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Abstract:

This research sought to assess the impact of organization design on the development of learning organizations in Zimbabwe with particular focus on the retail sector. The major objectives of the research were: to identify the major variables of organization design that affect retail businesses, to evaluate the structure being adopted by the retailers, and to establish the key characteristics of a learning organization. The researchers took a descriptive approach to a case study to explore this area. Zimbabwe’s major retailers, that is OK Zimbabwe Limited, TM supermarkets, Spar and Afro Foods were used as they were convenient to the researchers. The case was studied in the mining town of Bindura because the retail set up fairly resembles the retail set up found anywhere in Zimbabwe. Questionnaires were used to solicit information from 34 employees that included management, supervisors, shop floor employees. Interviews were also used to complement the questionnaires and a total of 4 interviews were successfully conducted with the representatives from the head offices in Harare, who were purposively selected. Findings from this research confirm that organization design has an impact on the development of learning organizations. It was established that the environment, level of controls and incentives played a crucial role in making organization design decisions. The study established that the retailers were far from the learning organization tag as they highly formalize their systems and procedures, exercise strict performance controls and there was no integration of processes and structures. It was established that organic design approach facilitated the development of the organization and its members through low formalization of procedures, low centralization of authority and high integration of processes and structures. From the study, it could be concluded that integration and combination of knowledge facilitated the development of both the organization and individuals. Abandonment of formal structures and reaching coordination through social reward and internal normative systems facilitated development of organizations and individuals. The recommendations made included a dynamic approach to social change which allows for development of new ideas and diversification for a better organization and individual and recognizing that employees are able to learn from past experience motivates them to take risks and look for new ways of developing themselves and the organization.

Key words: Organization design, learning organization, organizational learning, retail and impact.

Introduction

The business environment today is very dynamic and this requires organizations to manage change successfully. The organizations also need to be innovative and engage on regular corporate renewal. Basically, in the search for the unattainable, companies are seeking to improve existing products and services and innovation. This has resulted in a plethora of initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR). Companies are however finding that such programmes succeed or fail depending on human factors, such as skills, attitudes and organizational culture. It also appears that many implementations are geared to highly specified processes, defined for anticipated situations. Current interest in the 'learning organization' stems from the recognition that these initiatives alone, often do not work. Something more is needed to cope with rapid and unexpected changes where existing 'programmed' responses are inadequate. However, organizational effectiveness is affected by several factors and amongst them is the way they are designed. Zimbabwean institutions are striving to transform in response to fast changing situations and requirements. Schoin (1973) as quoted by Mullins (1996) said that there was need to invent and develop institutions which are learning systems, that is to say systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation.

The extent to which these institutions engage the way they are designed as an issue affecting their progress towards being learning organizations is a subject for debate. Organizations do not organically develop into learning organizations; there are factors prompting their change. As organizations grow, they lose their capacity to learn as company structures and individual thinking become rigid. When problems arise, the proposed solutions often turn out to be only short term and re-emerge in the future. To create a competitive advantage, companies need to learn faster than their competitors and to develop a customer responsive culture. Argyris (1999) identified that organizations...
need to maintain knowledge about new products and processes, understand what is happening in the outside environment and produce creative solutions using the knowledge and skills of all within the organization. This requires co-operation between individuals and groups, free and reliable communication, and a culture of trust.

Two critical success factors within the retail industry are effective organizational design and continuous learning. The researchers have observed that there has been little research done concerning the development of the retail sector in Zimbabwe despite being also heavily affected by globalization. The Zimbabwean retail sector is facing a very turbulent environment and, as a consequence, tremendous change. This change also brings many opportunities for organizations that are prepared to change. More than a year after the economy of Zimbabwe was dollarised and more stable currencies adopted, the retail sector continues to struggle. (Zimbabwe Advertising Research : November 2011). Problems characterizing this sector have continued despite the policy shift, leaving players in the industry wondering what has to be done. Because of the low barriers to entry, many retail companies have bemoaned the stiff competition from the smaller players in the retail sector. This has seen the once giant retailers cum wholesalers like Red Star and Jaggers closing down operations. The case retailers (OK, TM, SPAR and AFRO-FOODS) could be implementing strategies that make them stay afloat or wallow in the doldrums. The main goal of the study is to contribute to the successfulness of organizations that decide for implementation of learning organization concept by correctly designing themselves despite the challenges being posed by the operational environment. The challenge for an organization is thus to adopt an appropriate organizational design that encourages organizations to continually improve themselves to create and sustain competitive advantage. Currently in Zimbabwe, retailers are still to successfully adopt the learning organizations idea as a competitive strategy. Organizations in this sector include, TM supermarkets, OK Zimbabwe Ltd, Afro foods, Town and Country and Spar outlets only to mention but a few. As such, there was need to undertake a comprehensive study on their organizational designs to have an overview of the opportunities and constraints underpinning their transition towards achieving the status of becoming learning organization.

