanings depending on when, where and by whom it is used (Morgan 1983a; Guba and Lincoln 1994). There is no universally accepted paradigm for any kind of research, and the discussion continues as to which paradigm and therefore, which methodology is best used when conducting research (Smircich 1983; Patton 1990; Perry 1994; Yin 1994). No single paradigm, and/or methodology will meet the needs of all researchers and research questions, particularly when investigating what Cunningham (1993) refers to as “our diverse, complex and changing contemporary society (pg. 71)”. Nonetheless, depending on the context, it is argued that some methodologies are more suitable than others are.

In terms of OL research, Kim (2003) has identified three widely used research paradigms, these being ‘positivism’, ‘interpretivism’, and ‘critical sciences’. Although ‘positivism’ has been preferred as the central research approach in studying OL issues in modern organisations, Kim (2003), suggests ‘interpretivism’ and ‘critical science’ are also very useful approaches. Therefore, a brief discussion is required to explain the approach suited for this research. The positivist approach is the first to be discussed, followed by critical science theory and finally the interpretivist approach. Later, the constructivist approach is also discussed as it has some relevance to the research paradigm.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) positivism is based on an assumption that the reality of the research is both real and apprehensible, as it can be measured and touched. As the reality is real, then when a researcher investigates it, causal relationships can be consistently measured and categorized, across both time and context (Perry et al. 1998). Further, Perry et al. (1998) also note that positivism is used to test hypotheses and from this establish the ‘truth’ about the hypothesis, using very structured verification methodologies such as, laboratory experiments surveys. Therefore, as one purpose of this thesis is to *explore and explain “Malaysian understanding of OL and the learning strategies practiced in Malaysian organisations”* rather than to verify a theory, it is argued that the positivism paradigm is not best suited for this research and so, the positivism paradigm is rejected.

In discussing the Critical Theory approach, the underlying assumption of Critical Theory is it is a “*virtual or historical reality*” derived from social contexts (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p 110). Those who advocate the use of this paradigm, wish to transform

the world around them by critiquing the existing “*social, political, economic, ethnic and gender values*” (Perry et al.1998, p 6) that have shaped the current reality, from a previous one (Guba and Lincoln 1994). To use this paradigm, as a research tool, would of necessity make the researcher, as argued by Guba and Lincoln (1994, p 112) a “*transformative intellectual*”, one who wishes to change the world in which the participants live (Perry et al. 1996, Brown 1997). However, as one purpose of this research is to explain and explore ***Malaysian understanding on OL and what are the learning strategy practices in Malaysian organisations*** rather than to transform them, this paradigm is considered to be inappropriate and is also rejected

The paradigm of the ‘interpretivist’ approach, suggests it is impossible to separate facts from values and the inherent subjectivity in any research conducted in relation to people and to the social world (Schwandt, 2000). In addition, Schwandt, (2000) justified this by claiming that knowledge is socially constructed, rather than the discovery of an independent reality, therefore, the notion of causality is defined differently. From the interpretivist perspective, causal relationships are simply another, possible construction or explanation for certain aspects of the social world that we are researching. Rather than seeking a ‘true’ match between our research observations and reality, the interpretivist paradigm understands reality as being constructed in and through our observations and pursuit of knowledge (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000, Lynch 2003, Pennycook 2001, Schwandt 2000). Looking at the nature of this research, which is to explore and explain the Malaysian understanding of OL and the learning strategy practices in Malaysian organizations, this approach is considered to be suited to answering the research questions.

As for the 'constructivist' approach, this paradigm is founded on the assumption that, there are multiple versions of reality and as a result there can be no singular truth (Guba and Lincoln 1994, Perry et al. 1998). For as Guba and Lincoln (1994, p111) assert the: "*realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature...and dependent for their form and content on the individual person or groups holding the constructions.*" Moreover, as the constructivist approach holds, each construction is based on the individual or groups own experiences, then the reality thereby constructed, cannot be real or true in an absolute sense (Perry et al. 1998). Thus as Perry et al. (1999 p 6) argue: "*perception is the most important reality*" and as a result, the level certainty as to the truth of the findings may not be constant. Also, as the findings may well be a creation or a synthesis of what the researcher has found, then the researcher is, what Guba and Lincoln (1994, p 111) describe as a "*passionate participant*". According to Carr & Kemmis (1986) the aim of 'constructivism' inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of the understanding that people initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve is justified the suitability of this paradigm to be used to answer the research question.

As this research investigates both existing research and the tacit knowledge of people involved in the industry, the nature of the research is both exploratory and explanatory. Therefore, the combination of interpretive and constructivist approach was deemed the most appropriate paradigm and methodology for conducting this research.

The 'Interpretive/Constructivist' paradigm proposes that people construct knowledge in social settings (Gregg et al. 2001). Therefore, the 'interpretive/constructive' study attempts to attain complete and broader understanding of people's daily life to recognize the models, practices and traditions of their society (Kim 2003). According to Gregg et al. (2001), the 'interpretive/constructivist' paradigm allows the researcher to construct new concepts based on observing the needs and relationships and experiences of others. Gregg et al. (2001) and Kim (2003) add that 'interpretive/constructive' research helps to shape or construct the organisational and social reality, as a product of theory, which in turn shapes and affects reality.

In this case, the opinions and perceptions of respondents and their collective experiences and knowledge are used to build a model of organisational learning in Malaysia. Consequently, the study started with questions derived from the literature, as recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2000). The first step was to gather general feedback and input from respondents via an Industry Survey. This survey tapped their understanding of OL, the learning strategies available in the market and the learning strategies used by their organisations and asked if they could distinguish between OL and KM. The results were then analysed to reveal the respondents opinions and understanding. Based on the input from this first wave data, a set of in-depth interview questions were derived for the second phase of the data collection.

3.3 Philosophy underpinning the Study

The research philosophy explains the researchers underlying thinking about the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2003). A philosophy is defined as 'the study or science of truths or principles underlying all knowledge and

being, or a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs' (Macquarie Dictionary 1996, p. 297). Philosophically, the researcher believes that people learn new knowledge in many ways; such as through direct and indirect experiences, formal and informal learning, problem solving, from practical experience or industrial training as well as coaching and mentoring. The researcher believes there are likely to be common learning strategies that are widely used by Malaysian organisations and some of these strategies will offer greater potential for efficiently and effectively enhancing employees' motivation and performance throughout learning. However, there is no hard evidence of what is really happening. So far, there is very little previous research to verify what the perceptions and understanding of OL are. For this reason, an exploratory approach and the use of open-ended questions were believed to be the best way to uncover Malaysian organisations understanding of what OL is and how it is implemented. The researcher also expects to identify some of the learning strategies being used in the market and implemented in Malaysian organisations.

As stated previously, this study aims to explore and understand the reality, rather than test the framework developed from the literature. Obtaining feedback from 'expert' practitioners or academics provides the opportunity for the respondents to pool their knowledge and experiences, then define and collectively interpret the information, to generate a meaning for organisational learning in Malaysia. A qualitative approach makes it possible to extract out what is applicable to the environment so that a theory relevant to the specific culture, geographic locality and environment can be developed. In brief, this study is actually trying to build a model to understand what is

appropriate to be taken from the Western model of organisational learning, to see if these can be adapted and implemented effectively within the Malaysian environment.

3.4 Ontology of the Study

The ontology is how individuals 'see' the world and make sense of or give meaning to what goes on around them make sense and gives meaning to it (Patel, Patel, and Samara, 2007; Pearsall and Trumble 2002). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), ontology is 'the nature of reality that is addressed'. It may well be that the respondents of this study propose underpinnings for organisational learning in Malaysia that differ from theories in the western literature. The ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and poses such questions as:

- What is the nature of reality?
- What is already known about this reality?
- What is already known about the real world?
- Is this how things really work? (Perry, Reige and Brown 1998: pg. 68)

The ontology of this study examines the reality of how Malaysian organisations go about acquiring knowledge. The process of knowledge acquisition in Malaysia costs organisations in terms of time, money and the efforts put into the learning or knowledge acquisition programs. Organisations invest in developing, enhancing and upgrading employees' knowledge through employee development programs, education assistance programs and local and overseas training and exposure. However, the return on investment (ROI) of the learning programs is not always measured and in many cases is perceived by management as a negative cost to the

organisation. This raises the question of how and why development, if it happens, can be justified.

Consequently, using open-ended questions that explore the learning strategies used and their objectives helps to construct the 'nature of reality' (Creswell 1998, p. 76) of Malaysian organisations. Therefore, the ontology of this study takes what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe as a constructive stance. Constructivism "suggests that each person's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other..." (Crotty 1998: pg. 58). The reality of existing means constructivist studies need to take into account that humans live in different settings and realities that are related to their culture, society, experiences, education systems, beliefs and physical environment (Guba and Lincoln 1990, cited in Patton 2002).

As time goes by, changes occur, sometimes as frequently as by the minute, so knowledge evolves, strategies are revised and some things become obsolete, which means new theories and practices need to be constructed (Patton 2002). This also raises questions about the applicability of Western Models of OL to an emerging Asian environment, particularly given cultural and geographic differences, such as city versus rural locations and the need for Asian businesses to adapt to a globalised world. Understanding the reality for Malaysian Businesses should assist the effective implementation of OL strategies at a much wider level.

3.5 Epistemology of the Study

The epistemology refers to the relationship researchers have with the reality they have created, their justifiable beliefs and the truth of their final research findings (Guba and

Lincoln 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) define epistemology as asking ‘what is the nature of knowledge’. In this sense, the epistemology refers to the set of questions designed by the researcher to draw out an explanation and provide an answer (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The aim is to elicit the true answer from those who have knowledge (Goldman 2001). The Oxford English Reference Dictionary (Pearsall and Trumble 2002) states that epistemology refers to a justified belief about truth, even when the empirical evidence to support the belief is lacking. Therefore, epistemology poses social questions such as:

- What is the relationship between the researcher and the reality, as they perceive it?
- Is the reality shared by others or only by the researcher?

The fundamental question is, have the perceptions of the researcher shaped the desired reality, or is it a ‘true’ representation of the reality? (Guba and Lincoln, 1994)

In this study, the researcher will communicate to the respondents who are, to use Goldman's term “the people in possession of the truth” (2001; pg 1) by using open-ended questions. By providing feedback about their experiences, opinions, feelings, understandings, beliefs and facts in relation to organisational learning, the ‘experts’ will describe and interpret reality based on their personal understanding and experiences. To be able to develop a reliable model, the study will very much depend on the respondents’ expertise and understanding of the issue.

3.6 The Methodological Perspective of the Study

The methodology is the processes used by a discipline to examine or test a phenomenon (Pearsall and Trumble 2002). The use of an appropriate methodology is

crucial when establishing the truth about phenomena, as an inappropriate methodology will yield unreliable and suspect results (Yin 1993; Guba and Lincoln 1994). This leads to the following question:

- What technique can be used to measure the perceived reality?

Firstly, an Industry Survey was used to collect the first round of data as a preliminary step to test the practicality of the interview questions and to gauge Malaysian understanding of the research issue in general. Three industries were represented these being, manufacturing, academia and government. The second phase of the data collection used in-depth interviews to collect data from a wider range of participants. The respondents targeted for this phase of the study were the human resource practitioners from manufacturing, government and the health industries as well as academics. The purpose of targeting a variety of industries was to test if respondents understanding was confined to some industries in particular, or was more widely representative.

3.7 Scope of the Study

A targeted qualitative survey was conducted among the Malaysian Human Resource Practitioners and academics, to seek feedback on their perceptions and understanding of organisational learning and learning strategy practices in Malaysia. This includes perceptions about the importance of OL as a concept and how and why organisational learning strategies are implemented in practice. Respondents were also asked to distinguish between OL and Knowledge Management (KM). Answers to these questions will help Human Resources Practitioners better understand the role of organisational learning and how learning strategy is operationalized. As recommended by Bohmer and Edmonson (2001), Yeung, Ulrich, Nason, and Von

Glinow (1999, p.16), this is a prerequisite to any efforts to encourage learning. The reality is that some strategies are likely to take preference over others. Understanding how learning strategies are, or can be utilized, to promote employee performance is expected to be a valuable finding with the potential to help Malaysian managers better understand and prioritize the learning strategies and processes they use.

3.8 Population and Sample

The research-targeted individuals deemed to have expert knowledge about how Malaysian organisations operate and included Human Resource Practitioners from private and public organisations, as well as academics. The inclusion of academics in the sample was to allow the information from the other two sectors to be triangulated, giving a more reliable picture of what is happening within Malaysia. Respondents were targeted, because it is imperative information comes from those who are able to make an informed contribution.

3.9 The Industry Survey

An industry survey used to assess the understanding of Organisational Learning and the extent of its practice in Malaysia. This survey was important as a first phase, to establish the level of understanding of organisational learning that already existed within the industry sectors in Malaysia. This survey sought for consensus about the understanding of OL and used a modified Delphi approach. Initially, the participants were contacted through an e-mail. Where e-mail addresses were not available, participants were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the survey. A brief explanation was given about the aim and procedure of the research during the

telephone conversation. Once willingness to participate in the study was confirmed the survey questions and a covering letter explaining the nature of the study were e-mailed to participants. This e-mail included a consent form to be completed and signed by them and gave an assurance that their confidentiality would be protected. A single round of survey questions was used to develop a preliminary understanding of the shared meaning of organisational learning and to identify the learning strategies that are being implemented within Malaysia.

Respondent names were initially selected from the organisations web site, the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers Members Directory and Graduate book. Once the name, position, telephone number and e-mail address were gathered, the five questions were sent to potential respondents. The process was followed up with a telephone call, to give respondents a chance to ask for clarification about any questions. The questions sent to the respondents are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: The Industry Survey Questions

1.	What is your understanding of “Organisational Learning”?
2.	Do you think the concept of “Organisational Learning” is important? Please explain.
3.	How do you think an organisation should go about acquiring knowledge?
4.	Could you please explain the learning strategies used in your organisation for acquiring knowledge?
5.	Does your organisation make a distinction between ‘Organisational Learning’ and ‘Knowledge Management’?

This survey required personal networking and a consistent follow up to encourage responses and took quite considerable, time, effort, fortitude and money to accomplish to get results. In all, 2000 requests for participation were sent out and 18 responses were obtained and this took five months. Among the reasons likely to have contributed to such a poor response rate, could be, unfamiliarity with the research topic, the many demands on the respondents time or the need for more verbal clarification about the research topic. Interpersonal communication is important because Malay is a spoken language, and the respondents would most likely feel more comfortable discussing their opinions in a personal interaction. Furthermore, even though the topic has been widely discussed, experts in the field of study are difficult to identify in Malaysia. In addition, considering the topic is relatively new in Malaysia some may have avoided the topic because of their limited knowledge. Nonetheless the day through obtained in this preliminary study was useful in preparing for the in-depth interviews used in the second phase of the data collection.

3.10 The In-Depth Interview Technique

The method involved in Phase 2 of the study was in-depth interviews of human resources practitioners from manufacturing and health as well as government officers and academics. There was no overlap between these respondents and those who participated in the industry survey. To provide some standardization across interviews, a schedule of interview questions were developed. These questions were based on the feedback from the industry survey and from the literature review. The objective of Phase 2 was to deeply and critically explore the issues and to build on the basic understanding of OL obtained from the Industry Survey. The in-depth interview

aimed to gather information that would provide a deeper understanding of the research topic and enrich the findings.

The guidelines for the in-depth interview were comprised of five lead questions with sub-questions or prompts and these are set out below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: In-Depth Interview Guideline

1.0	What is your understanding of 'Organisational Learning'?
	1.1 From your understanding, is there any difference between training and development and organisational learning? Please explain your answer.
2.0	Do you think the concept of 'Organisational Learning' is important? Please explain.
	2.1 Do you think the concept of training and development is equivalent to organisational learning? Please explain your answer.
3.0	How do you think an organisation should go about acquiring knowledge?
	3.1 How should an organisation acquire knowledge?
4.0	Could you please explain the learning strategies used in your organisation for acquiring and disseminating knowledge?
	4.1 How does your organization (or employees) acquire knowledge?
	4.2 Do you think that the selection of “the right learning strategy” is crucial for your organisation? Please explain why.
5.0	Does your organisation make a distinction between 'Organisational Learning' and 'Knowledge Management'?

Using the same databases as for the previous study, the researcher selected potential respondents around the Penang State, for convenience, and contacted them by telephone. After a brief discussion, appointments were arranged with those who agreed to participate in the interview. The 'face to face' meetings lasted between 1-2 hours and each interview was tape-recorded. Thirty-eight respondents participated and were interviewed over a period of two months. Of the 38 interviews recorded, only 35 tapes were transcribed as three tapes were of poor quality so that they were damaged or unusable. The number of responses fits comfortably within the recommended range of 25 to 40 respondents (Reece 2004) recommended for this type of study. Transcription of the tapes started in October 2004 and was completed by the end of December 2004. After transcribing, the respondent feedback was sorted by questions and by industry in preparation for data analysis.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in line with the steps advised by Dick (1990b p 12-14). The recommended flow for effective an interview process is outlined below.

- Introduce oneself
- Discuss more general matters to establish a rapport with the interviewee before entering into the interview process; thank the respondent for both their time and the willingness to be involved in the research process
- Remind the respondent of the purpose of the interview, checking that the themes were clear (this is based on the letter, email, the phone call or the face to face conversation)

- Confirm that the person is happy to allow the interviewer to use a tape recorder to record the interview and assure the interviewee that a copy of the transcript will be forwarded to them
- Assure them that their anonymity will be protected at all times as per the research guidelines of the University.
- Ask if there are points about which they are uncertain and if necessary, clarify these points to enable the respondent to fully understand.
- Finally, ensure respondents have a copy of the themes close at hand for ease of reference and if required, encourage respondents to share their perceptions about the themes during the interview.

