THE QUEST FOR INNOVATION: LEARNING SYSTEMS AND INNOVATIVENESS
WITHIN A GLOBAL STAFFING ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

Today’s world is evolving at such a rapid pace that change is the only constant. Transformation and consistent reinvention of today’s organization is believed to be the key to becoming a market leader. Further, sustained competitiveness in an international marketplace demands a culture of continuous, holistic, and rapid innovation. In this study, the phenomena of organizational learning, performance, and innovation were explored from the perspectives of senior and executive leadership at a global human resources solutions company. This study was grounded in Parsons’s theory of social systems and David Schwandt and Michael Marquardt’s model for organizational learning systems. Data was gathered for this quantitative case study via two survey instruments. Eighty-seven leaders responded, offering 147 suggestions for organizational innovation. There were four key findings: (a) respondents reported a relatively balanced perception of organizational learning versus performing; however, forced-rank items and analysis of highest versus lowest scoring questions weighed more heavily towards organizational performing; (b) organizational innovativeness was perceived as significantly lower than organizational learning; (c) there were significant variations across tenure as those who had been with the organization for a longer length of time had lower perceptions of learning, performance, and innovation; and (d) open field commentary portrayed the organization as one of performance rather than learning.

Keywords: organizational learning, organizational innovation, innovativeness, change management, organizational performance
Dedication

I stand on the shoulders of my praying grandmother, Dorothy Ingram Sargent, who instilled in me the importance of education and the freedom it provides. Granny, this work is in your honor.

To my first father, I love you Albert Sargent

1929–2019
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—

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study........................................................................................................ 9
  Statement of the Problem..................................................................................................................... 10
  Significance of the Problem................................................................................................................. 11
  Research Purpose and Research Questions....................................................................................... 15
  Theoretical Framework...................................................................................................................... 15
    Schwandt’s Model of Organizational Learning Systems Theory ................................................. 16
    Rationale ......................................................................................................................................... 18
  Key Terms and Definitions.................................................................................................................. 19
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 20

Chapter 2: Literature Review................................................................................................................ 21
  Theoretical Framework: Organizational Learning Systems Model ................................................. 21
    General Systems Theory and Social Systems .............................................................................. 22
    Parsons’s Theory of Social Systems .............................................................................................. 22
    Organizational Learning .................................................................................................................. 24
    The Organizational Learning System ............................................................................................ 26
  A Review of Related Literature ........................................................................................................ 30
    Convergence and Divergence ........................................................................................................ 32
    The Linkages Between Innovation, Organizational Learning, and Performance ..................... 35
  Global Talent Workplace Trends ...................................................................................................... 46
    The Rise of Automation .................................................................................................................. 47
    The Nurtured Candidate: Tech ....................................................................................................... 48
    The Nurtured Candidate: Touch ..................................................................................................... 51
    The Nurtured Employee .................................................................................................................. 52
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 53

Chapter 3: Research Design................................................................................................................ 54
  Research Design and Methodology ................................................................................................. 54
    Research Paradigm .......................................................................................................................... 55
    Context of the Study ......................................................................................................................... 55
    Site Selection and Description ......................................................................................................... 56
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Today’s world is evolving at such a rapid pace that change is the only constant (Wolpe, 2017). Transformation and consistent reinvention of any organization is believed to be the essence of becoming a market leader (Aiken & Keller, 2009). Further, sustained competitiveness in an international marketplace demands a culture of continuous, holistic, and rapid innovation (Yates & Yaeger, 2011). The question of how to innovate and become more efficient and effective with fewer resources and competing priorities leaves organizational leaders perplexed when attempting to discern when, how, and how fast to change. These challenges exist inside of systems with multiple contributing factors rendering them difficult to clearly define and even more challenging to predict (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Furthermore, it is not easy to determine if a single, or even multiple interventions, will resolve the problem entirely. Subsequently, organizational leaders have recognized that the dynamic challenges of a globalized environment require more advanced problem solving techniques than they have previously had available. These challenges require a creative way of conceptualizing enabling leaders to introduce new solutions (Brown, 2008).