Research questions

What are the key elements of organization design?

What are the key characteristics of a learning organization?

How does organizational design affect the development of learning organizations?

What are the recommendations for organizations to become learning organizations?

Literature review

Learning organization concept

The concept of learning organizations has a long lineage in management literature. Although some authors like Ortenblad (2001) maintain that the theory was introduced in the 1960s other theorists identify the origins of learning in Frederick Taylors’ introduction of repetitive tasks to improve productivity in the early 1900s as emphasized by Ulrich et al.,(1993). Nevertheless, the concept became more pronounced in the modern world where adopting the learning organization ideas is viewed as a means of creating competitive advantage in today’s turbulent business environment (Blerly and Hamalainen, 1995). The emergence of increasing uncertainty with globalization and tougher economic times has seen a growth in business attempting to adopt the learning organization concept as a strategy to maintain and improve competitiveness. Prior to discussing strategies that organizations could adopt, this paper presents an explanation of the concept of learning organizations as well as organizational design. This is followed by an exploration of the important issues and challenges as well as a number of strategies that need to be considered in implementing learning organization concept.

Organizational Design

According to Jackson and Carter (2000: 48), organization design is “a formal, guided process for integrating the people, information and technology of an organization.” It is used to match the form of the organization as closely as possible to the purpose the organization seeks to achieve.' Slocum and Hellriegel (2009) try to simplify the definition by stating that, organizational design is the process of selecting a structure for the tasks, responsibilities, and authority relationships within an organization.’ Many people equate organization design with an organization's structure: The words "lean" and "flat" are used to describe organization design as well as its structure. In fact, organizational design encompasses much more than simply the structure as emphasized by Mullins (1996) when he argued that organization design is the process of aligning an organization's structure with its mission. Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) contended that organization design creates an environment where
people can work effectively. They even argued that many productivity and performance issues can be traced back to poor organization design. In other words, a company can have a great mission, great people, great leadership, etc. and still not perform well because of poor organizational design.

Luthans (2008) also suggested that how work is done; business processes, information sharing and the way people are incentivized directly affects how well the organization performs. All of these factors are facets of the organization's design and each facet is important to the organization's success. Given the importance of organizational design, why is it so often to blame it for inefficiency and ineffectiveness? The reason is simply because organizations often evolve rather than get designed as Salaman and Butler (1994) strongly argues. With little or no planning and intervention, the organization design that emerges is likely to be flawed with misaligned incentives, processing gaps and barriers to good communications.

Making Organization Design Decisions

Different organization structures have different benefits in different situations. Slocum and Hellriegel (2009) support this by stating that every organization design decision (e.g., greater decentralization and empowerment of employees) solves one set of problems but creates others. By definition, the choice of organization design entails a set of trade-offs because every organization design has some drawbacks. The key is to select one that minimizes drawbacks. What matters is that the overall organization design is aligned with the business strategy and the market environment in which the business operates. Slocum and Hellriegel (2009) suggest environmental, strategic and technological factors as most impacting organization design decisions. Similarly, Burton and Obel (2004) suggested the following, as some of the major things that can also be considered when thinking about the design of an organization:

Strategy – The organization design must support the strategy. For example, if the organization intends to be innovative then a hierarchical structure will not work.

Size – The design must take into account the size of an organization. A small organization could be paralyzed by too much specialization. In larger organizations, on the other hand, there may be economies of scale that can be gained by maintaining functionally specialist departments and teams.

Environment – If the market environment (customers, suppliers, regulators, etc.) is unpredictable or volatile, then the organization needs to be flexible enough to react to this.

Controls – Some activities need special controls (such as patient services in hospitals, money handling in banks and maintenance in air transport) whilst others are more efficient when there is a high degree of flexibility for example operations in the retail sector.