The above steps expedite the interview process. A successful interview session might require several approaches, to make contact initially or to make changes to dates and times so as to fit in the respondents. The more comfortable the respondent feels, the more likely they are to elaborate their answers. In addition, each question needs to be simple and as general as possible to give the respondent the confidence to speak freely and feel at ease with the interviewer (Nair and Reige 1995; Perry and Cote 1994). In qualitative research, the richness of data very much depends on the respondents' input. If the interview is convenient for them, they are more likely to discuss their views on the themes deemed most appropriate to their situation. Once gained, the information can then be triangulated amongst the multiple sources of evidence to assist in clarifying the meaning behind the words (Yin 1993, 1994).

Once completed, the recorded interview tapes were stored in a safe place and labelled with the companies' name, the respondent's name and the date and time of the interview. Next, the interview conversations were transcribed.

3.11 The Transcribing Process

The transcribing process took over three months; from October 2004 until December 2004. All conversations were transcribed manually and the following technology was used to make the process easier and faster. A free to air program, Audacity, was downloaded from the internet (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>). Firstly, Audacity was used to transfer the tape recorded conversations onto the computer. Secondly, the speed of the taped conversations was slowed to make transcription easier. This meant that the conversations were recorded and tagged on the computer and saved for further use, so information was easy to find when it needed to be reviewed. The recording was played with Windows Media Player so the transcription was available for analysis, both aurally and with the qualitative statistical program Nudist.

3.12 Data Analysis

The data was analysed using a content analysis method to systematically examine the content of the communications. Data was sorted using the Nudist software program. At first, the data was sorted according to the interview questions and the industry. Then the data was coded according to the themes addressed in the interview questions. The constant comparison method was used to identify major themes, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The data were analysed from a broader view and narrowed down to specific issues. In analysing the data, three approaches

have been applied. First was a general analysis of the data based on the questions across the industry. Second was the industry's understanding of the research issue. Third was a summary of comparative understanding of the research issues, across industries. The details of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

“Only enterprises that are capable of harnessing technology and knowledge to develop into high value-added products and services, professionally managed, excellent in process and customer service management will be able to compete globally!” HAFSAH HASHIM, the Chief Executive Officer, Small Medium Industry Development Corporation, Malaysia (SMIDEC), 6th July 2005.

4. Overview of Chapter 4

This chapter analyses the data gathered from the industry survey and the in-depth interviews to examine Organisational Learning and learning strategies practiced in Malaysian organisations. The findings from the industry surveys helped to formulate the questions used in the second phase of data collection, which was the in-depth interview. The in-depth interviews targeted respondents from four industries; manufacturing, health, government and academia, and the results are presented here. The discussion is structured around the five main interview questions, beginning with the respondents’ background, the interview outcomes and the implications of the findings.

4.1 Introduction to the Data Analysis

The analysis begins by analysing the data gathered from the industry survey and aims to grasp the general Malaysian understanding of the research topic. The key questions were targeted at the understanding of OL, the importance of OL as a concept, learning strategies that are known about and practiced as well as respondents understanding of

knowledge management. The second part of the chapter discusses the in-depth interview analysis and explores questions about what is happening in Malaysia in practice.

4.2 Results of the Industry Survey

The data were collected either via e-mail or letter and there were eighteen (18) respondents to the random survey. It was initially assumed the survey would receive equal interest from across the industry sectors, however, of the eighteen useable responses, twelve were from government departments, four were from the manufacturing industry and two were academics. The respondents all currently work within private or public organisations and their responses are believed to be based on their working experience and personal understanding.

The data were analysed manually by comparing and compiling the similarities and the differences of the respondents' understandings and inputs. The data analyses is presented according to the following themes; understanding of organisational learning, proposed learning strategies, practised learning strategy, and the distinction between organisational learning and knowledge management. The following results were obtained.

i The Understanding of Organisational Learning

From the eighteen (18) responses about the understanding of the organisational learning, five main ideas were collated. The respondents defined Organisational Learning as:

- a) the continuous learning and development of people to perform the job better, and reach the level set by the organisation for handling changes and challenges in achieving the organisation's goals;
- b) a process of long term, short term and professional training and learning, such as a bachelor and masters program, that developed employees so they can improve their contributions to achieving the organisations' objectives;
- c) a process of tacit and implicit knowledge acquisition and accumulation of experience within the organisation's members;
- d) a systematic and aggressive training and development program, which enhances the soft and hard skills of the employees; and
- e) A learning process via the discovery and rectification of mistakes, and application of the lessons learnt to improve and create a sophisticated and intelligent organisation.

These understandings reflect the definitions presented in Table 2.2., in Chapter 2 and indicate that in general, the respondents had a basic understanding of 'Organisational Learning', even though there were mixed interpretations between organisational learning and training and development. For example, most of the respondents agreed that OL is the same as training and development, which it is not.

ii. The Concept and Importance of OL

Acknowledging the power of knowledge for the present and for the future, all the respondents agreed that Organisational Learning is important. The respondents perceived that learning was the key to industry progress and survival. Most of the respondents believed that Organisational Learning is crucial in determining the

effectiveness and survival of an organisation, especially when tacit and implicit knowledge needs to be institutionalised for long-term planning. The respondents also emphasised that the creation of knowledgeable members in the organisation would help to promote the product, maintain the image and preserve the goodwill of an organisation. Therefore, establishing a Learning Culture in the organisation through Organisational Learning practice should reduce overall training costs.

Subsequently, the respondents believed that Organisational Learning would allow their organisations:

- a) To create 'knowledge-workers',
- b) to upgrade employees to use the latest technology and know-how,
- c) to ensure continuous learning involving various levels of employees,
- d) to enhance the productivity and quality of service,
- e) to design new ideas, share the vision and mission,
- f) to work in teams,
- g) to promote effective inter and intra department communication for efficient change management,
- h) to increase the organisational image,
- i) to ensure total quality control and the effectiveness of the organisation,
- j) to drive the organisation towards knowledge and skills acquisition, and
- k) To have a well organised and up-to-date organisation.

iii. The Proposed Learning Strategy and Methodology

All the respondents agreed that successful organisations should promote and set a knowledge culture within the organisation. Promotion and recognition should be

given to those people who contributed to the learning of others, in recognition of their passion in sharing their knowledge (M3 and A1 2004). The organisation on the other hand should strongly encourage the employee to voice out their ideas and take part in any discussions held in the organisation (A2 2004).

The respondents suggested that an organisation should continuously implement systematic and well-planned learning strategies that allow informal, as well as formal, training programs (in-house/external) (M1, M2 and M3 2004). The learning methods proposed as popular by the respondents included; having a formal organisational structure, professional courses, experimentation, seminars and conferences (workshops, talks, discussion, and speeches), on the job training, mentoring, and self-learning such as reading books and articles.

iv. Learning Strategies in Practice

The respondents believed a number of learning strategies are used in Malaysian organisations and these are listed below.

- a) Informal and formal learning. Resource centers which are equipped with books, videos, and cd-rom is one way of in-formal learning and classroom learning either using internal or external trainers is an example of formal learning. There are many other examples of informal and formal learning such as long term and short term courses, brainstorming, reading books and articles, distributing bulletins, meeting minutes, official circulations, announcements, e-mails,

memos, monthly meetings, monthly assemblies and invention of new technology

- b) Strategic planning that is cascaded down to the Tactical Planning,
- d) Placing the less experienced or junior staff under senior personnel who are holding key positions so they can be coached and or mentored,
- e) By establishing a training and development department, or linking to a group of experts,
- f) Training collaboration with technical institutions,
- g) Having an integrated management information system, and
- h) 'Third-person-teaching'. The Third-Person Teaching strategy requires individuals to teach what they have learned within 48 hours of gaining the new knowledge.

Drawing on literature, Covey (2005) explains that the third-person-teaching paradigm and process affects all four stages of an Empowered Learning Model (ELM), which is to prepare, participate, perform and measure. The preparation stage aims to create the feeling of accountability, for example, this includes the preparation contribution of a trainer and having the information on who are the intended participants for effective knowledge dissemination. The participation stage is where the trainer encourages active participation from the participants in order to share his/her experience. In the performance stage, the trainer is responsible for transferring the knowledge in the easiest and simplest form to ensure understanding and application of the knowledge. Finally, in the measurement stage the organisation will evaluate the trainer or the 'third-person-teachers' progress in assisting the implementation of knowledge to improve the organisations performance.

v. The Distinction between Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management

The Industry Survey identified a distinction between Organisational Learning (OL) and Knowledge Management (KM). Respondents viewed organisational learning as catering for a wide spectrum of employees managed by the Training Directorate. Knowledge Management, on the other hand, was handled by IT and the Communication Directorate and used processes to harness and nurture knowledge within the organisation. Nonetheless, OL and KM are interrelated; however, another view was that the real focus of OL is more toward customer needs and services.

The review of literature explains:

"Knowledge Management refers to the critical issues of organisational adaptation, survival and competence against discontinuous environmental change. Essentially it embodies organisational processes that seek synergistic combinations of data and information processing capacity of information technologies, and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings" (Malhotra, 2005, p.2).

The industry survey results showed that most of the respondents did not have a clear understanding of "organisational learning" and were unable to answer the survey question effectively. Based on the feedback, the respondents' understanding and definitions of OL were vague and confused with training and development.

All the respondents agreed on the importance of OL as a concept, even though they were unclear on what it actually meant. The respondents also listed the current

learning strategies and methodologies practiced in their organisations. However, the responses regarding KM were expected because most of the respondents claimed KM was a new term they were unfamiliar with. The overall findings from the industry survey raise concerns about the wider understanding of Organisational Learning and how effectively this could be researched within the Malaysian context.

Due to the ambiguity of these responses, extra caution was taken when asking about the understanding of OL and the definition of OL in the in-depth interviews. Likewise, based on the respondents' feedback, the researcher detected some questions needed more clarification to allow the respondents to give short and precise answers. For that reason, the researcher has constructed the sub-question 1.1 and 1.2 to expand on question 1, which asked: *What is your understanding of 'Organisational Learning?* To avoid confusion about the understanding of OL and T&D, Question 1.1 was included and asked: *From your understanding, is there any difference between training and development and organisational learning? Please explain your answer.* The aim was to make the questions clearer to the respondents to enable them to respond effectively to the question. After reviewing the industry survey results the five main questions for the in-depth interviews were derived.

4.3 The In-Depth Interview Analysis

Interviews were conducted with thirty eight (38) respondents within the four industry sectors of academia, government, health, and manufacturing. All the respondents gave consent for the interviews to be recorded. Thirty-five tapes of the interviews were

usable, but three were unusable due to recording problems. Table 4.1 describes the respondents' background.

Table 4.1: Respondents' Backgrounds

	Industry	Respondents		Positions	Gender	
		Frequency	%		Female	Male
1.	Academic	5	14.29%	Professor Lecturer	3	2
2.	Government	9	25.71%	Administrator Director Assistant Director Manager Executive	4	5
3.	Health	3	8.57%	Manager Executive	1	2
4.	Manufacturing	18	51.43%	Director Manager Executive	3	15
	TOTAL	35	100%		11 (31.43%)	24 (68.57%)

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of respondents were from the manufacturing sector (51.43%) followed by the government (25.71%), academia (14.29%) and the health sectors (8.57%). Of the respondents, 69% are male and 31% are female. The respondents hold a variety of positions, such as Professor, Lecturer, Administrator, Director, Assistant Director, Manager, and Executive.

The data was analysed based on the interview questions and sorted into themes and used Nudist version 6 (N6) software to generate the frequency of discussion on each theme. Those themes that stood alone, or were separate from the themes identified in the literature, were put into a category termed the 'Emerging Area of Discussion'. The figures in the 'Frequency of Discussion' column (refer Table 4.2) are based on the N6 software detection throughout the data categorisation and compilation process.

However, not all themes discussed in the interviews were detected by the software, due to the usage of different terms or indirect wording - even though they carried the same meaning and point. For these reasons, the researcher revisited areas of discussion that were found to be unconvincing and extracted further information manually. This provided a backup mechanism to the analysis and ensured the richness of the data and any significant contributions would be identified and captured. This also makes the data analysis and discussion more meaningful and reliable. The frequencies of feedback in relation to the themes of the study are tabulated below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Summary of Interview’s Feedback

S/N	Interview Question	Themes Gathered	Frequency of Discussion
1.	What is your understanding of ‘Organisational Learning’?	Definition of OL Distinction between T&D and OL	34 35
2.	Do you think the concept of ‘Organisational Learning’ is important? Please explain.	OL Concept and Importance OL Operation	12 9
3.	How do you think an organisation should go about acquiring knowledge?	Knowledge Acquisition Method	7
4.	Could you please explain the learning strategies used in your organisation in acquiring and disseminating knowledge?	Learning Strategies Used Knowledge Dissemination	19 1
5.	Does your organisation make a distinction between ‘Organisational Learning’ and ‘Knowledge Management’?	Distinction between OL and KM	32
6.	Emerging Area of Discussion	Learning in Malaysia Example of OL OL External Forces The OL Impact The OL Context Reasons for OL Who determines the OL	9 10 20 12 10 3 4

Source: The In-depth Interviews, 2006

4.4 Data Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis and discussion was structured according to the themes and their subtopics. The main themes, based on the interview questions, (refer to Table 4.2) are in the column ‘Themes Gathered’. The discussion of the data analysis follows the sequence of questions and the sub-themes derived from the key topics are presented in Table 4.3, to provide a better flow of ideas and show the continuity of the subject matter.

Table 4.3: Analysis and Discussion Structure

S/N	Main Subject	Sub-subject
1.	Learning in Malaysia	Learning Concept Learning Process
2.	An Understanding of OL	Definition of OL Distinction between T&D and OL
3.	OL: The Concept, Importance and Operation	OL Concept and Importance OL Operation Example of OL
4.	OL: External Forces, Impact and Reasons	OL External Forces The OL Impact Reasons for OL
5.	OL: Organisation Context and Determination	Organisation Context to OL Who Determines OL
6.	OL: Learning Strategy	Selection of Learning Methodology Source of OL Learning Strategy Knowledge Acquisition Method Knowledge Dissemination
7.	Distinction between OL & KM	

4.4.1 OL: The Malaysia Scenario

Malaysia is facing acute competition with neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and a very competitive China, especially in the manufacturing industries. For example, the advantage of high labour resources at low cost, has allowed China to open up investment and stirred interest among companies to invest in the country.

This shift has encouraged Malaysia to change its business and development direction and focus on biotechnology involving agriculture, research and development and food production. According to M18 (2004) Malaysia also intends to become a regional learning centre in South-East Asia, as evidenced by the number of institutions and universities competing within the country that promise investment from Europe, America and France.

One of the participants pointed out how this had changed. As recently as 2004, the national climate has changed and Malaysia is emphasizing becoming a knowledge generator for the region, rather than solely relying on being a producer (M18 2004). Although Singapore is currently more competitive than Malaysia in terms of knowledge, Malaysia wants to close this gap. The Malaysian environment is conducive to knowledge generation because of multicultural society and variety of multinational companies (MNC's). The country acknowledges it now needs to expand in research and development (R&D). To move forward in R&D, especially in this region, learning is critical at the organisational, community, and national level and this makes OL very relevant to Malaysian organisations (M18 2004).

Another of the respondents, H1 (2004), claimed that the concept and idea of OL is wide spread and discussed at the national and ministry level. Another respondent claimed that the government is serious in implementing OL and have distributed a circular explaining the concept of organisational learning to the public sector (G7 2004). Awareness of OL is also increasing among public organisations through a quality awards program, which is similar to the Malcolm Baldrige prize in the USA or the Netherlands Highest Quality award. This is helps to promote the application of

OL in organisations (G9, 2004). This growing emphasis by government is highlighted in the following comment.

“There is never at any time the government as a whole, or our organisation or my department, would say OL is not important. Knowledge is always important, learning is always important; in fact, we always encourage employees to gain knowledge by whatever means” (G7, 2004).

According to M9 (2004), the problem in learning in Malaysia is low initiative on self-learning. For example, M9 (2004) claimed that reading is very important to continuously learn, but in reality, acquiring knowledge through reading is very low among Malaysians (M9 and G4 2004). Another way for organisations to acquire knowledge is through discussion and sharing of knowledge with friends and peers (M9, A5 and G6 2004). For example, M9 stated.

“In Malaysia, people are not focusing on, or putting importance on self learning. Research done in Japan showed that they have already instilled the learning habit through reading while they were small, because a very important source of learning is books, magazines, and articles. On average, Malaysians read two books in a month while Japanese read six books in a week. Another example is the latest development on IT; permitting people to explore so much information on the internet, but people abuse it” (M9, 2004).

Nonetheless, according to G6 (2004) the lack of awareness of OL among Malaysians, especially from the government sector is because the top management perceives *“it is just a small matter, less important and find it difficult to disseminate the information”* and believe it is hard to plan for long-term learning projects. Another factor leading to

problems is that the top management people are scheduled to their posting and after two to three years of service, they become complacent and would be better served if posted from one department to another or from one place to another (G6 2004). The interviewees suggested learning awareness among government departments could still be improved as the level of application is inconsistent. In addition, middle managers were more aware of the need for learning, than top managements (G6 2004).

In addition, A5 (2004) claimed that Malaysian organisations do not really specify they are going to adopt OL *per se* or move in that direction. According to A5 (2004),

“They are more commonly talking about KM, e-this, e-that rather than focusing on OL per se. They might be adopting or practising OL but they are not aware that they are implementing OL. However, the OL concept is important” (A5, 2004).