The purpose of this research was to understand the organizational learning and innovativeness orientations as perceived by the North American leaders of a global human resources (HR) solutions company as they sought to enhance their market position. Data was gathered from a worldwide staffing firm to evaluate current strategies and provide context and a go-forward framework to advance innovation. This chapter begins with a statement of the problem evidenced by relevant literature, followed by the significance of the study, the research questions, and the introduction of the theoretical framework.
Statement of the Problem

In a globalized economy, organizations, institutions, and corporations face the constant challenge of how to become more effective in competing and ever-evolving marketplaces (Wolpe, 2017). Work smarter, faster, and cheaper is the mantra of many. To quickly adapt to new and thriving business models and retain a competitive advantage, many organizations find themselves in a consistent state of flux. Globalization and technology advancements now require organizations to reconfigure their approaches in order to succeed in what is now the fourth industrial revolution. (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000); ABC Staffing is no exception.

ABC Staffing is the world’s largest staffing and recruitment firm. Founded in 1960, the company has grown both organically and via mergers and acquisitions to an immense 32,000 employees across 52 countries. To adapt and survive, the global leadership team created a $50 million innovation fund 3 years ago. The aim of the fund was to invest in or acquire HR technology startup companies to stay abreast of the latest HR technology trends. The total portfolio included more than 70 technologies, with many implemented in various markets around the world. An unintended result of these changes was that the company's direction has become unclear, which has caused confusion for clients and employees at the receiving end of the technological advancements. For example, clients have expressed that the focus is unclear, and in some cases, the technologies appear to be competing rather than complementary, while employees, on the other hand, harbor on the dual and manual work created. Hasty decision making, nonintegrated systems, and disparate processes have all significantly complicated the problem.

Although the need to change to remain relevant includes both the external elements of an organization (i.e., services provided) and its internal operations, actions taken in the present must
be adequate for the challenges of the future (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000), so the proposed solution for continuous and sustainable innovation is organizational learning. Scholars have written extensively organizational change best practices, the antecedents of change, resistance to change, (Armenakis, & Bedeian, 1999), and change readiness (Bernerth, 2004). Introducing consistent organizational learning practices systematically into the organization may play a significant role in generating solutions suitable to its environment. These practices can not only meet the needs of the external environment but contribute to the engagement—rather than disengagement—of employees while simultaneously providing a method to create new knowledge and innovative solutions.

Organizational learning practices allow leaders to gain a deeper understanding of their organization’s current state including the learning capabilities of members, the nature of the changing environment in which the organization operates, and the ways in which leaders can adapt for their anticipated futures. When leaders understand how the organization learns, they can create knowledge, take actions, and make decisions best aligned to that organization and its environment, which is key for creative and innovative solutions (Aminbeidokhti, Jamshidi, & Hoseini, 2016). Although the literature indicates that continuous organizational learning is vital to successful organizational change, when deploying new solutions such as the global technology innovation fund created by ABC Staffing, it is not known how organizational learning can be utilized to effectively design, implement, and sustain new solutions.

**Significance of the Problem**

In 2010 there were over 156 million American workers, (U.S. Census, 2010) with over 28 million employed by Fortune 500 companies. (2017, February 13, Fortune). Fortune 500 companies represented “two-thirds of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, with $12 trillion in
revenue, $890 billion in profits, and $19 trillion in market value” (2017, February 13, Fortune). Additionally, the Fortune Global 500 companies employed 67 million people worldwide in 2017 and were represented across 34 countries (2017, February 13, Fortune). At a macro level, according to the 2019 Fortune 500 list, fewer than 11% of 1955’s Fortune 500 companies still exist, and about half of today’s S&P 500 firms will be replaced with market disruptors over the course of the next 10 years. It is speculated that the hyper-competitive global economy continuously replaces them with new and emerging industries. To further demonstrate, Kiernan (1993) wrote: “Propelled by the competitive exigencies of speed, global responsiveness, and the need to innovate constantly or perish, and enabled by new information technologies, learning will become the only viable alternative to corporate extinction” (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000, p. 2).

In an effort to quickly adapt to new and thriving business models and to retain a competitive advantage, many Fortune 500 organizations have found themselves in a constant state of flux (Wolpe, 2017). Market disrupters such as Uber, Netflix, Amazon, and Airbnb have forced organizations to reform practice and process. Whether reevaluating the go-to market strategy and value proposition, revisiting organizational structure, or redesigning the technology roadmap, the mere pace of change leaves a trail of opportunities to explore or risk extinction.

ABC Staffing has followed suit, as a Fortune 500 company with over 30,000 employees across 52 countries and annual revenues greater than $20 billion. In the past 5 years, in North America alone, ABC Staffing spent more than $400 million acquiring the company behind Jobboards.com to access their unreleased technologies. Additionally, in North America, upwards of $30 million was spent deploying various automation and artificial intelligence
technologies in tandem with investing in emerging practices such as offshoring, outsourcing, and robotics process automation with varying degrees of success.