Incentives – Incentives and rewards must be aligned with the business's strategy and purpose.

Organizational Learning versus Learning Organizations.

The terms organizational learning and learning organization have been used interchangeably in the past. As a result, confusion has affected the use of these terms. However, attempts have been made to clarify and distinguish the two concepts. Ortenblad (2001) suggested that organizational learning is viewed as a process or set of activities, whereas the learning organization is seen as a form of organization. Tsang (1997) hold the view that learning takes place naturally in organizations, whereas it requires effort to develop a learning organization. Easterby-Smith (1997) contended that the literature on organizational learning emerged from academic inquiry, while the literature on the learning organization developed primarily from practice. Finally, Ortenblad (2001) suggests that two additional factors should be added to the list to help differentiate the two concepts: distinctions based on who learns and on the location of the knowledge. In organizational learning, the focus is on individual learners, whereas in the learning organization, it is on learners at the individual, group, and organizational levels. In organizational learning, knowledge is viewed as residing in individuals, while it is viewed as residing in individuals and in the organizational memory in learning organizations (Argyris, 1999). This study focused on the learning organizations.

Learning organizations

Senge (1990) defined learning organization as, a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. Pedlar et al (1992) defined the learning organization as, “an organization which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself”. It can be argued therefore that organizations must be able to learn and to learn from their learning. The purpose of the organizational transformation that is achieved through a learning organization is to enable the organization to search for new ideas, new problems and new
opportunities for learning from which competitive advantage can be culled in an increasingly competitive world (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1999).

**Characteristics of a learning organization**

Mills and Friesen (1992: 151) argued that the essential characteristics of learning organizations are that, “they transfer learning among individuals and groups, are committed to learning, and possess openness to the outside world.” Commitment to learning necessitates top management support, training initiatives, and the payment of rewards to people or departments that translate their learning into superior performance. “Within such a firm, employees are encouraged to challenge the status quo, to develop new ideas, innovate, and continuously evaluate their activities with a view to improving performance. Failure is tolerated, provided lessons are learned.” (Dixon, 1992:33). Mills and Friesen (1992) suggested that openness to the outside world involves continuous market and competitor research and the use of competitors’ performances as benchmarks for evaluating the caliber of the organization in question. Research data is gathered from multiple sources and shared throughout the firm. It follows therefore that undertaking research causes the learning organization to become close to its customers, suppliers and other crucial constituencies, thus facilitating adjustments when the unexpected occurs. Accordingly, learning organizations are said to be better able to cope with unstable environments and to anticipate future opportunities and threats as argued by (Urlich et al., 1993).

A widely quoted characterization of the learning organization is that of Pedler et al. (1992), who suggested that it is one which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself. Luthans (2008) tries also to characterize learning organizations in three major dimensions namely:

1) *The presence of tension*- which serves as a catalyst or motivational need to learn. This tension stems from the gap between the organization’s vision and reality and suggests the learning organization’s continually questioning and challenging the status quo.

2) *The systems characteristics*- which recognize the shared vision of employees throughout the whole organization and the openness to new ideas and external environment.

3) *The culture of the organization*- which places a high value on the process of learning and goes beyond mere lip service by setting mechanisms in place for suggestions, teams, empowerment and empathy.

Senge (1990) suggested that there are five basic features of a learning organization which are:

**Systems thinking**- People tend to focus on the parts rather than seeing the whole, and to fail to see organization as a dynamic process. Thus, the argument is that, a better appreciation of systems will lead to more appropriate action.

**Personal mastery**- Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs.

**Mental models**- These are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.

**Shared vision**- relates to the importance of cooperation and a shared vision by team members. The development of a shared vision is important in motivating the staff to learn, as it creates a common identity that provides focus and energy for learning.

**Team learning**- requires individuals to engage in dialogue and discussion; therefore team members must develop open communication, shared meaning, and shared understanding.