In general, the overall input from the respondents revealed that the learning scenario in Malaysia is improving but there is still much that needs to be done. In developing a knowledgeable Malaysian nation, the government, representing the public sector and multiple private sector industries, bares the responsibility of promoting, encouraging, educating and instilling awareness of the importance for being a knowledgeable people. A continuous, collective and holistic effort by Malaysian organisations to institutionalize a learning and knowledge culture within organisations will expedite the process of achieving the vision 2020.

4.4.1.1 The Learning Concept

A good understanding of the concepts of learning is vital for smoothly implementing OL. Without a good understanding of learning concepts, organisations might always think that learning has to be formal and only occur in the classroom, whereas, learning can be formal, informal, theoretical and or practical. To highlight the importance of this one respondent explained his understanding of learning;

“The learning concept must come to the point where it becomes reflective. So in order to make the learning reflective, the experiment is required by using the human body such as feet, hand, finger and so forth. When it becomes reflective, he does not need to learn. For instance, walking is so complex and in order for a kid to master until he can walk in a small path, he must find a way to pull up one leg. Jumping is formed through a long and active learning process” (M18, 2004).

The above respondent is actually explaining the importance of combining theory and practice to achieve the best out of the learning process. Without practical application the learning process can become impaired, which can distort the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer. This prevents knowledge being reflective and alive within the individual.

Another concern about learning was raised by M18 (2004). This respondent cited weaknesses in the current university curriculum, which just requires students to learn by reading and memorizing, without giving them a chance to apply what they have learnt. Because of this, they may not be able to apply the knowledge, so it is perceived as unrealistic, less practical or useful to the student. For this reason,

students are underdeveloped, lack creativity and have poor critical thinking ability. Again, this respondent (M18 2004) used the example of a small child, claiming a child cannot learn how to walk without having the chance to walk;

“Actually, when kids begin to walk it is a very complex process whereby the responses of the whole body system must work. Thus, the focus of the brain at the beginning stage is very complex whereby the brain is really focusing on how to walk only. After the kids can totally walk, they will overcome all the difficulties and just focus on how to play and do other things. In reality, it is the same as the organisation where at that time we can just knock out the Human Resource Manager (HRM) because the organisation can already run on its own”
(M18, 2004).

Therefore, learning has to come in a package that combines theory and practice to ensure the effectiveness and practicality of the knowledge gained. This shows the importance of employing experiential learning in the process of learning.

For these reasons, according to M18 (2004), the organisation must observe how it is actually learning. An organisation should allow the learning process to happen by building a learning platform. To ensure the continuation of learning processes and concepts within the organisation, all systems, such as Human Resources, Information Technology, and Production have to respond actively. Further, M18 (2004) recommended that organisational learning is not just about learning how to become a manager, but learning how to obtain the highest value for the company’s products. This suggests learning is not just looking at the lack of people skills and knowledge, but it requires coordination between skills and knowledge such as leadership and

computer skills. Efficient learning coordination within the organisation will enable knowledge and skill development processes to become more rigorous and reliable.

Similar to the example that learning to walk is a whole brain exercise (M18 2004); the same applies to the organisation as knowledge competency moves the organisation ahead. Further, M18 (2004) suggested that body actions or movement involves billions of responses within the entire body system through the brains instruction and this result in reflex action. Therefore, reflexes are knowledge that is stored and becomes independent so that it can work by itself (M18 2004). This is the reason why learning extends beyond formal methods. In reality, learning happens everyday, whether it is initiated by the employer or employees or both parties when employing or using knowledge (M12 and M18 2004). These findings suggest that reflex action is the end result of the learning process and signifies the existence of knowledge transfer and acquisition.

4.4.1.2 The Learning Process

The process of learning and the effectiveness of learning processes are different from one person to another. Most respondents were conversant with experiential learning, which requires involvement in real working conditions to understand the work and easily absorb the knowledge required. Thus, according to M9 (2004), the process of learning requires people to apply the knowledge learnt. People will also learn throughout knowledge application, especially when mistakes occur. This means that the learning process is continuous until the desired objective is achieved. According to M18 (2004), once the targeted knowledge and skills are achieved, they need to be

expanded. Proliferation occurs when the knowledge is transferred and taught to other people.

For most Malaysian organisations, the learning process of new employees begins at the orientation program and is followed by On the Job Training (OJT). Generally, orientation programs for new employees will explain the organisations' structure, mission and vision, the organisation's policies, rules and regulations and the organisation's products or services. For the first 2 – 3 days of OJT, employees are given information about the nature of the job, product defects and other relevant issues. Thus, OJT is an effective process of learning because it combines theory and practice. The employees are exposed to real life examples! For example, one respondent said that throughout OJT the employees will learn about machinery they operate; how to operate it, how to repair it and how to use it effectively (M13 2004).

One respondent claimed that in some companies OJT teams are used and these consist of engineers, production executives, and a member of the Quality Assurance (QA) committee. The team will conduct a daily meeting to come up with new ideas and solutions for any problems that have occurred. For instance, the team will discuss or brainstorm how to increase the production capacity or produce more volume in production. The team will come up with new ideas, such as the design of an improved process flow, or changes to materials. Findings or solutions that are deemed acceptable can then be explained to production executives as an implementation option (M5 2004). This respondent added;

“Some companies perceive that the formal training is better but others perceive that OJT is better. In this company both are simultaneously applied in order to get a better result” (M13, 2004).

Learning is a lifelong and never ending journey and many respondents with more than 10 years experience claimed they still have a lot to learn in the area of human resources and management. One respondent with 16 years experience felt that Human Resource Management is still very subjective. He claimed, even at 50 years of age, there is always something new to learn, even if it is just a small thing (M6 2004);

“For instance, The Employment Act (EA)! Even today, people are still arguing on some things. The answer is still grey although the act has been there for 30 years. There is no correct interpretation of the law, which reflects the learning process” (M6, 2004).

For many of the respondents training activities are the main source of learning. Respondents suggested training for adults should be fun and flexible. Different methodologies should be used depending on the objectives and focus of the learning. This is to ensure the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition in the process of learning. According to M6 (2004), the most practical learning process is where there is an opportunity to practice, for example, the auto-cad training program.

A number of respondents made the point that although knowledge is important to the organisation, learning programs should not impede the daily operations of the organisation. For example, groups of employees from the production area should not be sent to training programs at the same time (M13 2004). Training programs need to be arranged in small groups or batches to allow greater opportunity for the employees

to experience the same learning process. This is to make sure that the learning has a return on investment; for example, mistakes are not repeated and defects are reduced (M6 2004). The principal here is that learning how to solve both secondary and primary factors will take care of the whole problem (M6 2004). These comments provide rich data and demonstrate a wide understanding of organisational learning.

4.4.2 An Understanding of OL: The Definition

Although the results of the industry survey revealed little understanding of OL amongst the Malaysian respondents, conversely, the findings of the in-depth interviews gave extensive insights into this subject. Respondents provided definitions based on their understanding of OL, adding some richness to the current definitions in the Western literature. These definitions are analysed according to industry and the similarities and differences among the inputs are evaluated. Finally, based on the overall analysis a generalised definition of OL amongst Malaysians is developed.

a. Health

Three respondents, two males and one female represented the Health industry and contributed to 8.57% of respondents. These respondents viewed OL as having the same function as T&D and assumed OL was about having a learning culture. The overall understanding of OL within this sector is expressed below.

“OL is where you train, develop and improve continuously, according to the set values of the organisation to move forward and become professional, which is similar to the learning culture. Besides that OL is aiming at three aspects of the corporate culture that are love and care, team work, and professionalism” (Health, 2004)

In addition, the '*back to basics*' principle is applied within this industry. This was explained as people being continuously trained and developed to improve their knowledge so that professionalism is enhanced and careers are developed. Consequently, in the Health industry, love, care, teamwork, and professionalism provide a focus not only for OL, they also become embedded in the corporate culture of an organisation.

b. Academics

Five academicians consisting of three females and two males were interviewed. The academic respondents were selected from various disciplines, such as Management Information Systems, Entrepreneurship, Strategic Management, Human Resources and Operations Management. Their inputs were collated and summarised according to similarities and points of meaning. Their understanding of OL varied and included comments relating to the culture, opportunities for knowledge acquisition or viewing OL as a tool that organisations could use, as is discussed below.

Two respondents claimed that OL is really about a programmed culture within an organisation that encourages the employees to learn from experts and peers. The culture of learning needs to be adopted and implemented from the strategic level through all the layers of the entire organisation (A1 and A2 2004). One respondent perceived OL as an opportunity for the organisation that has implications not only for the work culture, but for procedures, systems and information. This respondent, A2 (2004) said;

“OL has to provide an environment that would enable the employees to think and learn from the mission statement, the symbols in the organisation, the artefacts, which are in the form of project themes, labels, books and publications, and e-mail information” (A2, 2004).

In terms of knowledge acquisition, another respondent believed OL is a way to store, accumulate and formulate ideas as well as knowledge and skills that are obtained within and outside the organisation. The accumulation and formulation of knowledge will result in a better or more positive attitude among employees to help the organisation do better. In addition, OL will assist in dealing with changes in the organisation. The fifth respondent, A5 (2004), commented;

“OL is a new tool used to cope with changes in the working environment especially changes in the technology” (A5, 2004).

In short, the academics looked at OL as *“a culture within”, “an opportunity”, “a way to store knowledge and skills”, “a new tool to cope with changes”* and a way to *“learn from the organisation and develop expertise”*. These understandings indicate that OL affects organisations and can bring benefits for the long-term survival of the organisation. In addition, it prepares the organisation to be more competitive in its own industry. Active learning within or outside the organisation that will ensure employees are more knowledgeable, competent, ready for change and prepared to take on new challenges in their daily work.

c. Manufacturing Industry

For the manufacturing industry, seventeen respondents, from the Director, Manager and Executive levels, from local and multinational companies were interviewed. They

represented foreign multinational companies, (from United States, Germany, Canada, Taiwan and Japan) as well as Malaysian companies. Based on their positions, these respondents are highly experienced and had clear views on the topic. Nonetheless, in defining OL, the manufacturing respondents had a different level of understanding. These respondents referred to OL as a system or as a continuous process of knowledge acquisition and skills enhancement, T&D activities, change process, and a long term strategy.

In referring to OL as a system, three of the manufacturing respondents indicated that OL is both a unique and complicated system. Depending on the work environment, OL could be either a useless process that delivers little, or if it is embedded within a positive and beneficial culture in the organisation, it can be a powerful tool for change. Another respondent described the system as;

“...a formal education program like a diploma, degree, masters, and PhD that is generally providing people with the thinking skills to develop the organisation by looking at business opportunities and taking advantage of the skills and knowledge acquired” (M3, 2004).

The majority of these respondents (6) agreed that OL is a continuous process of knowledge acquisition and skills enhancement. This requires the organisation to manage the knowledge within and encourage employees to actively learn, so they gain and share knowledge, progress and fill competencies gaps. Continuous learning, either through formal or informal methods, ensures effective and efficient operations as well as ongoing improvement and development. Another respondent commented that;

“OL is a process of knowledge acquisition to enhance personal competencies and skills - to be able to produce knowledge upon requirement in the daily work - through attending in-house training, group training, instructor-led training, e-learning, OJT, seminars, workshops, and the application of mentoring systems or through succession planning” (M1, 2004).

Besides enhancing the employees' knowledge and skills, and the organisation's performance, OL was also suggested as a means to increase shareholders value;

“OL is where the majority of the employees will learn only one major key area to carry out the ultimate goal which is to improve the overall performance of the organisation and to increase the share holder value” (M5, 2004).

In relation to T&D activities, three respondents claimed that OL is closely related to Organisational Development (OD) and T&D activities such as the On Job Training (OJT). The implementation of OL, OD and T&D should integrate with each other to create changes in the work culture and ensure improvement within the organisation. Similar to the academic viewpoint, the other two manufacturing industry respondents related OL to change processes within the organisation, particularly as it affects current needs and requirements.

Three respondents indicated OL was a long term strategy; for example,

“OL is a very long learning strategy that involves three ranges of learning process: short term, middle term and long term to achieve the company’s objectives, such as mergers and acquisition” (M11, 2004).

Overall, the Manufacturing respondents viewed OL as having a close relationship with T&D in that they functioned in the same way to develop employees’ skills, knowledge and expertise. Despite claiming OL is unique and encompasses a large scope in organisations the respondents also indicated that OL needs a process or activity that inculcates into the organisation's culture. Overall, OL was viewed as a beneficial tool for the survival of the organisation and for keeping up current performance as well as managing changes as they occur from time to time.

d. Government Department

Eight government employees contributed to discussions on the definition and understanding of OL. These respondents were supportive and enthusiastic about the issue. They were familiar with the concept of OL and some had been involved in OL implementation processes. All viewed OL as an opportunity for employee improvement, knowledge acquisition and stimulating a continuous learning process. Focusing on employee improvement, two respondents indicated that OL provided the opportunity to increase employees’ capability and capacity for knowledge and skills, and this improved the organisation. For example, G1 (2004), said:

“OL is a very important process in creating and upgrading the staff’s competitiveness in terms of innovation, processes, development and technology, especially under globalization” (G1, 2004).

In regards to knowledge acquisition, one respondent claimed OL also requires gathering internal and external information. The information is kept in databases so it is accessible to anyone in the organisation; for example, via information technology (IT) or a booklet. Another respondent suggested that information gathered should include data on staff training programs, employees' qualifications and experience, their current duties and responsibilities to facilitate aligning their work with the mission of the organisation. Another claimed OL should stimulate employees' desire for continuous learning so they were motivated to pick up their own knowledge, without being dictated to by the organisation or management.

As a whole, most of the Government respondents said that OL is a process of knowledge improvement and learning new skills to improve expertise for the betterment of the organisation. They suggested that knowledge improvement should be either voluntary or arranged by the organisation through training and or knowledge development programs. This group saw OL as a continuous process of information gathering and dissemination aimed at continuous organisational improvement and enhancing employee competitiveness. The variations in defining OL reflect the different experiences of respondents, in terms of whether or not OL had been implemented in their organisation.

4.4.2.1 OL: The Distinction between OL and T&D

Most of the respondents in the industry survey viewed Organisational Learning (OL) as similar to Training and Development (T&D). Therefore, this question was specifically addressed in the in-depth interviews, to see if these respondents distinguished between the two concepts. The in-depth interview revealed that the

majority of respondents did distinguish between the two concepts (OL & T&D), although a minority interpreted them as being the same. The data was then analysed according to industry sectors (health, academic, manufacturing and government) to see if perceptions of OL and T&D differed. The results were compared and contrasted to find points of difference and or shared understanding. The health respondents were unable to distinguish between OL and T&D, whereas, the academic, manufacturing and government respondents did make distinctions and these are discussed in the next sections.

a. Academic Industry

Five of the academic's respondents identified three main differences between OL and T&D and these were:

1. Training and Development was viewed as a tool used in OL implementation and operation,
2. Training and Development was a formal way of learning or acquiring knowledge, and
3. Training and Development is aimed at individual employee skill enhancement and knowledge development.

The five were unanimous that T&D was a tool to implement and operationalise OL in the organisation. For example,

“T&D is actually part of OL and a tool used in order to implement OL, while OL is more of a culture within the organisation” (A2, 2004).

The respondents claimed the second point that makes OL different from T&D, is that T&D is a formal way of learning or knowledge acquisition while OL is more than that. For example respondent A3 supported the view put forward by A4 (2004), who said;

“...formal sources like courses or training to acquire all those [required] competencies (skills and knowledge). On the other hand, OL can happen at anytime, anywhere and from other sources such as reading, communication and the organisational bulletin - it can take place informally” (A4, 2004).

The respondents also said that T&D is more about individual knowledge acquisition and skills enhancement, rather than considering the whole organisation performance. This understanding was shared by respondents A2, A3, A4, and A5 and explained by A1 as;

“Training and development is just providing training to improve skills and to change old habits of production to increase productivity. Specifically, training is for the job at hand and development is where the employees are trained for the next level or the same level but in a different area or across functional activities. But, OL has to provide some kind of environment that keeps all employees on track, and abreast with the current changes in the environment. In addition, OL would allow the employees to think and anticipate the future direction of the organisation i.e. where the organisation is heading to in 5 years time” (A1, 2004).

Overall, the academic respondents viewed T&D as a contributor to OL, but more as a technical process of development guided by the organisation, rather than free thinking

knowledge acquisition. They considered OL had a much wider scope and was more flexible in terms of time, sources, places and occasions for knowledge acquisition and for influencing organisational culture.

b. Manufacturing Industry

Sixteen (16) participants responded to the discussion regarding the distinction between OL and T&D. The discussion is constructed around five major differences and these are that training and development is:

- 1) An old approach and subset to OL,
- 2) A formal basis for major learning activities,
- 3) A department,
- 4) A tool, and
- 5) Focuses on employees' individual skill development and knowledge attainment.

The point about 'T&D being an old approach and subset to OL', was that T&D is adopted by the organisation to operate the learning activities and therefore is a forerunner to OL. A number of respondents (*M1, M2, and M5*) also suggested that T&D is the formal basis for major learning activities that happen in the organisation. For example;

"T&D is more focused on the business needs, mission, vision, and goals of the company, besides employee skills and career development" (M1, 2004).

The business needs, the mission, vision and goal of the company are formal matters for all organisations, which is why training activities need to be planned and organised and often need a specific department. The implementation of T&D departments, in almost all organisations in Malaysia, lead to the perception that;

“T&D is the department which administers the training activities i.e. getting the program’s approved, sending employees for training, and for sourcing training programs and training providers” (M8, 2004).