This single-site case study collected both qualitative and quantitative data from employees within the HR advisory sector of ABC Staffing, specifically serving North America. With nearly $1 billion in annual revenues, the North American division employs approximately 750 employees, making it the largest HR advisory sector globally, resulting in the usage of a sizable amount of the technology innovation fund; additionally, this population has first-hand knowledge of the successes and challenges to date.

Although change and innovation may be necessary for competitive advantage, research has shown that between 60% and 82% of change projects fail (Kotter, 1995). Another study conducted by Pritchard (2010) showed that one out of three projects is considered to be successful, arguing organizations may have the best intentions for success, but they frequently fail to achieve the desired goal. Many factors contribute to the failure of change initiatives, such as organizational resistance, ill-conceived future states, lack of reinforcement, lackluster implementation strategies, or deficient knowledge of leadership (Pritchard, 2010). Issues surrounding resistance and implementation may also be a result of the change process being poorly managed (Pritchard, 2010). Rapid and frequent change, however, will continue because it is a result of an evolving external environment, technology evolution, and growing consumer sophistication (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraf, & Thakor, 2006). Consequently, no matter the cause or origin of the change, the impact of lackluster or nonexistent change and innovation strategies rests upon the shoulders of the employees and ultimately impacts the products and services delivered to customers.
In the case of ABC Staffing, the purpose of the organization is to assist organizations with their workforce needs or to serve them in an advisory capacity. The core role of ABC Staffing is to remain abreast or ahead of global megatrends in order to guide their thousands of clients who seek human capital, recruitment process, and technology solutions. If ABC Staffing cannot strike a balance between exploring the external environment and exploiting its current resources to drive towards optimal results, employees, their families, and the various industries served could be negatively affected. Challenges such as miscommunications, disparate processes, and ineffective technologies could result in significant job loss or the inability of the customers served to deliver their products and services successfully. Conversely, if ABC Staffing can successfully innovate, they can lead the way for the Fortune 500 companies employing nearly 30 million people worldwide.

According to Schwandt and Marquardt (2000), the demands put on organizations in the global economy require learning to occur more quickly, efficiently, and effectively than ever before while organizations simultaneously navigate the need to:

- reorganize, restructure, and reengineer for survival;
- make decisions around outsourcing, offshoring, and robotic process automation;
- double knowledge every 2 to 3 years; and
- prepare for overwhelming breakthroughs in technological advancements.

Dilworth (1998) remarked on how “change now tends to outdistance our ability to learn” (p. 5) Rather than facilitate problem solution, existing knowledge tends to create misdirect inquiry and organizational leaders need to fresh and novel ways to deal with challenges. Only by improving the learning capacity of organizations can change dynamics be mastered (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000). These challenges led to the overarching research questions covered in the next section.
Research Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to understand the perceptions of organizational learning and innovativeness by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company. To answer the research questions, it was essential to examine how holistic and systematic organizational learning can generate the knowledge necessary to advance an organization towards continual innovation. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What is the learning orientation across the four subsystems of an organizational learning systems model as perceived by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company?

RQ2. What is the level of innovativeness across the five factors of innovativeness as perceived by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company?

Sub question: To what extent is there variation across functional areas?

The following section includes a description and discussion of Schwandt’s (1994, 1997) organizational learning systems model (OLSM), which served as the theoretical lens for this study.

Theoretical Framework

Today’s organizations are facing challenges which exist inside of systems that have multiple contributing factors rendering them difficult to clearly define and even more challenging to predict. Creating solutions to these challenges necessitates creative thinking. (Brown, 2008). Learning can be utilized two-fold. The first is a human-centered iterative way that relies on feedback, dynamic thinking, and empathy. The second is an externally focused way that involves the scanning of the environment and the use of information to generate
multiple ideas, create prototypes, learn from failure, and engage in risk taking to arrive at solutions (Boland & Collopy, 2004).

The literature offered many examples of organizations that had generated positive results through the use of organizational learning (Bevan, Robert, Bate, Maher, & Wells, 2007). Organizational learning has been utilized across a myriad of industries to solve change management problems, product design, marketing challenges, and software development. In a fast-paced, complex, and interdependent environment, survival depends on the ability of an organization’s members to learn and improve (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000). The ability to learn and then design and deploy allows for agile and inclusive innovation practices. To better understand this process, Schwandt’s (1994, 1997) OLSM was used.