**Organization design and -learning organizations**

The concept of a learning organization does not involve a specific organizational design per se but instead describes an organizational mind-set or philosophy that has significant design implications (Blerly and Hamalainen, 1995). In a learning organization, employees practice knowledge management by continually acquiring and sharing new knowledge and are willing to apply that knowledge in making decisions or performing their work. Ulrich et al. (1993) argued that some organizational design theorists even go so far as to say that an organization's ability to learn and to apply that learning as they perform the organization's work may be the only sustainable source of competitive advantage. According to Marquardt (1996), the important characteristics of a learning organization revolve around organizational design, information sharing, leadership, and culture. In a learning organization, it is critical for members to share information and collaborate on work activities throughout the entire organization, across different functional specialties and even at different organizational levels (Hodgkinson, 2000). This can be done by minimizing or eliminating the existing structural and physical boundaries. In this type of boundary-less environment, employees are free to work together and collaborate in doing the
organization work, the best way they can and to learn from each other. Because of this need to collaborate, teams also tend to be an important feature of a learning organization's structural design. Employees work in teams on whatever activities need to be done, and these employee teams are empowered to make decisions about doing their work or resolving issues. With empowered employees and teams, there is little need for "bosses" to direct and control. Instead, managers serve as facilitators, supporters, and advocates for employee teams.

To remain competitive in today’s turbulent and complex business environment, organizations must be able to consistently learn about the key organizational design elements that impact on their performance (Pedler et al., 1992). Learning is critical in order to achieve the goals of improving customer service, increasing market share, sustaining growth and maintaining profit levels. Burton and Obel (2004) cited that organization learning can be highly influenced by the design approach selected. An organization characterized by low formalization and centralization and high integration can easily possess characteristics of a learning organization as compared to that following a mechanistic approach. Miller and Droge (1986) highlighted that where there is integration and combination of knowledge within the organization, a learning organization is likely to emerge. No matter what structural design managers choose for their organizations, the design should help employees do their work in the best most efficient and effective way they can. The structure needs to help, not hinder, organizational members as they carry out the organization's work. After all, the structure is simply a means to an end.

Research Methodology

The research adopted a case study research design in which the qualitative technique was used. The case study was chosen because case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. This case study involved a rigorous examination of some of the country’s largest retail organizations that are located in Bindura.

Study Site

The study was carried out in Bindura, 88 kilometers from Harare. The major retailers in Bindura were four that is OK Zimbabwe Ltd, TM supermarket, Spar and Afro foods. Bindura was chosen because these major retail outlets are also found in most parts of the country and the place was highly convenient for the researchers.

Sampling methodology

The population consisted of shop floor employees, supervisors and senior managers in the mentioned retail outlets of Bindura and the population size was 98. Senior management was selected because they drive the process of organization design and implement learning organization principles. Supervisors were targeted also as they act as midlevels between the decision makers (senior management) and those affected by the decisions (employees). They were in the better view of what goes on in the organization. Employees were selected as they are directly affected by the organization design decisions and play a big role in the development of organizations into learning institutions. The researchers used personal judgments to select one senior manager at the head office of each of the retailers under study to give opinions from the policy formulator's side. The rest of the population was divided into 3 strata that is management, supervisor and shop floor employees. The researchers had no choice on the selection of management as all the retailers had at most 2 managerial employees which are the manager and the assistant manager. Supervisors’ names per each retail outlet were put in a bowel from which 2 names were randomly selected to choose the participants. The criterion was not used for Afro Foods as it had 2 supervisors who automatically qualified for participation in the study. The researchers requested a list of all the shop floor employees from each of the retailers under study and randomly picked names for the participation in the study. Five shop floor employees were selected per each retail outlet serve for Afro-foods where only 3 were selected as it had a smaller number of employees. The sample size was therefore 38. The sample size was a true representation of the population as it gives a 39% representation. Best and Khan (2006), contended that a sample equal or above 10% is valid to generalize results for the whole population.

Data collection instruments

The research instruments used in this research were formal questionnaires and key informant interviews. Questionnaires were used as appropriate research tools to reveal sensitive issues which respondents would otherwise feel uncomfortable to talk about in an interview. A pre-test survey was conducted in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Questions that proved to be unclear to the respondents were modified, rephrased or discarded. Edwards (2003) posits that pre-testing of instruments in the field can serve as a reality check indicating to the researcher how well conceptualization of the problem matches the actual experience of the
practitioner. Key informant interviews were used to obtain in-depth data from the selected few

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The analysis carried was largely descriptive and comparisons were made between the results.

The major elements of organizational design.