Many respondents (M4, M6, M11, and M13) viewed T&D as the tool organisations use to implement organisational learning. For example, the respondents claimed that;

“T&D is a tool to identify the employees’ needs to drive employees’ development for some other job - either in the same level or a higher level” (M6, 2004).

Another respondent said;

“Training is a method - a tool to implement OL in line with the companies’ vision and mission, to develop the staff competency through formal and informal training and OJT” (M10, 2004).

Training and development was viewed as a tool to facilitate the right course, for the right candidate, at the right time, as determined by the head of department or manager. For example, one respondent (M13 2004) explained that training teaches employees so as to fill existing knowledge or skill gaps and could be either a “nice to have or a must have” because employee development should be a conscious effort to chart the career path of their human resources.

However, most respondents agreed that T&D is focused on employees' individual skill development and knowledge attainment. While this understanding closely relates to the OL objectives, the scope of activity focuses on individuals to promote skill development and knowledge attainment. For example;

*“T&D is where the skills and knowledge are provided to the people through the major learning activities happening in the organisation”
(M9, 2004).*

Knowledge acquisition is important as part of the learning process, as a way of making the organisation more competitive. On the other hand, the respondents stressed that T&D is very closely related to OL because implementation is followed by changes in the work culture as well as operation improvement. Learning becomes a part of the culture so employees are self-motivated to gain greater knowledge for self-development. As a tool T&D helps an organisation become a learning organisation. It is a means to motivate employees to seek and acquire knowledge, to make them more competitive and to add value. T&D is used to consolidate learning activities and fill knowledge gaps to help a company achieve its mission and vision; however, OL aims to prepare the organisation for all sorts of challenges and for the long-term survival.

c. Government Respondents

All Government respondents (9) highlighted similar distinctions between OL and T&D; they viewed T&D as traditional and a tool that brings about individual skill enhancement and knowledge acquisition. These respondents also perceived that

learning or knowledge acquisition is only acknowledged in practice, if it is implemented through the T&D department or approved training activities, particularly when the training program is certified. Training and Development was viewed as a source or channel to import knowledge into the organisations' members and as such, was an intermediate tool for gaining explicit knowledge. For instance, to support this argument, one respondent (G2 2004) said; *“Training is suitable for immediate and ad hoc learning”* and another respondent (G5 2004) claimed, *“T&D is a mediating tool towards OL”*.

Similar to the Academics and Manufacturing respondents, the government respondents also viewed T&D as being directed at individual employee skill development and knowledge acquisition. This view is expressed as follows:

“T&D is part of OL since learning is the core competencies and it is essential for the staff to learn management skills as well as soft skills. Training is provided for the staff to plan and develop their career in the organisation. Training is more focused on the program while development is more focused on individual” (G9, 2004).

In conclusion, this group also referred to T&D as a traditional way of acquiring knowledge - through a formal learning process. They also indicated that an emphasis on self-improvement and career development make the existence of T&D significant, but OL achieves more than just that objective. Organisational Learning should be a catalyst for improvement in all aspects; such as productivity, work efficiency, innovation, knowledge capability and capacity, and process performance. As a result, OL makes customers more satisfied with the services and products of the organisation.

The distinction between OL and T&D

The overall understanding shows that the government, academic and manufacturing respondents held similar views about OL and T&D. The five common themes that emerged were that training and development is;

- 1) A more traditional subset of OL,
- 2) Is the formal base for major learning activities,
- 3) Is usually managed and implemented through a discreet department,
- 4) Is merely a tool, and
- 5) Is focused on individual skill development and knowledge attainment.

The Malaysian respondents could make distinctions between OL and T&D'. Despite their different working experiences, qualifications and backgrounds, the respondents had a shared and rich understanding of the distinction between OL and T&D. This understanding reflected their exposure, gained locally or overseas, to international practices. These findings suggest that Malaysian businesses not only can distinguish between T&D and OL, but much of the discussion implies they practice OL to varying degrees.

4.4.3 OL: Implementation in Malaysia

Once the understanding of OL was clarified the next phase was to explore the importance of OL to business operations and identify examples of OL practices in Malaysian organisations. The first hand accounts from respondents presented here should enrich understanding of how OL is operationalised in Malaysia. The findings

will also add to the understanding of how the western concepts of OL translate into the Malaysian environment.

4.4.3.1 The Importance of OL

The general view was that organisational learning is a core value within a learning culture that aims to continuously improve people's knowledge, skills and capabilities and enable them to be professional in their work. A learning culture is generated through the practice of OL and learning becomes a continuous process. A health industry's respondent explained;

"...the learning culture is part of our core values. This culture [learning] continuously improves our knowledge and makes our organisation become professional. To us, learning culture and OL is the same and this is the culture that we want to develop in our organisation, whereby learning is a continuous [non stop] process. No matter how much we have learned there is still more to learn" (H1, 2004).

The concept of OL is important, especially when the organisation's survival depends on the speed of learning. For example;

"...the [OL] concept is important. The importance depends on the individuals - on what they [the organisation] really want to produce out of this" (M18, 2004).

For this reason, it is important to determine which group of employees, such as clerical staff, middle management or top management staff, should acquire knowledge

to ensure any knowledge gained is widely spread. The employees' readiness, promptness in applying the knowledge and reaction to mistakes are factors that assist the application of OL. Organisational learning needs to be applied to enable knowledge transfer, to develop and retain good employees.

Many respondents perceived that the bottom line regarding OL is the applicability or usability of the knowledge gained. Only then will it result in the highest value returns to the business operations:

"...our own [OL] concept is related to what we are looking at and that is what we are producing and what we are doing. Then we will focus our learning based on our production. This kind of [OL] concept is very broad" (M12, 2004).

The process of learning incurs substantial costs to an organisation in terms of time, money and effort. It can also be perceived as an interruption to business performance as well as the stability of the organisation. Close relationships between the learning objectives, the business' strategies, operational efficiency and industry focus give the best return on investment (ROI). Learning needs to be part of the organisations mission, vision and objectives if it is to be a good fit to business operations. Thus, learning and an effectively designed learning program is needed to attain practical and useable knowledge. Furthermore the concept;

"...should reflect the culture of the company from the top to the bottom" (M1, 2004).

Organisational learning as it is practised was also explained as an on going activity whereby learning of new knowledge and skills is always important and necessary. In fact, as one respondent pointed out, learning happens throughout our daily life and is not bound by time, place or space.

“Learning is either hard skills or soft skill but you learn every day and all the time. The most important thing in practice is to shape your mindset” (M1, 2004).

The whole of the organisation needs to be included in OL. Organisations consist of various departments. For example, in a university there is a chancellery, finance and accounting, student affairs department and others. Therefore, according to the government respondent:

“The faculty, the professor, the VC, and the whole range of specialized areas must be exposed and incorporated into the learning processes” (G3, 2004).

At the same time, different areas of specialization might also need specialization in terms of their learning methods and approaches. For example;

“The university believes that everyone should begin with the general idea because this [the university] is a knowledge factory and people must have passion for their respective function. For instance, the general ground worker, philosophical thinker, or people in the maintenance department need to continue to improve capability and capacity in the matter of either their work and research and development” (G3, 2004).

Therefore, OL is considered to be more than just skills development and improvement. Organisational learning is a medium to enhance and rebuild capability and capacity within the working environment to achieve the company's mission, vision and objectives. This government respondent said;

“In the university case, the ideas and the objectives of OL are far into the abstraction of getting knowledge and there is no end to it. Meaning that there would be no end to OL. Therefore it is impossible to just maintain and retain at that level of skills” (G3, 2004).

Another respondent believed that learning occurred in his organisation in three discreet stages, as is summarized below;

“...learning is in 3 stages: beginning, mid-term and long term. Beginning [stage] is when they [the new employees] come in without knowledge or maybe with trivial knowledge. At the beginning this company starts to impart the knowledge to the new employees through the induction program, OJT, and coaching from their superiors. The middle stage is where the employees are transmitted for external or internal training and expected to come back with ideas for improvement. Here, the improvement doesn't only refer to training but the superiors' coaching and the employee's own ability and initiative are included. Long-term learning is more on innovation, creativity, ideas and so forth. Long-term learning is aiming for employee knowledge development and skills enhancement to fulfil the career succession plan requirements. Thus, it demands the employees' innovation and creativity. Most of the time coaching and internal training are the main tools to achieve that” (M1, 2004).

This respondent also indicated that in his organisation, OL is closely related and very relevant to the organisations' strategy.

“To me, to acquire knowledge is to meet the company’s strategy” (M1, 2004).

In short, OL is linked to the planned and future strategy of the organisation. This implies that OL was viewed as important to the success, growth and survival of the organisation. This kind of understanding should make organisations become more motivated to operationalise OL.

4.4.3.2 The OL Operation

Implementing OL into operations within organisations requires a well-versed understanding of OL concepts and applications. Having a good understanding of OL as a concept is not enough. Knowing what has worked for others can help avoid failure and disappointment or losses in terms of money, time and energy.

There are many ways OL operates and *“it varies from one organisation to another, depending on their nature of business, industry and operations”* (M18 2004). Having a training and development section or department contributes to the overall OL operations. According to the M18 (2004), most successful companies in the world incorporate OL into their operations. Organisational learning exposes the organisation to opportunities to learn about new strategies, the latest technologies and other recent developments so they can apply and strategise these into the business operations. This respondent (M18 2004) stressed that implementing the knowledge

gained will always present some pitfalls so quick responses are needed to recover from mistakes and help proliferate knowledge. Fast action will ensure smooth and effective application of knowledge and this in turn boosts the whole organisation and creates a positive environment and learning culture, where every one in the organisation feels that they want and need to learn.

According to M12 (2004), some organisations perceive that learning is not continuous, but seasonal. This suggests that OL is viewed as less important and has only limited benefits for the organisation. Rather than take a holistic view, knowledge is perceived as limited and only needed as and when required. Such an organisation does not realize that the best output is generated by employees when they are at the optimum level of job satisfaction and understanding. This means that, the need for knowledge acquisition is not just about the work, but it has to consider the employees' physical, mental and emotional quality of life. This is how a learning culture is embedded in the organisation so that it stays alive without strong enforcement from management (M12 2004). Another respondent from the health industry considered that when OL is included as part of the core values of the organisation it sustains the learning culture within the organisation (H1 2004). In further support of a formal learning process, another respondent claimed;

“...we have to make sure that at least 80% of what we formally plan [for learning] is achieved. To us informal training is on an ad hoc basis that comes and goes in a very short period of learning. However, we have more formal training than informal training” (M5, 2004).

The literature identifies that in most cases where changes are required by the organisation, major efforts are involved to explain and give an in-depth understanding of the issues to ensure success. The same scenario applies to OL operations in Malaysian organisations, whereby awareness, understanding, and information have to be given to the employees early. According to one respondent;

“...to be a learning organisation you have to make the people [employees] aware [of the importance of learning] first, otherwise you won't come to that stage. Then you have to instil the culture to learn, to think and to explore things, as a way for the organisation to reach the OL level” (G4, 2004).

In addition, an academic respondent testified that the explanation of OL practices should start from top management or the strategic level, and should be passed down to all employees. This is necessary if OL is to involve the entire organisation holistically. One respondent's opinion is summarised below.

“Top down! Again, it should start from the strategic level because you can't say that you are adopting OL just for one department or one section of the organisation. So, it should cover the whole organisation” (A2, 2004).

Generally, OL will be more easily adopted and faster to implement if it has the assistance of the T&D department. According to G9 (2004), the OL operation begins with information gathering, that is then converted into data bases and finally the information is disseminated via various methods such as books, email, or other modalities, to all the staff.

In summary, the findings show that the respondents were able to describe, in practical terms, examples of OL operations in their organisations. These real life examples help clarify how OL is implemented in Malaysian organisations. These examples and success stories from other organisations can help motivate and convince more organisations to adopt and reap the benefits of implementing the OL. In the following section, presents some examples of OL operations in the Malaysian organisation as described by the respondents.

4.4.3.3 Examples of OL Operation

Examples are very important especially when one wants successful implementation. From the examples, others can make judgements, to evaluate and predict the outcome of adopting a new strategy or system into the organisation. The same applies to the OL. Therefore, some examples were collected throughout the interview process to describe how OL is being practised in Malaysian companies. These experiences draw from the three industry sectors that participated in the study.

The first example is from one of the government organisations. The respondent, G7 (2004) explained an OL activity aimed at newly employed staff. New staffs are sent to a basic program that explains about their department, as well as other divisions or departments as part of an orientation program. General information that is given in the basic program is then narrowed down specifically to their working department, their duties and responsibilities. In addition, all employees are sent to other training programs from time to time to enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies. These training programs are carefully matched to the employees' needs in regards to their job requirements.

Another example from a government respondent claimed that job rotation was an example of OL activity in their organisation. This respondent said;

“I have been rotated in a few different divisions, such as the housing department as my first job, followed by finance department and currently in the HR department. Job rotation is one of the HR department concerns to enhance the employee’s competencies, knowledge and skills” (G8, 2004).

A manufacturing respondent cites another example. This respondent said an example of an OL activity is where staff members form a committee for a certain project. For instance, this organisation possessed a Continuous Improvement Project (CIP) team. The project team consists of engineers, production executives and Quality Assurance (QA) Officers, who sat together brainstormed among themselves, in order to run the project. The team has a daily meeting to discuss and brainstorm about the project - to come out with a solution or to increase the capacity of production. The participating employees will gain various experiences, skills and knowledge throughout the project. The respondent further explained;

“Usually the project team will come out with something new, for example, designing a ‘tool’ or changing some production materials or throw out what is unnecessary. The project team will test the solution obtained to see the feasibility and reliability of their findings. After that, they will call the supervisors to explain the findings. Following the explanation, the supervisor will make the decision either to opt for the new improvement or not” (M5, 2004).

Knowledge acquisition via the customer was another example of an OL activity given by a manufacturing respondent. This respondent explained that;

“...we also learn from our customers. For example when we have a Japanese customer we have to learn the Japanese culture and other matters related to their expectations and requirements. All these are then put together and become an organisational learning...” (M12, 2004).

This example was supported by a government respondent who suggested that a dialogue with the customer or user was a tool to acquire knowledge as part of the OL activity (G6 2004).

Setting up a resource centre in the organisation was also viewed as another example that supported OL implementation. One company had a resource centre that is open to all employees throughout their working hours and provides all sorts of sources of information, such as books, videos and internet access. For example;

“... [We] set up the resources centre - where we purchase books of all categories. For example self motivation, management and some story books for operators for them to start the reading habit. These books hopefully are able to change their mind set, then we will start seeing the changes” (M2, 2004).

Another example cited was a learning collaboration program with external learning institutions. By providing an opportunity to obtain higher qualifications this collaborative program aims to assist employees' career development, promotional and salary increment opportunities. The following is a statement from the respondent;

“We also tie up our [learning] programs with PSDC [the technical development centre] to develop skills and knowledge of our current operators to be technicians in the future. We want to have a university kind of environment so that the learning culture will be practiced here” (M2, 2004).

E-learning is also another approach to promoting OL as it allows the employees to gather information easily. For example, a manufacturing respondent said;

“...with an e-learning program, the employees will do their study on their own time, at their own pace and at any time, 24 hours a day” (M4, 2004).

Another government respondent viewed both internal and external training courses as examples of OL in operation. This respondent said;

“... instead of sending ASTS [staff] overseas for study and come back, we are also conducting a learning package, like learning for specific skills, such as the technicians. Whenever staff need some exposure to the new technology then we will do it just for a short course, like a one month or two month program. That one is very important” (G2, 2004).

Last but not least, another example of OL is benchmarking. Benchmarking can occur either manually or electronically. For instance, a government respondent explained;

“...like benchmarking matters, we are learning from other people in order to enhance the skills of our people in this organisation. We have

to do that to gather all the knowledge, all the information, to complement and strengthen the present process” (G9, 2004).

In conclusion, the activities described above demonstrate successful cases of OL and how knowledge is acquired the betterment of the organisation and show that OL is being adopted by Malaysian organisations. These success stories are occurring for a number of reasons and the next section discusses the direct and indirect forces that are urging organisations to implement OL. In addition, this next section discusses the impacts of practising and implementing OL.

4.4.4 OL: Reasons, External Forces and Impact

There are various reasons why Malaysian organisations implement OL. The most significant reason is to stay competitive in the globalised marketplace, as well as in their industry. Some external forces give organisations no other choice but to apply OL management concepts. Among these are audit requirements, suppliers, and government policies, such as the Human Resources Development Fund. In Malaysia, adopting OL can be on a voluntarily basis or, be forced on the organisation by a third party as is discussed in this section of the chapter. The significant benefits are improved return on investment (ROI) and employees’ intention to stay with the organisation. The following discusses respondents’ feedback in relation to these issues.

4.4.4.1 The Reasons to go for OL

A number of reasons were identified by the respondents to explain why they choose to implement and practice OL in their organisations. The most significant reason cited

was for the organisation's survival because of the need to compete within an industry and successfully cope with the rapid changes in the industry. One respondent said;

“We have to move towards OL to compete in the industry especially in this globalization era where there are always changes in the product; the production process is getting faster, and the need for better skills of employees” (M10, 2004).

Organisational learning implementation aims to fulfil the market demand for competitive employees, effective cost management and prudent business strategy.

Another respondent claimed that;

“This is back to a survival concept. If they are thinking about their survival they must improve their technology, their supply chain channel; such as how to get cheaper material for a quality product and so forth for a long term business. For me the survival concept is very important” (M4, 2004).