**Schwandt’s Model of Organizational Learning Systems Theory**

The primary theoretical framework for this research was Schwandt’s OLSM (Parsons, 1951; Schwandt, 1994, 1997). This framework is rooted in systems theory and has been used to examine the collective actions of a social system through four interrelated subsystems of actions, which are covered later in this section. The overarching theory utilized in this study was open-systems theory. Open systems theory is foundationally grounded in general systems theory, in which the behavior of a single autonomous element is seen to dynamically change when it interacts with another single autonomous element (Bertalanffy, 1951, 1969). Open systems exchange energy through matter, people, information, and interaction with external environmental elements (Mele, Pels, & Polese, 2010). Open systems theory, as applied to organizations by Katz and Kahn (1978), allows researchers to focus on the relationships between the elements of the organization and the environment in which it is a part.

Katz and Kahn (1966) stated:
Organizations are energetic input–output systems in which the energetic return from the output reactivates the system. Social organizations are flagrantly open systems in that the input of energy and the conversion of output into further energetic input consists of transactions between the organization and its environment. All social systems, including organizations, consist of the patterned activities of a number of individuals. Moreover, these patterned activities are complementary or interdependent with respect to some common output or outcome; they are repeated, relatively enduring, and bounded in space and time. (p. 218)

Entirely dependent upon their external environments, open systems utilize information received as inputs to allow the system to process and adapt as needed. Parsons (1951) postulated the change of social systems through not only performance actions but also through the process of gathering information which is consistently in motion. When internalized this information transforms into new knowledge, which in-turn causes reaction. Parsons argued that if the members of an organization can efficiently process information about their internal environments, they are better able to adapt and shift contextual conditions as needed (Mele et al., 2010). Corporations that are primarily global in nature, like ABC Staffing, are examples of open systems that depend on multiple external environments, which increases complexity (Schaffer, 1992).

Schwandt (1994) argued that the increasingly complex, ambiguous, and nonlinear nature of human systems necessitated a model to understand the social system and organizational learning. He based his model on three assumptions:

1. Organizations, as human social entities, are always learning.
2. Organizational learning is a result of interdependent human behavior.
3. Representing the complexity in human systems, Parsons (1951) linked the actions and fluidity of individuals and groups through the theory of action.

Schwandt proposed that when organizational leaders attend to the social dynamics among an organization’s subsystems, they can integrate organizational learning into systems thinking for strategic planning and action. Schwandt (1994) identified and defined four, nonhierarchical,
interdependent subsystems as the core channels of information flowing within an organization. In his OLSM, Schwandt (1994) showed how the four subsystems circulate environmental inputs and use them to create functional outputs (see Figure 1):

- The environmental interface subsystem represents the activities and actions that introduce new internal and external information into an organization. It gathers, filters, and distributes information.
- The action and reflection subsystem represents the activities and actions that create new knowledge. Actions are taken to achieve goals, and reflection on action fuels learning to improve processes and outcomes.
- The dissemination and diffusion subsystem represents the formal and informal mechanisms that propel information and knowledge through the organization. These mechanisms include official training and newsletters as well as informal communications.
- The meaning and memory subsystem represents the formalization of knowledge. Knowledge in this subsystem is a store of the beliefs and values of the organization’s members.

Figure 1. Collective Cognition Framework adapted from Organizational Learning—From World-Class Theories to Global Best Practices, by D. R. Schwandt & M. J. Marquardt, 2000, New York, NY: St Lucie Press.

Rationale

OLSM was utilized as the basis for this study due to the significance of the social elements of collective learning. The North American division of the HR advisory sector of ABC
Staffing was comprised of approximately 750 dynamic, open, human systems which were consistently digesting, processing, and transforming information influencing the capabilities of the organization’s members and their ability to innovate effectively. Other organizational models and theories such as those by Crossan, Lane, and White (1999), Nonaka (1994), and March (1991) are incorporated into the literature review to show alignment, convergence, and divergence in models and theories and as support for the validity of the OLSM and organizational learning theory at large. There were several reasons these models were not selected as primary models in this study such as having a greater focus on individual contributions (Crossan et al., 1999; Nonaka, 1994), on management theories (Nonaka, 1994; Senge 1990/2006), or on a purely environmental exploration versus internal exploitation (March, 1991). All of these scholars and their work in organizational learning, as well as open systems theory and OLSM, are addressed in the literature review to provide syntheses of the work in this field and to provide a deeper understanding of the theory.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

The following terms and definitions were used in this study:

- **Communication channel**: A medium through which messages transfer to individuals.
- **Exploration**: This term refers to the search for knowledge through experimentation, with the external environment (March, 1991; O’Reilly & Tushman, 2011).
- **Exploitation**: Efficiency, control, execution, certainty, and variance reduction (March, 1991; O’Reilly & Tushman, 2011).
- **Innovation**: Innovation is the process of identifying and employing methods to create branch new or significantly “enhanced products or services” (Subramaniam & Youndt, 2005 p.14).
• Organizational change: Organizational change is a dynamic response to environmental feedback that moderates organizational behavior to meet organizational objectives and customer expectations (Kaplan & Norton, 2001).