Results showed that 100% of the respondents from questionnaires agreed that organization design decisions were mostly influenced by the suggested factors: strategy, size, environment, controls and incentives.

This is also supported by Jackson and Carter (2000) who suggested the same variables as having an influence in organization design. However, the environment, the level of controls and incentives appear to be the most influencing variables as shown from all the data sources.

Results from the questionnaire seem to suggest that retailers highly formalize their systems and procedures and there is very strict control of performance. Processes and systems are lowly integrated whilst decision making is highly centralized. Similarly, the interview responses show the same outcome as also highlighted by Miller and Droge (1996)’s mechanistic design approach.

Characteristics of a learning organization

The results show that 38% of the participants suggested that their organizations had knowledgeable employees. 11% indicated that employees are willing to share knowledge and information. 14% indicated that the retailers transfer knowledge amongst individuals and groups. All the respondents disputed that employees were encouraged to challenge the status quo in their organizations. 6 % indicated that failure is tolerated provided lessons are learnt. 6% also hinted that their organizations anticipate future opportunities and threats. 3 % agreed that their organizations facilitate the learning of all its members. 6% highlighted that their organizations continuously transform themselves.

Below are other characteristics that the respondents believed should also reflect that an organization is a learning one:

- Valuing people - ideas, creativity and "imaginative capabilities" are stimulated, made use of and developed.
- Performance Measurement - appropriate measures and indicators of performance; ones that provide a 'balanced scorecard' and encourage investment in learning.
- Reward and Recognition Systems - There should be processes and systems that recognize acquisition of new skills, team-work as well as individual effort, celebrate successes and accomplishments, and encourages continuous personal development.

Analysis

Results seem to suggest that retailers show little characteristics of learning organization. Retail outlets fairly have knowledgeable employees. However, employees are reluctant to share their knowledge and information and there is very little transfer of knowledge amongst individuals and groups. There are no systems in place to ensure that expertise is available where it is needed; individuals do not network extensively, crossing organizational boundaries to develop their knowledge and expertise.Marquardt (1996); Mills and Friesen (1992) however emphasized the need to share knowledge and information as this motivates everyone to work towards a common goal. Senge (1990) also stresses that shared vision encourages innovation.

Results indicated that the retail employees are not at all encouraged to challenge the status quo. Diversity is not recognized as strength. Views can rarely be challenged. This is contrary to Mills and Friesen (1992) and Luthans (2008) who suggested that challenging the status quo will help in the development of new ideas and employees work towards performance improvement.

Interview response also encouraged the valuing of people as another means of stimulating and developing new ideas. Results indicated that climate of openness and trust does not exist in the retail cases as individuals are not encouraged to develop ideas, to speak out, to challenge actions. Learning from mistakes is often more powerful than learning from success. There is little tolerance for failure by superiors in the retail business meaning that employees always get punishment for making mistakes. Dixon (1992) suggested that it necessary to allow failure as long as lessons are learnt as this improves performance.

The retail case businesses do not value the learning of all its members; there is little or no commitment to learning and personal development. Top management does not support regularly learning of its employees.
and there is no reward for learning. Pedler et al. (1992) emphasized in his definition that learning organization facilitates the learning of all its members. Senge (1990) also tries to emphasize the need for commitment to learning through personal mastery. The characteristics shown by the retailers basically suggest that the businesses are still a long way to deserve the learning organization tag. There is barely any significant transformation of the retail organizations.

Impact of organizational design on the development of learning organization

Of the 34 questionnaire respondents, 94 % strongly agreed to the fact that organization design has an impact on the development of learning organization and only 6% disagreed. This generally implies that retail employees believe that organization design have an influence on the development of learning organization. All the senior managers interviewed also concurred with the majority of the questionnaire respondents, that organizational design has a positive impact on the development of a learning organization.

How organization design impacts the development of learning organization:

Below are some findings which came from both the questionnaire and the interview responses.

- Organic design approach which allows for low formalization of systems and procedures and high delegation of decision making authority paves in way for the overall continuous development of its members and the organization itself.

- Integration and combination of knowledge allows tasks to be combined and avoids the breaking of the workflows of the knowledge intensive organizations triggering continuous development of the organization and its members.

- Organizational learning processes encourage organizations to abandon formal structures and reach coordination through social reward and internal normative systems rather than the hierarchical controls which retard continuous improvement of the organization and its members.