In addition, a government respondent agreed that all employees need to be trained and updated to the current technologies, information, skills and knowledge if they are to cope with the changes in the working environment (G8 2004). The above-mentioned reasons might also link, either indirectly or directly, with the external or internal forces that urged the organisation to adopt OL.

4.4.4.2 The External Forces for OL

This research found a number of external forces influenced OL implementation and these include: 1) Audit requirements, 2) Suppliers, and 3) Government policy. The

audit requirement is mainly for a quality audit, such as those required for international standard certification, like ISO 9000, 2000, QS 9000 and customer audits. Supplier requirements and government policies like the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) also contributed to OL implementation in Malaysian organisations. Such forces are unavoidable if the organisations wish to maintain their business, especially if they want to expand services or products into the global market. These external forces are explained more fully in the next section.

a. Audit Requirement

The reason to perform ISO and QS audits is to ensure the organisations' products and or services in accordance with international quality standards and specifications. For any product to go international, there are certain quality certifications required by the purchasing country and customer. For example, one manufacturing respondent said;

“External forces like customer, supplier, certification bodies, and so on are for sure 101% indirectly encouraging the organisation to be an OL. For example, product quality certification, this is all because of the customer's requirement” (M11, 2004).

In addition, another respondent claimed;

“Our customers play a very big role and greatly impacted our direction of training and certification like ISO 2000, QS 9000 in order to get the business” (M1, 2004).

The product brand manufacturers also conduct customer audits of the companies that manufacture their products. This is how ISO certification, QS certification and

customer audits, as external forces, aid Malaysian organisations to practise and implement OL. For example, one manufacturing respondent stated;

“The example is Dell. They require us to have ISO 14000 certification for their product to enter certain markets. That is one of the forces and also the legal requirement that we need to look at” (M2, 2004).

The health respondent supported certification programs as also influencing knowledge acquisition in the organisation. The respondent said;

“For your information, our hospital is ISO certified. Actually, quality assurance, quality improvement and all that is based on people and focused on training. I think this helps us to organise more training activities for our staff and gives us no choice except to meet the requirement” (H1, 2004).

b. Suppliers

“...some of the suppliers - we learn from them” (M9, 2004).

In most cases, suppliers learn from their customers. The findings suggest learning occurs when the supplier or salesperson comes to an organisation to sell their products or services. For example, when the supplier wants to sell products, such as machinery, electronic parts, electrical components, chemical product or fabrics, they first need to educate their customer. They explain about the product; how to use the product, the advantages of using the product and so on. In certain cases, they offer a product trial in order to gain the customer’s trust and confidence.

While organisations learn from the suppliers in this way many did not recognise or realise that a learning process occurred. Thus, recognition of this provides an opportunity to enhance organisations understanding of the learning process.

c. Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF)

The introduction by the Malaysian government of the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) in 1993 was to promote and encourage people from industry to be professional, knowledgeable and update to new technology and business needs. The establishment of the HRDF by the Malaysian government was in tandem with efforts to make Malaysia a developed nation by the year 2020. The objectives of the HRDF policy are:

- 1) To upgrade the worker's knowledge and skills,
- 2) To equip workers with the latest and specific skills,
- 3) To facilitate the transfer of technology in industry operations,
- 4) To increase productivity and value-added operations
- 5) To prevent workers' skills from becoming obsolete in an environment of technological change,
- 6) To create multi-skilled workers for functional flexibility, and
- 7) To enhance the training culture amongst employers

(<http://www.hrdnet.com.my/eng.html>, 2006).

The HRDF was established to promote an OL culture within Malaysian organisations, especially in the manufacturing and service industry. The legal enforcement of the HRDF gives organisations no choice as they must implement this policy. To date, the

HRDF is considered one of the most significant external forces driving Malaysian organisations to become learning organisations.

Before the introduction of the HRDF many companies were reluctant to send their employees for training. The reason for this was that many companies had experienced a loss of financial investment when some well-trained employees left the company. However, after the HRDF was introduced and companies understood that unused contributed funds would be forfeited and given to another company; companies became positive towards sending employees to development programs. One respondent from the manufacturing industry explained;

“Yes - certainly the HRDF has highlighted the importance of training - otherwise there were some companies who just ignored it. They [the companies] just get the people to work, work, work, and didn’t develop them. Then [the HRD] tell them [the companies] if you don’t utilize it [the fund] you will loose that 1% and others will utilize it. So, in that sense it is good to have that fund to make sure of the growth of the employees and the employers” (M16, 2004).

From another perspective, some companies found it difficult to organise training programs without the HRDF. For example;

“I see it as a good move by the government because by having HRDF, the employers became aware. If the money was not there they can’t have the training programs” (M2, 2004).

This respondent further emphasized that training programs are very important for organisations to survive in the dynamic competitive environment. This respondent

believed that organisation were more at risk of losing their market if they did not train their employees with the right skills, current information and latest technologies required (M2 2004).

According to another manufacturing respondent, M5 (2004) Small and Medium Industries (SMI) do not look at OL as a priority. Reasons for this include, not having the financial resources as well as having less manpower and tighter operating budgets. Therefore, local companies are more interested with “inbreeding” (local training) in order to save costs and time. This is different for the Multinational Companies (MNC) because they have greater financial resources, are more established and have higher headcounts and reserves to call upon. Also, they do not want to waste their contribution to the HRDF. These findings suggest the HRDF has strategically and successfully become a driving force in promoting Organisational Learning in Malaysian organisations.

Recognizing that these external forces have tactically and effectively transformed Malaysian organisations to adopt Organisational Learning, the next step is to consider the impact of OL implementation on organisations and their business performance. Therefore, the next discussion will highlight the impact of OL in regards to the cost invested in learning programs and the employees’ intention to stay with an organisation.

4.4.4.3 The Impact of OL

Generally, accepting or practising new skills requires knowledge of the impact or benefits of accepting and practising them. The same applies to organisations wanting

to implement OL. Changes that are implemented in organisations involve huge amounts of money, time and energy. The respondents in this study indicated that the payback or worth of implementing changes is of great concern to organisations, especially in terms of return on investment and the intention of employees to stay.

a. Return on Investment (ROI)

Many respondents claimed that it is difficult to identify a return on investment (ROI) from learning. This led to a series of different viewpoints being expressed about how to value learning activities and programs in dollars and cents. Some experts and practitioners claimed there is a return on learning investment, either in terms of monetary or employees' behaviour. For example, one of the manufacturing respondents claimed;

“ROI is not correlated with certain training but there are other factors that influence the end result. Nevertheless, training has a lot of impacts towards the performance and productivity of the people; for example when we send people to learn about performance management, then they set the goal, discuss the goal, they do that properly, and they really apply the knowledge. Then that is the return on investment whereby at the end, the company's performance is better. Therefore the ROI for training depends on what sort of training and what are the areas of training” (M9, 2004).

Another claimed;

“...to know whether the ROI is worth it or not, we call the immediate superior to come and explain about subordinates performance. To us it is a pay off when the subordinate is more alert about his work, able to

apply the tools and techniques he learned and can do his work faster, more accurately and is more productive compared to before” (M5, 2004).

There were four respondents (M1, M2, M9, and M18 2004) who claimed there is no way to measure the learning ROI. In addition, M13 (2004) also questioned the loyalty of employees who resigned from the company after being well trained which raised the question of intention to stay with the organisation.

b. Intention to stay

Building employee loyalty, remuneration packages and other fringe benefit can be effective tools for retaining employees in an organisation, providing a win-win situation for employees and employers. A high percentage of turnover in an organisation reduces profits and can lead to less benefits and lower wages being offered to employees. High turnover incurs additional recruitment and retraining costs and involves costs in time and energy. Therefore, the question is whether organisational learning makes it more attractive for existing employees to stay on. In answer to this question, one manufacturing respondent explained;

“Well off course if you [the organisation] show interest in the employee, you [the organisation] provide them with a career path based on additional acquired knowledge, then it will certainly be the means of retaining the employee. In fact I think that would be the best way the organisation can retain employees” (M16, 2004).

In addition, another manufacturing respondent said;

“During exit interviews, they [the employees] do mention that OL activities did help to retain people for a certain period of time” (M10, 2004).

Another suggested that, OL motivates employees to stay with the organisation. This respondent stated;

“I think it [OL] motivates the employees to stay” (M8, 2004).

There was a consensus among some organisations that the implementation of OL was perceived as a significant factor for retaining employees. There was also acknowledgement that employee turnover can occur for many reasons unrelated to the workplace and that organisations do need to minimize turnover, especially for important positions. Respondent (M15 2004) suggested that establishing a bond between the employee and organisation through training was one way of keeping employees longer term. These comments suggest that implementing OL can aid employee retention.

4.4.5 OL: The Organisation

The implementation of OL in Malaysia was also influenced by the organisations' age, status and leadership. Organisations were grouped into those aged less than 5 years, between 5 to 10 years and 10 years and above and in terms of status were classified as locally owned or multinationals. The decision to implement OL and ensure it happens across the entire organisation comes from the most senior levels; therefore, the success of OL is related to the leaders' role and commitment.

4.4.5.1 OL: The Organisational Context

a. Age of the Organisation

Generally, the diverse level of business maturity was related to the different organisational experiences. In some cases, age did not determine the organisations learning process, but was related to the decisional role of the person driving the implementation. For example, one of the respondents from the manufacturing industry explained;

“I personally think the age of the organisation is not the factor [for OL] because the person who drives the company will determine the direction of the company, no matter how old and how young the organisation is. The age is only the building but if the age of the organisation goes along with the age of the key person or people in the organisation, yes off course it will” (M9, 2004).

Logically, new organisations have more to learn when compared to mature organisations. This suggests that mature organisations have greater levels of knowledge and thus may be more comfortable or adept with change. Whereas newly emerging companies or newly set up companies have less experience and resources and therefore prefer to employ trained people. One respondent expressed this as;

“...new companies would be very minimal in terms of training and they are more interested in recruitment” (M16, 2004).

Nonetheless, according to M9 (2004) mature organisations still have to learn otherwise they become obsolete or “a dinosaur”. Furthermore, in most cases the age of the organisation is linked to their survival, as one respondent said,

“If they [the organisations] think about survival they must improve their technology, their supply chain channel and how to get a cheaper material for quality product. Thus, this is the strategy. If they don’t have long term business planning they might not need this concept. To me the survival concept is very important” (M4, 2004).

Nothing is more than important than survival. Another respondent commented;

“The business requirement is determined by whether you [the organisation] are old, plus the climate of the company. For example, if the company is nearly bankrupt it will not focus on training but more on survival. Nevertheless if the company is still well and wants to progress further they have to improve and they have to learn more” (M9, 2004).

In conclusion, these comments suggest an organisation’s age can be a determining factor that influences the process of learning and knowledge acquisition, although this does depend on how the organisation defines ‘the age’ of their organisation.

b. Organisation Status

Whether a Multinational (MNC), locally owned or Small and Medium Industry (SMI), the size of the production plant is among the factors that describe an organisations’ status. Multinational companies are not just different in terms of size, but also in the availability of the resources. Respondents from the MNC’s indicated learning or training is important for their survival. One manufacturing respondent said;

“MNCs consider training and learning as a very important tool in the survival of the organisation.”(M4, 2004)

In a similar vein M10 (2004) claimed the learning culture is more likely to be embedded in the MNC because there are specific personnel appointed to administer the learning programs. In addition to the established training and development department, MNCs allocate more resources and have greater varieties of or access to learning materials; for example *“some companies have their own university”* (M16 2004). Dynamic competition amongst MNCs requires them to be better than, or at least on a par with, their competitors otherwise they risk becoming obsolete. In line with this statement, one manufacturing’s respondent claimed;

“...to compete with our competitors, we have to gain as much knowledge or improve our knowledge - to be more advanced than our competitors. This is our survival” (M10, 2004).

On the other hand, M10 (2004) believed that the Small and Medium Industry (SMI) has much greater limitations because of its small-scale limited resources. These industries usually have to rely on whatever training programs are available. This view is expressed as follows;

“The SMI companies’ resources are limited and very often they have to rely on what ever is available in the market. In terms of training they are not so encouraging, not top drive; (some are) so small and can’t afford to send the employees for training” (M10, 2004).

In relation to local companies, one manufacturing respondent argued;

“Being locally owned or an MNC company, I feel does effect whether to go, or not to go for OL. Malaysian companies [that operate] where they live and grow, are still hooked up with their previous history because they are family owned businesses. The influence of the older generations, that lack the latest exposure, means the organisation can’t see the importance of being a learning organisation” (M17, 2004).

According to M9 (2004), established local companies like Petronas and Proton are in a different category and operate the same way as the MNCs. They acknowledge the importance of training and for them, learning is very much determined by the business needs. Another respondent, M8 (2004) agreed;

“It [OL] is not just because you are local or an MNC” (M8, 2004).

In conclusion, although there was some debate around this topic, the size and status of the organisation was found to indirectly influence the implementation and practice of OL as well as the influence of key decision-makers. Who manages an organisation and the direction they are heading as well as the industry they belong to, also determined the choice of opting for OL, as is discussed next.

4.4.5.2 OL: Determining to implement Organisational Learning

Senior management are responsible for setting the vision, mission, objectives, policies and designing a companies’ direction. Subsequently, because OL involves the entire organisation, senior management need to be involved and supportive. Respondents in this study support the view that top management enforcement and encouragement is

important if learning is to become a reality. For example, an academic respondent said;

“The top management should be the focus in implementing OL. They are the people who need to have that particular mind set to navigate the company towards certain goals, such as globalization and sustaining the organisations’ competitive advantage” (A5, 2004).

Another respondent explained;

“We have 5-6 senior management group members, for instance the Managing Directors and production managers, who decide and guide the direction of the learning - to ensure it meets the technology, development, and product demands” (M9, 2004).

The respondents’ opinions identified that not only do senior management need to determine the implementation of OL, they also have the responsibility of ensuring what is implemented is relevant and able to assist in achieving the organisation’s objectives.

4.4.6 OL: The Selection, Method, Source, Strategy and Dissemination

The interview findings suggest that Malaysian organisations are using multiple methods as learning strategies to acquire knowledge, enhance employee’s skills and ability and for employees’ career development. To be effective knowledge acquisition needs to be disseminated among the employees of the organisation to not only strengthen understanding of the acquired knowledge, but to foster an OL culture within the organisation.

4.4.6.1 The Selection of Learning Methodology and Strategy

The selection of learning methodologies and strategies by the organisation is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of the knowledge acquisition and transfer. Below is one example from a respondent about determining learning methodology and strategy to be used by the organisation.

“The learning strategy depends on the maturity and smartness of the organisation. It is true that the selection of the right learning strategy is crucial. It is crucial especially in obtaining the fastest, the easiest and the cheapest way of the learning strategy for the organisation” (M18, 2004).

Subsequently, the in-depth interview findings show that various reasons were considered when choosing learning methodologies and strategies. Amongst the reasons taken into consideration were the different ages and generations of trainees, availability of information technology (IT), the learning resources within the organisation, the affordability of training and budgetary support, the nature of the business, mode of operation and types of products manufactured. The objective is to get the best impact from learning and knowledge acquisition for the benefit and betterment of the organisation, as explained below;

“...there must be the flexibility of learning tools and it is not only for a certain function or certain people, but also allowing universal diversity of choices and this must include learning tools” (A2, 2004).

The organisation needs to ensure that whatever is used during the learning process is used effectively, whether it is costs, energy or time.

4.4.6.2 Knowledge Acquisition Strategy and Method

Every organisation has its own strategy and methodology for acquiring knowledge. Thus, an organisation will plan, design, organize and structure the learning strategies, methodologies and activities to fulfill the business, production and management needs. Among the knowledge acquisition methods used by the Malaysian organisation were: 1) product base, 2) resources centre and databases, 3) information technology, accessed through consultant, public and private institution, and, 4) problem solving, attachment, and visitations. The respondents, made a distinction between these categories, for example;

“All American based companies are organised in developing their learning strategy and methodology. For instance they will focus on the skills required, the availability of business in the market, and the gaps of the present knowledge and skills. While for the Japanese company, they are focusing more on product size, new and unique appearance, stylish, reliable, and artistic design but expensive” (M18, 2004).

Another respondent, in reference to resource centres and databases, G3 (2004), made the comment;

“...the library is open to everyone, complete with computers, databases, and internet which is encouraging the employee to seek the knowledge” (G3, 2004).

Some of the other learning strategies and methodologies suggested included; information technology (IT), the use of consultants, and gaining information from public and private institutions;

“We get the external trainer for soft skill training as well as 80% of our technical training. On top of that, we acquire knowledge through e-learning that is provided by our corporate office in US. We call it seminar net. Besides that, we also consider formal training and emphasize on the job training to get better knowledge acquisition results” (M13, 2004).

Respondents from the manufacturing and government claimed that problem solving, attachment and visitations were other practical ways of acquiring knowledge. According to G6 (2004), problem solving methods are very important for supervisory bodies in government departments. Several respondents referred to the benefit of providing overseas attachments or placements of two to three months in a parent company or similar organisation, as a very practical way to expose employees to new experiences (M8, G2, and G6 2004).

Having effective learning strategies and methodologies helps establish strong and effective systems to underpin organisational operations. For example, experiential learning can be a very effective learning methodology, therefore, the organisation needs to provide experiential pathways that assist employees to strengthen their understanding, and apply the abilities and skills or knowledge gained. This was explained as:

“The system is very important to the organisation. Thus, it will be magnificent if the Human Resources department can develop a system that is able to identify the training needs, the knowledge gaps and competencies, and the learning curriculum in the organisation. Therefore, it [the system] will become the strategy to the organisation...” (M18, 2004).

Learning strategies and methodologies also vary between organisations, depending on their financial strength, manpower resources, internal facilities and the condition of the organisation. They can also vary because of differences in terms of the size of the company, nature of the business and the industry which they belong to. Therefore, each and every organisation differs in terms of the learning emphasis or focus, but all of them aim at achieving the greatest level of knowledge absorption with the least cost, time and energy. For example, one respondent said;

“About the methodology this organisation is using - whatever is available in the market. A different method is used at different times and most importantly it depends on the capability of the managers. If the organisation is rich they can use the most expensive method. For example they can have Steven Covey to be in the organisation for a year to train the employees” (M18, 2004).

Similarly, another respondent explained;

“This organisation’s focus is to develop the skills and knowledge of the employees so as to meet and improve the product quality. This serves as the first priority of this organisation - to deliver the best products and services to our customer. Thus, for whatever we require - technology, production machinery and quality materials - the management will make sure to have it first. Then it will be followed by

soft skills development, such as leadership and human relations. The reason for this is that the management would like to see the organisation healthy in terms of knowledge, technology, processes, human interaction, and leadership” (M9, 2004).

There were some organisations that believed happy employees can perform better in terms of quality and will become more productive (M1, M9, M10, and M11, 2004) in line with the improvement of their quality of life. So, these organisations provide employees with non-work related learning, such as parenting skills, craftsmanship and sewing, to name a few.

Taking a broad perspective, one respondent claimed;

“Learning does not mean using a pen and book only. Therefore, for the learning culture in this organisation, it happens each and every time. For example, over lunch, through small group activities, problem solving meetings and the exchange of ideas and opinions. This supports the rapid changes in the business as well as in the industry. The OL practice is there and it is a continuous process - especially for the Japanese” (M5, 2004).

The above comments support the view that learning strategies and methodologies are applied after considering many factors such as speed, costs and ease of implementation. Strategies need to be fast, cheap and easy yet deliver improved efficiency and effectiveness. They also need to be appropriate to the nature of business and product base and suitable with the latest technology. Next, the discussion turns to the sources of OL as the mediums used for imparting and instilling the knowledge, information and skills to employees.

4.4.6.3 The Sources of OL

The Malaysian organisations revealed many learning strategies and methodologies are exercised in the knowledge acquisition process. The findings show there were four main learning strategies used and these can be classified as internal, external, formal and informal strategies. A summary of the methodologies and strategies used are presented in Table 4.4, and discussed below

Table 4.4: Learning Strategies and Methodologies

Keys: Health Mfg: Manufacturing Gov: Government Aca: Academic

S/N	Strategies	Health	Mfg	Gov	Aca	Total
1.	Internal	3	13	6	4	26
2.	External	1	13	6	3	23
3.	Formal		8	3	2	13
4.	Informal		9	2	2	13
	Methodologies	Health	Mfg	Gov	Aca	Total
1.	Education Program	2	5	4	6	17
2.	Classroom	1	12	2		15
3.	Online e.g. web, internet and email		14	3	1	18
4.	On the Job Training (OJT)	2	13	2	1	18
5.	Coaching and mentoring e.g. buddy system	1	12	2	1	16
6.	Training and development activities		13	4	3	20
7.	Self learning e.g. reading, research, and books		10	2	13	25
8.	Seminar and conferences	6	7	2	9	24
9.	Attachment and exposure e.g. job rotation	3	13	5	4	25
10.	Experiential learning e.g. Team building, problem solving, project, product transfer and Small Group Activities(SGA)		22	1	1	24
11.	Outsourcing and networking e.g. customer		3	1	3	7
12.	Brainstorming and dialogue e.g. meeting	1	17	4	1	23
13.	Research and consultancy e.g. benchmarking		2	4	3	9

Source: Researcher, 2006

Further, the respondents revealed thirteen (13) learning methodologies practised either singularly or simultaneously. The singular methodologies were usually education programs, either in the classroom or as on the job training (OJT). The simultaneous methodologies included online access to materials, coaching and mentoring, training and development, self-learning, seminars and conferences, attachment exposure or placements, experiential learning, outsourcing and networking, problem solving by brainstorming and dialogue, and finally research and consultancy support..

a. Academic Respondents

Of the five respondents from the academic sector, four respondents claimed their organisations were using internal strategies and three claimed their organisations were using external strategies to acquire knowledge. Further, they said their organisation used both formal (2) and informal (2) learning strategy to acquire knowledge (Refer to Table 4.4). Referring to Table 4.4, the most popular method used among academics was self-learning (13) followed by seminar and conference participation (9), indicating these were the most frequently method applied by academics for knowledge acquisition process.

b. Manufacturing Respondents

Of the 18 respondents in the Manufacturing industry, 13 claimed that they were using both external and internal strategies for knowledge acquisition to occur in their organisations (see Table 4.4). Referring to the Table 4.4, 8 respondents claimed that learning was conducted formally and 9 respondents claimed that learning also occurred informally in their organisations. Experiential learning (22) was the most

popular learning method followed by brainstorming and dialogue (17), online learning (14) and, On the Job Training (OJT) (13) in the manufacturing industry.

On reviewing the overall learning methodologies used in the manufacturing industries, it seems that most organisations prefer internal and informal learning strategies. This was not surprising given these methodologies can be effective and also avoid the disruption of staff being away from the organisation.

c. Government Respondents

There were eight Government respondents. Table 4.4 shows that six out of eight respondents claimed that both external and internal strategies were used. Three of the eight claimed that learning was a formal process and two respondents claimed learning was also informal. There was also evidence that they practised more formal learning than informal learning. In terms of learning methodology, attachment and exposure (5) and education programs (4) appeared to be a popular learning method (see Table 4.4). This is expected because government departments are concerned with formal structures and processes in order to sustain their credibility. The findings also suggest that informal learning is occurring in government departments, especially where learning has become part of the organisations culture.

d. Health Respondents

Three respondents represented the health industry and this may limit the accurateness of the data. The findings suggest that these organisations prefer to use internal learning strategies (3) in comparison to external strategies (1). Referring to Table 4.4, the respondents from the health industry claimed that seminars and conferences (6)

were the most popular learning method. The respondents did not indicate preferences for learning being formal or informal, but indirectly suggested that formal strategies were more popular.

Overall Findings

Overall, the findings suggest (see Table 4.4) that both internal (26) and external (23) strategies for knowledge acquisition are popular. The most popular methods were self-learning (25) and attachment and exposure (25). These two methodologies are referred to as multi-sources method because they draw on various sources of learning, such as reading, research, books, magazines, journals, publications, resource centre and others. Attachment and exposure referred to job rotation, job positioning, visitations, and exhibitions. The next most popular learning methods were seminars and conferences (24) and experiential learning (24). Brainstorming and dialogue (23) was the third most popular learning methodology used by the Malaysian organisations.

Referring to the Table 4.4, On the Job Training (OJT) (18) and education programs (17) were also popular learning methods. The findings also suggest that online learning (18), such as via the internet and emails, has become a popular learning methodology. These findings reflect the Malaysian government's positive and proactive approach in encouraging Malaysians to use information technology to enrich their knowledge. The choice of formal (13) and informal (13) learning strategies showed lower although both were popular means of knowledge acquisition, with informal learning slightly more preferred than formal learning.

The findings also suggest that different industries emphasize different learning methodologies. For instance, the health organisations emphasized seminars and conferences, the manufacturing sector emphasised experiential learning, government departments focused more on attachment and exposure, whereas the academics relied more on self-learning.

4.4.6.4 Knowledge Dissemination

Any knowledge gained by the organisation has to be disseminated for the knowledge to grow and proliferate in the organisation. Otherwise it will wither and become a loss to the organisation. Management needs to ensure that knowledge is shared and absorbed so the organisation can improve and develop. The interview findings suggest the most popular approach for disseminating knowledge is by using trained employees to conduct internal training. For example, one respondent said;

“To disseminate the knowledge within the organisation, the Head of Department or the Managers will conduct some classes on the topic given by the top management. Although they are not that professional, they are comfortable with the subject, and furthermore they can talk at the other people’s ‘language’ have a close relation with the participants, and are able to cite the actual examples and real situation of the company. By doing this the organisation is appreciating and capitalising the employees’ knowledge and experiences” (M13, 2004).

In another example, the respondent claimed;

“Over lunch meetings and in managers’ meetings is where they will share and disseminate the knowledge to their colleagues and meeting members” (M9, 2004).

Learning from example requires the top management to execute the knowledge and information throughout the organisation and be an example to others. Moreover, the success is more promising when delegation and execution are implemented together, because employees note the participation and involvement of the top management (M11 2004). Knowledge dissemination has the advantage of rejuvenating employees and thereby the organisation, which expedites organisational maturity and helps establish a learning culture (M8 2004).

4.4.7 The distinction between ‘Organisational Learning’ and ‘Knowledge Management’

Knowledge management is a new terminology for managers in Malaysia. Therefore, a number of the 30 respondents were unsure about what KM was, and had a lesser understanding and awareness of KM. The concepts of OL and KM were often confused. This section discusses the distinctions, or lack thereof, that were drawn between the two concepts by each industry sector.

a. Health Industry

The respondents from the health industry seemed unable to distinguish between KM and OL. For example, one respondent said; *“KM is something which allows the knowledge to be alive in the organisation” (H2, 2004).* Whereas, another respondent

said, *“OL and KM could be the same and it is just two different words but the process can be the same” (H1, 2004).*

Another respondent suggested that an orientation program is one way of disseminating knowledge within an organisation, particularly in regards to medical and management aspects. This respondent declared,

“Since 1991 the orientation systems are a lot more improved and emphasize more on learning and knowledge exploration in the government department” (H3, 2004).

The three respondents from the health industry had limited awareness of both KM and OL terminology and their explanations, definitions and use of terminology were confused and inconsistent. It must be acknowledged that appears contradictory, as there was some evidence of learning activities and knowledge acquisition programs in their organisations. It appears that learning activities and programs are in place, but the concepts appear to be poorly understood. Orientation programs, for example, were cited as the main source of knowledge for new and existing staff and served as the premier knowledge hub for the organisation. Admittedly this was only a small sample so it cannot be taken as the industries benchmark. However, given the interactions within the health sector it does raise questions about how well these concepts can be implemented if they are not understood. This suggests that further investigation of their understanding is warranted.

b. Academics

The academics believed that the term knowledge management (KM) might lead people to assume KM is about technical knowledge, technology and information. Therefore, the academics made minimal distinctions between KM and OL. The academics perceived KM as a tool to operationalise OL and thus KM is a subset of OL. The academics believed that implementing OL requires efficient management of knowledge. It is the implementation of OL that influences the culture of learning, whereas KM is merely a tool that allows the organisation to hold knowledge and inform its strategies. For example, one respondent said;

“KM assists the organisation in the process of acquiring, managing and disseminating all the knowledge and information within the organisation in a well structured way. On top of that, KM is also a tool to improve certain parts of the business process – by putting them together to give some strategic advantages for the company” (A2, 2004).

The academics perceived that KM led to higher development and advancement of the organisation because it was a repository for all the organisations knowledge. Knowledge management in this sense would be confined to how knowledge is collected, collated and distributed within the organisation. To ensure the successful execution of KM, one respondent suggested *“there must be some concerted effort”* (A3 2004). On the other hand, the academics also believed that OL is about managing culture. One argued that OL differed from KM because *“OL is actually getting the employees to expose themselves to whatever knowledge is available in the market, internally as well as externally”* (A1 2004). These comments demonstrate the lack of distinction between KM and OL.

c. ***Manufacturing Industry***

Generally, the term Knowledge Management (KM) was also poorly understood by the manufacturing respondents. These respondents generalized and confused the definition and function of both KM and OL. For instance, some respondents said that the terms of KM and OL were merely semantic differences. Others viewed KM is a subset or tool of OL and still others claimed that KM and OL are the same. For example, “*KM is just a subset of the OL*” and “*Presumably, (the difference between) OL and KM is semantic*” (M3 2004).

Yet another respondent explained KM as;

“... ‘how’ the organisation manages the knowledge learned - storing, applying and deploying the knowledge into something with economic value. For example, how the organisation could make knowledge available and accessible to people, which means KM is encompassing more activities...” (M3, 2004).

Some suggested that KM and OL were just different terminology. Nonetheless, in terms of organisational practice, OL was perceived as a precursor to KM and therefore, both compliment each other. One respondent mentioned;

“Sometimes KM is more important compared to OL. Anyhow both are complimenting each other and in certain situations this organisation does not make any distinction between the two because both are important” (M5, 2004).

The respondents also agreed that the existence of KM and OL lead to an upgrade of the organisation's performance in terms of operational effectiveness and efficiency and customer satisfaction. Ultimately, the aim of both is to maintain the business and promote survival and the performance of the organisation.

Yet other viewpoints on KM were that it related to information technology (IT). For example;

“KM refers to the intranet, data and ICT, whereby the system will capture a lot of data, analyse and use the data to see the trends. It helps problem solving and is done online - which some people call the multi knowledge super corridor” (M11, 2004).

Implementing KM was perceived as a cost saving mechanism. It allows an organisation to understand what resources it has, so the organisation can more effectively manage these. One respondent expressed this as follows;

“In that sense the organisation is managing the knowledge within by placing the competent employees into a specific area to ensure that the knowledge is effectively applied. As such, job placement becomes important - KM is like you don't put a square peg in a round hole” (M16, 2004).

In addition, another respondent, M17 (2004) believed that the effective KM could help *“avoid the organisation being in a vacuum... and sustain knowledge within the organisation if any of the employees resign from the organisation”*. Ultimately, the respondents viewed KM as akin to intellectual property, whereas OL was perceived as

more toward the processes of knowledge acquisition and the organisation's strategic plan.

d. Government

Most of the government respondents agreed that KM and the idea of learning were connected but were different in terms of emphasis. For example, one respondent said, *"KM and OL, both are interrelated but those who possess OL must be good at KM"* (G6 2004). In this group, there were also respondents who claimed that there was no distinction between KM and OL. Similar to the previous groups, these respondents' understanding of KM was vague. One respondent explained KM as;

"KM is started by the collection of knowledge followed by the setting up of the data bank. Nevertheless, if the knowledge is improperly managed and disseminated then there will be no learning occurring" (G7, 2004).

Another respondent, G9 (2004), also agreed that KM is the process of knowledge dissemination whereby *"intranet is used mostly as a KM centre and all the knowledge is managed through the intranet."* Another viewpoint was that KM is used *"to equip or enhance the knowledge of employees to make the organisation keep moving, growing, progressing and improving"* (G5 2004).

One respondent cited KM application in Japan as a good example of effective knowledge management.

"KM application and practice was very high and it has happened not just at the administrative level but at the lower levels. As a result, they

know what to do and they do not require someone to monitor and to instruct them” (G6, 2004).

Many of the respondents were not able to articulate a clear understanding of KM, although some did think there was evidence of it being implemented into their operations. For example, G7 2004 said, *“perhaps this organisation practised the KM system does not in a proper way therefore there is no clear evidence to claim so”*. Another respondent, G8 2004, referred to KM as self-knowledge management, which allows individuals to transform into a ‘total person’ who is perfectly suited to the required skills and knowledge for a job. This respondent explained;

“To become a total person (mind, body and soul) the employee needs to gain knowledge outside of the organisation on their own. For example, if you are an engineer, the organisation would most probably send you for courses that are related to your work but to make you a total person you should also have to go and seek certain skills that you feel would be relevant to yourself, such as public speaking and computer skills” (G8, 2004).

4.5 Conclusion

Based on the findings from the four industries there seems to be little ability to distinguish between KM and OL. These understandings and the distinction drawn are listed below: Knowledge management was:

- a. understood as being no different to or a subset of OL
- b. perceived as a tool to assist the implementation of OL

- c. understood as being a process for managing acquired knowledge, with the assistance of IT systems, such as the intranet and databases. In this way it is used to gain the highest benefit from existing knowledge to enhance and develop the performance of the organisation
- d. understood as the process of knowledge dissemination within an organisation – to appreciate and maximise the use of tacit knowledge or to build employees knowledge.
- e. described as a system created to develop a total person and protect the loss of organisational knowledge so as to sustain customer satisfaction, organisational performance and operational effectiveness and efficiency.

In contrast, Organisational Learning was perceived as:

- f. a specific process of knowledge acquisition, through various strategies and methodologies. This would equip employees and the organisation with the latest skills and information, improve customer service and deal with competition and increased technology demands.
- g. The creation of a culture that moves the organisation toward achieving its strategic plan. However, it was perceived that, *“the protocols in the government sectors make the learning process difficult and tough compared to the private sector” (G7 2004).*

These findings show that the respondents had little knowledge and understanding of the role of KM. Furthermore, they found it difficult to distinguish KM from OL. These findings suggest that considerable further education is required so Malaysian organisations not only understand the terms, but are better able to operationalise and implement both strategies.

The discussion in Chapter 4 is merely about the analysis of all the inputs gathered both from the Industry Survey and In-depth interview. The analysis discussion is ranging from the input pertaining to the research questions and other emergence issues raised by the respondents which enriched the understanding to the research topic. Further, chapter 5 will specifically discuss the findings based on the research questions and linked to the constructed conceptual framework as in the chapter 2. In addition, chapter 5 will also touch on the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and draw conclusions from the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5. Overview of Chapter 5

This chapter discusses the findings of the analysis constructed in Chapter 4 and draws on the research questions and theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. Next the implications of the findings, the contribution of the study and the limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research are provided and lead in to the concluding comments of the thesis.