- A dynamic approach to social change allows for new developments and diversification, instead of a passive view of business.

- Recognizing that individuals are able to learn from past experiences and that they are not totally rational in their decision-making processes motivates them to freely develop themselves as well as their organizations.

- Considering the social dimension of learning is a good way to design the organization for learning organization, instead of considering that learning is only individual and is not influenced by social elements.

- Empowerment of employees assists employees to accept responsibility for their action and continuously seek for solutions of their problems and those of their organization.

Analysis

It seems reasonable to assume that in designing the organization for a learning organization it might be better to follow the organic design approach, characterized by low formalization and centralization and high integration, instead of considering following the mechanistic design approach, characterized by low integration and high formalization and centralization as supported by Burton and Obel (2004).

The integration and combination of knowledge is a good way to design the organization for learning organization, instead of separating tasks and breaking the workflows of the knowledge intensive operations. This finding is consistent with Mills and Friesen’s study (1992) which determined that successful companies are those that create new knowledge and are able to disseminate it throughout the organization. This also relates closely to Senge’s view regarding the importance of building a shared vision. Senge (1992) sees shared vision as being vital for a learning organization. An analysis of data showed that people (especially at shop floor level) who were not directly involved in the planning process, valued integration and combination of knowledge as an element of design affecting the development of learning organization. Respondents believed that shared vision must reach all parts of the organization and involve everybody to be effective. This notion relates closely the integration and combination of knowledge.

Organizational capabilities emerge over time through organizational learning processes. Knowledge intensive firms abandon formal structures and reach coordination through social reward and internal normative systems, instead of hierarchical control. This finding is
consistent with the content analysis of interview responses, which revealed the need for collaboration of work activities. Evidence from the face-to-face interviews supports this finding. People within the case organizations believed that formal processes, structures and systems did not necessarily lead to successful change process. There is also a clear link with the literature (Ortenblad, 2001) who emphasized the need to minimize or eliminate the existing structural and physical boundaries. Social reward and internal normative systems are a good way to design the organization for learning organization, instead of formal hierarchy and structured incentives.

On the dynamic approach to social change, results from face-to-face interviews showed that there must be a climate of trust and a sense of commitment for new ideas to be generated. This finding can also be aligned with the ideas of Macher (1992) who argues that continuous learning and improvement thrive in certain climates that are made up of specific characteristics. Results suggest that there must be a climate that allows for learning from mistakes within the organization. Employees need to be encouraged to take risks and they must also be empowered to take risks as emphasized by Argyris (1999). In order for people to learn from their mistakes they need to support this climate by being responsible for their own actions and also by knowledge sharing.

Considering that learning is not individual, as also supported by Senge (1990)’s team learning which encourages individuals to develop open communication, shared meaning and shared understanding, this stimulates members to grow more rapidly hence developing the organization too.

FINDINGS

- The effective designing of businesses and development into learning organizations require participation across all levels of the company regardless of one’s period of employment and level of employment.

- Organization design decisions are mostly influenced by the environment of operation, level of controls and incentives. However, the size of the retail business and strategy also play very significant role in deciding the organization design.

- Retailers in Zimbabwe highly stick to systems and procedures and exercise strict control of performance. Processes and structures are lowly integrated and decision making authority is lowly delegated.

- Retailers are adopting the structures that are very suitable for the size of their businesses but however there is little sharing of knowledge and information between departments. People tend to focus more on the departmental goals that might overlap the overall business goals.

- Some specific retail outlets display more of the characteristics of learning organizations than others but generally, results indicated that the retail outlets are far from showing significant characteristics of learning organizations. The retailers have fairly knowledgeable employees who are reluctant to share knowledge and information or do not value the need to transfer knowledge amongst individuals and groups. Employees are not encouraged to challenge the status quo but are rather usually punished for making mistakes.

- Organization design has an impact on the development of learning organization.

Conclusion

Retail organizations in Zimbabwe employ the right structures but however sticking to the systems and procedures retard their development. For retailers to be flexible enough to withstand competition in this turbulent environment, they need to redesign continuously rather than evolving. Successful retailers possess more of the learning organization characteristics than those that fail to continuously improve, however no organization can possess all the characteristics of a learning organization. The researchers concluded that retailers in Zimbabwe are far from being learning organizations but however, there is potential for improvement.

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