5.1 Introduction

This research was designed to explore the understanding of Organisational Learning (OL) and learning strategies practiced in Malaysia. The study involved human resources practitioners, academics and government executives from Malaysian organisations and sought answers to the following five questions: (a) What is the Malaysian understanding of Organisational Learning, (b) What is the importance of Organisational Learning as it is currently implemented within Malaysian organisations, (c) What suggestions and ideas can be drawn from this study to assist other organisations understand how they should go about acquiring knowledge, (d) What learning strategies are currently used in assisting organisations acquire and disseminate knowledge, and finally, (e) Was a distinction drawn between Knowledge Management (KM) and Organisational Learning. Representatives from the four key industry sectors of Academia, Health, Government, and Manufacturing participated in

semi structured in-depth interviews. In all there were 35 respondents and these included General Managers, Managers, Professors, Lecturers and Executives.

5.2 Discussion on Findings

Overall, the respondents were able to define organisational learning, although they confused OL and knowledge management. They also had limited approaches to implementing OL. These findings are now discussed in more depth following the same sequence as the research questions.

RQ1: Malaysian understanding on ‘Organisational Learning’

All interviewees agreed they had heard about the OL concept. However, the understanding of OL differs across the various industries. Differences in their definitions of OL were due to different respondents’ personal and industry backgrounds, work experiences and academic qualifications. The findings also indicated that the manufacturing respondents had the highest level of understanding of OL.

The manufacturing’s respondents were also the most consistent in their understanding of OL. They viewed OL as a long term strategy that was part of a system that enforced continuous knowledge acquisition and skill enhancement via T&D activities to facilitate the change process. The health respondents referred to OL as being the same as T&D, while the academics viewed OL as a cultural attribute, or opportunity or tool that aided knowledge acquisition. On the other hand, the government’s respondents saw OL as a stimulus for employees’ skill and performance improvement

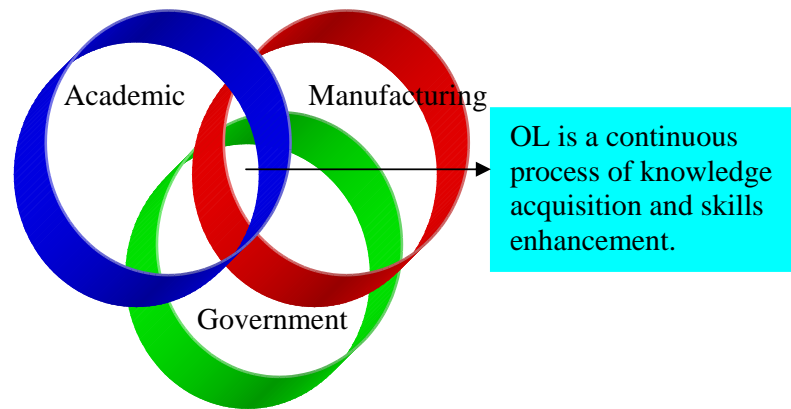
through knowledge acquisition. The respondents' different perceptions are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Understanding of OL by Industry

Industry	Understanding of OL
Health	OL is the same as T&D
Academic	OL is a cultural attribute or an opportunity or tool that aids knowledge acquisition
Manufacturing	OL is a system wide, long term strategy that enforces continuous knowledge acquisition and skills enhancement via the T&D activities to facilitate the change process in the organisation.
Government	OL is a stimulator for employees' performance and skills improvement through the activities and processes of knowledge acquisition

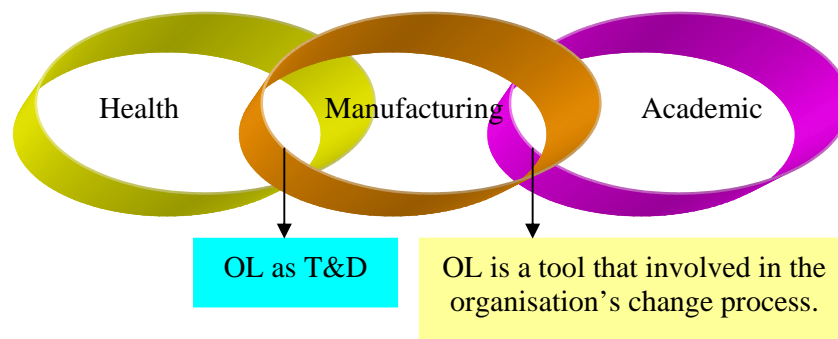
The collective definitions or understandings of OL identified that the academic, manufacturing and government respondents understanding of OL had some overlap, as each viewed OL as a continuous process of knowledge acquisition and skill enhancement as is represented in Figure 5.1. This understanding gives the best match to the definition given by western scholars like Garvin (1993), Jashapara (1993), and, Bennet and O'Brien (1994).

Figure 5.1: The shared understanding among Academic, Manufacturing & Government Respondents



The differences among respondents in relation to defining OL can be seen in Figure 5.2. While the health and manufacturing respondents identified that OL was related to T&D; on the other hand, similar to Huber (1991), and Williams (2001), the manufacturing and academic respondents viewed OL is a tool to aid the organisation when it is involved in change. Taken together, the results suggest that overall there is shallow understanding and limited exposure to the Organisational Learning concept.

Figure 5.2: The shared understanding among Health and Manufacturing Industry and Academic and Manufacturing Industry



Considering both, the Industry Survey and In-depth Interview findings, the definitions and understanding of the OL concept can be categorized into the following five (5) perspectives:

i) ***Organisational Learning is a systematic and aggressive training and development program*** that involves professional training and or learning and development to assist employees improve, upgrade or enhance their personal skills and competencies. In another words, OL encapsulates all the processes that go toward increasing and upgrading an employees' capability and capacity to improve knowledge and skills. Furthermore, OL is an ongoing process. For example, the suitability of further training is determined by employees' qualifications, experience, current duties and responsibilities, and level of competence. As one respondent suggested, the system needs to be operated with 'love and care', teamwork and a professional attitude.

ii) **A continuous learning and development**

OL is a continuous process where everyone is encouraged to learn and gain or share knowledge in order to progress. Employees learn together in different phases, although progression needs to align or focus on the organisations' key areas. For example, a system for handling employees' grievances should not undermine production efficiencies. Comments from the respondents indicated they recognised the need for short, mid and long term learning, which accords with the recommendations of Sinkula (1994), and Slater and Narver (1995). Awareness of the need for these three stages of learning, acknowledges that employees learn from the organisation and other knowledgeable employees as

well as from experts external to the organisation as part of a circular ongoing process.

iii) A process of knowledge and experience accumulation and acquisition

OL was understood as a process of knowledge acquisition and information gathering by using various means and methods of formal or informal education. Knowledge acquisition provides a means for capturing information about the ideas, practices and skills that are taught and practised. Both external and internal training programs help develop knowledge and skills and this in turn motivates people in the organisation to acquire knowledge.

iv) A new tool used to cope with changes in the environment

Organisational learning was also defined as a new tool organisations could use to cope with changes required within the organisation. It can be used to create changes throughout the entire organisation, starting at the strategic level and flowing through to affect all parts of the organisation, including the culture. As such it is a means of continuous improvement to employees' knowledge and the organisation becoming more professional.

v) A unique approach to managing complex systems

OL is a unique way of managing complexity within an organisation, because it views organisations from a systemic perspective where all activities are inter-related. This view recognises the interactions between building and managing

knowledge as part of a long term strategy to deal with present and future challenges.

These definitions show that most of the Malaysian respondents were able to define OL in a broad way. As a group, the health industry respondents were the least able to distinguish OL from T&D. It also needs to be acknowledged that across all respondents there were a small number from the manufacturing and government sectors who were unable to distinguish between T&D and OL. The range of definitions proposed by the respondents are compared to those drawn from the western literature and presented in chapter 2 and the comparisons are presented in Table 5.2 overleaf.

RQ2: The importance of Organisational Learning as a concept

The importance to the organisation of OL as a concept, and the role and importance of OL for gaining knowledge, skills and capability to build organisational competence is also accepted by the various industries. Therefore, using a systematic and well organized approach to learning was seen as critical for learning to be embedded in all the organisations' operations. Respondents identified that resourceful consumers in today's business environment are seeking improved products and services, improved quality, efficiency and accessibility, and usually for lower costs, which strengthens the case for continuous improvement through organisational learning. This is a similar pattern to that found in the Western literature where OL is also viewed as a strategy aimed at improving the quality of current products and services (Joseph, 1995) to bring about continuous improvement (Robinson et al. 1997).

Table 5.2: A Comparison of Definitions of Organisational Learning

Malaysian Definition	Western Definition
“OL is closely related to On the Job Training (OJT), Organisational Development (OD) and T&D...” (M6, 2004)	“the detection and correction of error”, Argyris (1977); Argyris & Schon (1978)
“OL is about formal education programs like diploma, degrees, master, and PhD...” (M2, 2004)	“the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding”, Fiol & Lyles (1985)
“OL is an on going process of equipping people with the required knowledge based on the person’s qualification, experiences, current duties and responsibilities to enhance their skills and competencies...” (M7, 2004)	“the acquisition of new knowledge by actors who are able and willing to apply that knowledge in making decisions or influencing others in the organisation”. Miller (1996)
“OL is an improvement and learning strategy that involves learning processes for the “short, middle and long term’...” (M11, 2004)	“organisational learning occurs through shared insights, knowledge and mental models And builds on past knowledge and experience”, Stata (1992) “organisational learning is a three stage process that includes information acquisition, information dissemination and shared interpretation”, Sinkula (1994); Slater & Narver (1995)
“OL is a new tool used to cope with changes in unique and complex systems...” (H1, 2004)	“an entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviours is changed”, Huber (1991)
“OL is a programmed culture that is adopted and implemented at the strategic level and disseminated to the entire organisation...” (A5, 2004)	“an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights”, Garvin (1993)
“OL is an opportunity that has implications for work culture, procedures, systems and information and has its’ own peripherals or structure...” (A2, 2004)	“Organisations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour”, Levitt & March (1988) “a continuously adaptive enterprise that promotes focused individual, team and organisational learning ...”, Jashapara (1993)
“OL is a continuous process of training, development and improvement of employees in the organisation...” (G3, 2004)	“an organisation that has woven a continuous and enhanced capacity to learn, adapt and change its culture...”, Bennet & O’Brien (1994)
“OL is a process that motivates the people in the organisation to pick up their own knowledge. It is very important for creating and upgrading staff and the organisation’s competitiveness in terms of innovation, processes, development and technology, especially under globalization” (G5, 2004)	“the capacity or processes within an organisation to maintain or improve performance based on experience”, Nevis, DiBella & Gould (1995) “organisational learning is a process in which relatively stable changes are brought about in the way we see things and behave in pursuit of our goals”, Williams (2001)

Source: The Malaysian definitions are drawn from this Research, 2004
The Western definitions are drawn from Williams, 2001; Farrell, 1999;
Miller, 1996

Ignoring the benefits of OL can expose an organisation to the risk of becoming obsolete. As identified in chapter 4, the respondents identified many benefits result from the implementation of OL. The benefits include, aiding survival when facing rapid industry changes and fulfilling the markets demands for competitive employees. This in turn results in effective cost management that supports prudent business strategies. Another benefit is the employees with up to date information, skills and knowledge can cope better with changes in the work environment. The investment in learning activities can be a key factor in retaining employees in the organisation and reducing turnover rates. Similar to others findings, the respondents believed that OL significantly improved an organisations performance (Orr 2000) and helped the organisation to compete successfully in the long term (Slater and Narver 1995) and provided a competitive advantage to the organisation (Bierly and Hamalainen 1995; Heracleous 1995; Kim 1993; Schein 1990; Stata 1989).

In the Vision 2020: The Way Forward, his Excellency Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed, (1989) the former Malaysian Leader as in the <http://www.wawasan2020.com/vision/> (2007), clearly stressed the importance of human resources development, knowledge acquisition and expansion and improved business strategy. He stated that, *“in order to achieve this economically just society, we must escalate dramatically our programmes for national human resource development”* pg.3:9.

Further, Dr Mahathir, (1989) explained *“In our drive to move vigorously ahead nothing is more important than the development of human resources”* pg.6:9. For Malaysia to achieve Vision 2020, the latest technology know-how, skills capability

and knowledge need to be instituted into the nation's human resources. The role played by the private sector is viewed as very important, as is expressed in the Vision 2020: The Way Forward article, as in the <http://www.wawasan2020.com/vision/> (2007), as quoted below.

“In the development of our human resources, our private sector has the most important of roles to play. Train your own manpower. Equip them for their changing tasks. Look after their interests. Upgrade their skills. Manage them well. And reward them for their contribution.” Pg. 9:9

As early as 1989, Dr Mahathir was urging Malaysian organisations to develop their human resources and help them to acquire knowledge, for the good of the companies and for the nations' prosperity.

RQ3: Proposed methods for acquiring knowledge

Respondents agreed that knowledge can be acquired through a number of methodologies and they emphasized that developing a knowledge culture within the organisation was important to successfully nurture and grow knowledge. They believed that the secret of being creative and efficiently acquiring knowledge was to have a positive attitude towards exploring knowledge and appreciating new ideas and information. For most, this meant using the fastest, cheapest, most effective and efficient methods of acquiring knowledge. The respondents in the study suggested there were many approaches to acquiring knowledge. These included:

1. Product based knowledge, whereby the type of product will determine the appropriate method to learn the skills and acquire other required knowledge;
2. Resource centers, such as a library, video centre and reading room for self-learning;
3. Databases, which are managed by the IT or Training department;
4. Information technology that promotes the use of intra departmental mailing systems;
5. Hiring external consultants to study the organisation;
6. Public and private academic institutions where organisations send staff for short and long-term courses;
7. Problem solving committees like Quality Circles (QC); and,
8. An attachment or visit to another organisation or the parent company

In addition, the respondents suggested that attending professional courses such as seminars, conferences, workshops, and discussions, as well as studying the forecast changes in business trends and examining and understanding product and customers needs all allowed an organisation to acquire knowledge. Other means they identified were through conducting laboratory experiments; performing on the job training; and establishing a mentoring system. In addition, the respondents recognized the value of having an appropriate organisational structure that facilitated both horizontal and vertical communication and knowledge capture.

It appears that Malaysian companies are implementing, at least in part, many of the learning strategies identified as prevalent in the west. Respondents gave examples of action, active, experiential, cooperative and problem based learning, as well as

coaching and mentoring. In agreement with the literature, the respondents also identified a mix of formal and informal learning strategies. The commonality between the methods identified in the literature and practiced in Malaysia, suggests that despite giving limited definitions of OL, Malaysian organisations are implementing learning strategies. An overview comparing Malaysian and Western OL practices is presented below in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: A comparison of the Learning Strategies recommended in the Literature and those practiced in Malaysia.

S/N	Learning Strategies described in the Literature	Learning Strategies Practised in Malaysia	References
1.	Action Learning * Highly participatory, learning from the experience, feedback and result of problem solving of others. Lifelong learning skills for managing change. Rapid adoption due to knowledge intensive industries.	1. Lab Experimentation 2. Product based learning	Miller, (2003); York & Marsick, (2000); Robinson (2001); Bourner (1999); Williams (2001); Dotlich & Noel (1998); Stata (1989)
2.	Active Learning * Learning that happens via activities. Actively analysing present knowledge and construct new knowledge collectively. Effective in enhancing academic achievement and performance. Real world learning situation.	1. Problem solving committee 2. Resource centre 3. Databases 4. Information Technology	Thomas, (1998); Boyer, (2002); Becker, (1997); McGoldrich, Battle & Gallagher, (2000); Salemi (2002).
3.	Experiential Learning * Learning 'by doing' in and out of the classroom. Links personal experiences and learning; theory and application. Formulation of new models of thought through reflection and guided discussion.	a. Outside Classroom 1. On-the-job training 2. Attachment or visitation b. In-side Classroom 1. Professional courses 2. Forecast changes	Hickox, (2002); Fiol & Lyles, (1985); Gustavsson & Harung, (1994)

Table 5.3 contd.

4.	Cooperative Learning * Team learning via empowerment in making the decision to determine success. To instil responsibility and accountability and increase self esteem. Provides a safe learning environment, success rate and higher individual achievement.	1. Formal organisational structure 2. Public and Private academic institution	Jenkins, Antil, Wayne & Vadasy, (2003); Lancaster & Strand, (2001)
5.	Problem based learning * Group or team solve the problem and come up with a solution. Heightened level of self directed learning, satisfaction, performance and motivation.	1. Problem solving group 2. External consultant	Ozuah, Curtis & Stein, (2001)
6.	Coaching and Mentoring * To improve specific work behaviour or skills. One to one learning process and involves the transmission of skills, knowledge and expertise	1. Mentoring system	Brocator, (2003); Clawson, (1996)
7.	Formal Learning * Planned & scheduled training, in house or outside organisation	1. Professional courses 2. Public and private academic institution 3. Lab experimentation 4. Attachment/ Visitation	Researcher, (2006)
8.	Informal Learning * Unplanned learning activity	1. Databases 2. Resources centre 3. Information Technology	Researcher, (2006)

According to Williams (2001), learning is shaped by circumstance so the methodologies should vary from one organisation to another, to take into account the nature of the business, the financial strength, product needs, technology, and requirements for human resource development. The main principle for determining

the choice of learning methodology is to choose the best method, with the least cost, time and energy, to produce good quality outputs by improving the processes and eliminating undesirable outcomes (Joseph 1995).

RQ4: Learning strategies for acquiring and disseminating knowledge

Although Malaysian organisations use a number of strategies to acquire knowledge, the various industries agreed that the most popular strategy is structured training and development programs. Most respondents favoured having a specialist department to provide a hub for handling knowledge and skills acquisition, for both internal and external learning sources. This does not mean that individual departments, such as finance, operations, engineering and maintenance should not conduct their own learning activities. In general, the respondents viewed departmental training as relating to a staff members specific job, in terms of dealing with problems, changes to the job or introducing new technology. In this situation such strategies as experiential, participative, problem solving and or active learning, coaching and mentoring can be extremely useful, whether they originate through formal or informal means. This in no way devalues learning programs organized by the Training and Development department, it merely recognizes that most of the time, such programs are more general in nature.

Most respondents acknowledged the use of internal resources for knowledge dissemination within their organisation. Often they rely on managers or other employees who already have the knowledge or skills to conduct training in one form

or another. This can include running classes, giving seminars or demonstrating with on-the-job training to develop the knowledge and skills of other employees. This approach strengthens and spreads knowledge throughout the entire organisation and aligns with learning network-theory. Interactions among employees, managers, training consultants and other learning actors plays an important role in designing effective learning mechanisms, that in turn lead to greater job efficiency (Poell et al. 2000). The respondents did not categorize the learning methods their organisation used as active, action or cooperative learning and so forth, but rather they explained the method and then referred to examples, which could be matched to categories of learning strategies identified in the literature. Table 5.4 compares the learning strategies and methodologies identified in the study with those found in the literature.

Table 5.4.: Comparison of Learning Strategies and Methodologies based on the Literature and Research Findings

S/N	Literature Findings	Research Findings
1.	Action Learning 1. Group of peers meeting. 2. Group discussion. 3. Experimentation	1. Research and consultancy (9) 2. Brainstorming and dialogue (23) TOTAL: 32
2.	Active Learning 1. Problem solving. 2. Teamwork. 3. Simulation. 4. Case work 5. Feedback 6. Small group discussion 7. Brainstorming 8. Reading 9. Writing	1. Brainstorming and dialogue (23) 2. Experiential learning (24) 3. Self learning (25) 4. Online (18) 5. Outsourcing and networking (7) TOTAL: 97

Table 5.4 contd.

3.	<p>Experiential Learning</p> <p>a. Outside Classroom</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practical experiences 2. On-the-job training <p>b. In-side Classroom</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Role-playing 2. Case study 3. Post-project reviews 4. Internal audits 5. Oral post mortem 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experiential learning (24) 2. On the Job Training (OJT) (18) 3. Attachment and exposure (25) <p>TOTAL: 67</p>
4.	<p>Cooperative Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Small Group Learning 2. Classroom 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Classroom (15) 2. Seminar and conferences (24) 3. Education Program (17) 4. Training and development activities (20) <p>TOTAL: 76</p>
5.	<p>Problem based learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem solving group 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experiential learning (24) <p>TOTAL: 24</p>
6.	<p>Coaching and Mentoring</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Top down 2. Peers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coaching and mentoring (16) <p>TOTAL: 16</p>
7.	<p>Formal Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training program 2. Education Assistance Program 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formal (13) 2. Classroom (15) 3. Seminar and conferences (24) 4. Education Program (17) 5. Training and development activities (20) 6. Research and consultancy (9) 7. Attachment and exposure (25) <p>TOTAL: 123</p>
8.	<p>Informal Learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observation 2. Advice 3. Feedback 4. Discussion over lunch or tea break 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Informal (13) 2. Experiential learning (24) 3. Coaching and mentoring (16) 4. On the Job Training (OJT) (18) 5. Self learning (25) 6. Online (18) 7. Outsourcing and networking (7) 8. Brainstorming and dialogue (23) <p>TOTAL: 144</p>

NB: The number in brackets refers to the number of items raised by individual respondents

It is important to note that the arrangement of the learning strategies above does not signify order of importance. This is because learning strategies are subjective in nature and their relevance to each organisation is shaped by circumstances (Williams 2001). These findings suggest Malaysian organisations prefer to use active (97) and cooperative learning (76) as their primary learning strategies. This matches similar findings in the literature. For example, McGoldrich et al. (2000) claim that action learning allows for a collective construction of knowledge and this makes it an effective learning strategy. The word '*active*' suggests that learners are actively seeking knowledge, either, individually, as a group, or through formal or informal channels to enhance their knowledge, skills and capability to fulfil the demands of their work or job. Active learning also has the benefit of being a cost-effective way to improve quality and knowledge capacity.

Cooperative learning was the second most popular learning strategy used by Malaysian organisations. The benefit of this approach, as pointed out by Jenkins et al. (2003), is that it promotes higher individual achievement because the individual efforts are more transparent to others. For this reason, Lancaster and Strand (2001) suggest that Cooperative learning also makes the individual more responsible and accountable. This is a cultural shift for many Malaysian organisations, but there are a number of reasons why Malaysian organisations are adopting western practices. In part it is because of exposure to western education, either through having a degree from a Western universities or using reference books from the West even if they studied in a local Malaysian university. Another reason is that Malaysian multinational manufacturing companies are tied to the Western practices of their parent

company. Globalisation has also forced Malaysian organisations to adopt western learning practices. There is the influence of dealing or trading with American, Australian and European companies, information is now readily available and companies know they need to be able to compete globally to successfully sustain their business operations.

In reference to Table 5.5, the study also found evidence of other learning strategies such as Experiential, Action and Problem-based learning as well as Mentoring and Coaching. This seems to match with Williams (2001) statement that learning choices are often contingent on the circumstances. Organisations need to consider which is the best learning strategy choice in relation to the type of knowledge that is required, when and where the knowledge can be acquired and what will maximize understanding and transfer of knowledge to the employees.

Malaysians are more inclined to use informal learning strategies (144) compared to formal learning strategies (123) (Refer to Table 5.2). The reason for this is to avoid employees being away from the organisation and to keep costs down. Similar to the examples cited in the Western Literature by Bechtold (2000) and Dowd (2000), informal learning, such as learning from peers on the job, allows greater chances for organisational members to learn from the experience of others. These experiences allow organisational members to effectively navigate changes in the organisation's operation to achieve better performance.

RQ5: The distinction between ‘Organisational Learning’ and ‘Knowledge Management’

The respondents were in general unable to distinguish between OL and KM. Some recognized the concepts were dissimilar but were unsure of how they differed. Their distinctions between OL and KM were based on common sense and practical experience, rather than an academic knowledge of the topic. The respondents mostly agreed that OL and KM are closely related and that KM is important. These findings revealed that respondents viewed knowledge as being available within an organisation and accessible through OL activities. Therefore KM was perceived as a means of managing knowledge to make it available or accessible to employees within the organisation. This statement is strongly supported by Gwynne (1999) and other scholars, who claim there are seven implicit assumptions about the knowledge people possess.

The first assumption is that knowledge is explicit; whereas the second is that knowledge is located within the organisation’s information technology and is easily obtained (Gwynne 1999; Loermans 2002; McElyea 2002; Brown and Brudney 2003). The third assumption is the belief that knowledge is available to all and everyone can access it (Gwynne 1999; McElyea 2002; Brown and Brudney 2003). The fourth assumption is that access to the knowledge provides the required knowledge (Gwynne 1999; Thomsen 2000; Caddy 2001; Hall 2001). The fifth, is that the information technology can capture the knowledge and give everyone in the organisation equal access (Gwynne 1999), whereas the sixth assumption is that the information is known and available when in fact it might not be known nor available (Gwynne 1999; Beeby and Booth 2000; Bhatt 2000). The final assumption is that there is ongoing

commitment, ability and resources available to keep capturing, upgrading and storing organisational knowledge (Gwynne 1999; Caddy 2001).

The research findings indicated that approximately ninety percent (90%) of the respondents were unable to distinguish clearly between OL and KM and seven percent (7%) claimed they had never heard of the term. This suggests that some of the organisations are not pro-active in keeping up to date, or that they don't see a need to adopt KM, so ignore it. In conclusion, it seems that there is a real imperative for ongoing education and information about the role and benefits that KM can offer Malaysian organisations across the spectrum. While there is no doubt that some organisations are low technology, this is no longer the case for most sectors. The reality is that manufacturing, health, education and Government all need to understand and embrace KM if Malaysia is to become a developed economy and country. These findings on the implementation of OL in Malaysia, have been explained in chapter four and are summarized in Figure 5.3 on the page 175.

**Figure 5.3: OL
IMPLEMENTATION IN
MALAYSIA**

The Importance of OL

- To the success, growth and survival of the organisation
- To meet the company's strategy
- As a culture
- To enable knowledge transfer and develop and retain good employees
- For skills development and improvement
- As a medium to enhance the capacity and capability within working environment to achieve the company's mission and vision

The OL Operation

- To sustain the learning culture within the organisation
- To proliferate knowledge
- Via the T&D department
- To expose the organisation to learn about new strategies, latest technologies and other recent development to apply into business operation
- Requires thorough explanation from top to bottom ; holistic approach

The Impact of OL

- ROI - the performance and productivity of the employees
- Retention strategy

Knowledge Dissemination

- Trained employees conduct training
- Lunch and managers meeting

The Reasons to go for OL

- Organisation survival: 1. to compete with rivals, 2. to cope with rapid changes
- To fulfil the market demand for competitive employees, effective cost management and product business strategy

The External Forces for OL

- Audit requirements. i.e. quality audit is to ensure product and services in accordance with internal standard and specification
- Government policy. i.e. HRDC
- A needs for the industry people to be professional, knowledgeable, up-to-date to new technology and business needs

Examples of OL Operation

- Induction program
- Job rotation
- Internal and external training program
- Project team
- Customer feedback
- The establishment of Research Centre
- E-learning
- benchmarking

The Selection of Learning Methodology and Strategy

- Objective – to get the best impact from learning and knowledge acquisition for the benefit and betterment of the organisation
- Crucial process
- Depend on different age and generation of trainee
- Availability of IT
- Learning resources within the organisation
- Affordability and budgetary support
- Nature of business
- Mode of operation and type of product manufacture

Knowledge Acquisition Strategy and Methodology

- Product base
- Resource centre and database
- IT, Consultant, Public and Private institution
- Problem solving, attachment, visitation and etc.
- Varies between organisation because;
 - Financial strength
 - Manpower resources
 - Internal facilities
 - Condition of the organisation
 - Size of the organisation
 - Nature of the business/industry

The Organisation Context/Influential Factor

- age of the organisation
- status of the organisation – local / MNC
- leadership

Determiner to implement OL

- Top management who lead the organisation
- The company's direction

5.3 Implications of the Study

The results of the study have shown that in the main, Malaysians do understand and are able to effectively define OL within the context of Malaysians work environment. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that Malaysian organisations are becoming more familiar with the concept and practical application of OL. The examples of OL in operation suggest how they appreciate the benefits that can be obtained through the implementation of OL. These findings have implications for Malaysian organisations and academics by demonstrating the benefits that can be obtained from implementing OL and provide guidance on how to better implement OL.

The research findings show that most respondents across all industry groups studied were also able to differentiate between T&D and OL and give examples of the role and importance of these. These findings provide useful feedback for practitioners in particular, to reduce confusion and misunderstanding of the differences between T&D and OL. Having a better understanding of the concepts should promote greater awareness of the value Malaysian organisations can gain from T&D as a tool to successfully implement and practice OL within their organisation. This understanding will also give more confidence to human resources practitioners when convincing top management to opt for the OL implementation.

This study also gives ample choices to the Malaysian organisations, human resource practitioners and academics of how learning strategies can be used by

the organisations. Most critical for those who want to improve performance, save costs, time and energy is the need to adopt the most effective or “right” learning strategies for each individual organisation. It is paramount that organisations adopt the appropriate learning strategy for them, whether it is active, participative, experiential, problem solving, coaching, mentoring and formal or informal learning. The learning strategies presented in the previous chapter could be taken into consideration and implemented by the similar organisations in Malaysia as well as other countries.

While the results identified that respondents were clear on the role of T&D, their understanding of OL was rudimentary, suggesting there is a definite need for further education and promotion of both OL and KM. Another implication of this study is that if Malaysia is to become an industrialised country and achieve its Vision 2020, considerably more work needs to be undertaken to promote the role and understanding of both OL and KM. Failure to recognize the delineations between OL and KM limits the effective operation of each as it is clear that both will be better implemented if they are better understood. This poses a significant challenge for both the government and business associations. Further education is fundamental if Malaysian organisations are to reap the benefits of organisational learning as they face the uncertainty of the challenges posed by globalization.

In line with the resource based theory, the study has revealed that industry acknowledges the importance of OL as a concept and the benefits

implementing OL offers to capture knowledge and promote information sharing to ensure the success of the organisation. For the adoption of any learning strategy and methodology to be successful it requires the involvement of employees, managers, training providers and any other related parties to ensure knowledge is acquired and disseminated. Therefore, these findings match learning network theory, which emphasizes integration as a critical component for success. In summary, quite apart from supporting the theories of OL found in the literature, these findings have significant implications for practitioners and it is hoped that the insights gained will assist Malaysian organisations capture greater advantages from practising OL.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is subjective in nature. Factors such as respondents' willingness, honesty and sincerity influence the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, organisational learning is a relatively new issue for Malaysia and, as became evident in the study, some managers had limited exposure to and understanding of organisational learning. The variability of respondents understanding and interpretations increase the risk of sample bias. It could be that in the wider community those who choose not to participate in the study had a lesser understanding, so the level of understanding might be much lower than this study suggests. Alternatively, the understanding might be equally as high, or higher, in some sectors of the wider business community, so the results should be accepted with some caution.

Another limitation, associated with the first, is that this study only explored the perceptions of respondents from four industries (Academic, Government, Health and Manufacturing). Different industries might be less or better informed. Similarly, there could be a bias within the industry groups depending on the knowledge of the individual participants in the study. In addition, while one could expect academics to have a better understanding of the theories of OL, the industry practitioners' conceptualizations might be influenced by the need to apply the theory in a practical way. Representation across the groups varied and this could also bias the results. As it is the results are influenced by the manufacturing respondents input, which might not be representative of their industries' views, or understanding in other sectors across the community.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This study provides a good foundation for future research. As an exploratory study it opens the way for more specific research to take place. For example, instead of just listing the numbers of learning strategies used by Malaysian organisations, future research could use a quantitative approach to surveying the frequency of usage of the strategies and confirm the use of various methodologies. Employee satisfaction, productivity, commitment and innovation could also be studied to identify and capitalize on the patterns of organisational learning and Knowledge Management that are emerging or are most appropriate to Malaysia.

This study could also be expanded to increase the number of respondents and explore a wider range of industries. This research involved four (4) industries, however, Malaysia has a very diverse range of industries, from plantations to banking, construction and education, and given the importance of situational contingencies, research needs to extend to other industries to create better generalizations of how OL can be implemented in Malaysia. An extension of this study across a wider scope would allow a better understanding of the strategies, processes and the outcomes being achieved.

Future studies could also examine the influence of different roles on OL. For example, the CEO or top manager's positions mean they not only influence the choices made by the organisation, they also need access to information to evaluate the organisations progress or to implement new strategies. This means their information and understanding of issues needs to be reliable. Further research is needed to uncover how best their needs could be met. It would also be useful to conduct further studies across cross sections of organisation, to identify how effectively OL has been implemented at the operational level and to understand any changes wrought. Knowing and understanding these would give some indication of how organisational learning contributes to performance, innovation and satisfaction within Malaysia.

Finally, research could also be extended to specifically explore KM issues. This study has identified there is a pressing need to explore this issue further. For KM to be effectively implemented to the advantage of organisations, it

goes without saying that it needs to be understood. The reality is that knowledge is subjective in nature and easily transformed over time and as situations change. Therefore, adoption of knowledge management best practice will allow organisations to utilize their knowledge more effectively, rather than risk knowledge being wasted or disorganised.

5.6 Conclusion

This thesis explored the understanding of Organisational Learning and the Learning strategies practiced by Malaysian organisations. The results suggest Malaysians are generally aware of the importance of Organisational Learning as a concept and value learning as they realize knowledge helps determine the future and direction of an organisation. While definitions of OL varied, it became clear that some Malaysian organisations are practicing a variety of OL strategies, even though they regarded these as normal T&D activities. It is clear that there is room for considerable improvement in the education and adoption of OL in all sectors. Being asked to distinguish between T&D and OL made respondents realise that these are not the same. Learning as a concept and Organisational Learning differ and this was acknowledged by the respondents in the study.

Questions on KM surprised many of the respondents and the reality is most were not aware of the term or what it means. Some respondents guessed at a meaning for KM when explaining their understanding. This indicates that KM, along with OL needs to be aggressively explained and promoted in Malaysia.

Considering the importance of KM to organisations in Malaysia's emerging economy, the government, academic institutions and training centres all have to play their role to further educate industries before Malaysia can reap the benefit of OL and KM.

Organisational learning and KM are of growing importance in Malaysia, as organisations try to discover the secrets of learning, as well as how to learn and capture and use knowledge so they can stay ahead of their competitors. With mounting globalization pressures to open up the Malaysian market to the international community, Malaysian organisations; private and public must brace themselves to adapt to rapid changes and learn if they are to stay competitive. Recognizing that there can be a difference between what is proposed as a learning strategy and what is adopted, may give practitioners further insights into how they can operationalise organisational learning. The respondents have given some good ideas and guidance and ideas on how learning strategies can be implemented. These may provide insights for others about choosing the best strategy for their needs and the long list of learning strategy examples provides an array of options so organisations can adopt strategies suitable to them. The ability to operationalise 'Organisational Learning' in Malaysian organisations will serve as a vehicle to help Malaysia achieve its Vision 2020 of becoming an industrialized nation.

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