• Organizational innovation: Wang and Ahmed (2004) defined organizational innovativeness as “an organization’s overall innovative capability of introducing new products to the market, or opening up new markets, through combining strategic orientation with innovative behavior and process” (p. 304).

• Organizational learning: The learning system is defined as “a system of actions, actors, symbols and processes that enables an organization to transform information into valued knowledge which in turn increases its long-run adaptive capacity” (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000, p. 43). Organizational learning does not refer to the learning processes of individuals, nor does it refer to the collective sum of the learning of individuals, but rather, how the collective internalizes, learns, and acts or reacts as a result of information.

• Social system: A social system is defined as interrelated units of individuals or groups.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the context of this study, beginning with a statement of the problem evidenced by relevant literature, followed by a discussion of the significance of the study and its implications. It included the primary and subsidiary research questions guided by the foundational model utilized. The chapter ended with the introduction of the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 expands upon the relevant research and its key themes and critical findings.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Globalization and technology advancements now require organizations to reconfigure their approaches in order to succeed in what is now the fourth industrial revolution. (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000).

The question of how to innovate and become more efficient and productive while balancing emergent challenges and seemingly unrelated competitors has perplexed organizational leaders who have attempted to create transformative strategies and ABC Staffing is no exception. ABC Staffing ($28B) is the world’s largest staffing and recruitment firm. The company deploys more than 600,000 individuals, called “talent,” to work weekly in a full spectrum of roles ranging from forklift drivers to medical physicians, to astrophysicists. If ABC Staffing cannot balance the need to explore the external environment with the need to exploit its resources to drive towards optimal solutions, then employees, their families, and the various industries served could be negatively impacted.

The purpose of this research was to understand the perceptions of organizational learning and innovativeness by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company as they sought to enhance their market position. Based on the theoretical framework of Schwandt’s (1994, 1997) OLSM, this review provides an overview of the theoretical framework utilized, covers the convergence and divergence of related scholars, and includes the literature surrounding organizational innovativeness as well as literature on global staffing and human resource trends.

Theoretical Framework: Organizational Learning Systems Model

The primary theoretical framework for this research was Schwandt’s OLSM (Parsons, 1951; Schwandt, 1994, 1997). This framework derives from the sociological systems theory
perspective and has been used to examine the collective actions of a social system through four interrelated subsystems of actions (Figure 1). The overarching theory utilized in this study was open-systems theory, an extension of general systems theory.

**General Systems Theory and Social Systems**

General systems theory was outlined in 1969 by Ludwig von Bertalanffy who researched the organization of complex systems and provides a set of logical assertions about causality in organizations. Von Bertalanffy (1969) believed a system to be a complex network of interacting elements that continuously interact with their environments. Through this interaction, they transform and thus continuously evolve. Von Bertalanffy (1969) also believed these systems course-correct based on feedback. Building upon general systems theory, social systems include patterns and networks of individuals from various origins or statuses that roll into groups or structures that carry out diverse functions.

**Parsons’s Theory of Social Systems**

Organizations are dynamic social systems that are being formed and reformed as they “consume energy in states of punctuated equilibrium with periodic movement between order and disorder” (Schwandt, 1997, p.56). The collective organization is an amalgamation of people, values, and cultural norms representing more than just the sum of the individual behaviors and attitudes of the different actors; the collective organization is characterized by mutually dependent actions (Weick, 1991) best described by “interrelated systems of actions emanating from the individual, group, and organizational levels” p.214. Social systems of action adapt to their environments from both performance and learning actions (Parsons, 1937). As a social imperative, the need of the collective to adapt to its environment was defined in Parsons's (1951) treatment of a general theory of action in which he discussed a system's adaptive capacity as a
function of psychological, behavioral, and cultural actions. The basis of Parson’s general theory of action surrounds members and their ability to adapt to their internal and external environments (Schwandt, 1997). Each action consists of subsystems responsible for carrying out one of four prerequisite functions:

- **Adaptation**: “the establishment of relations between the system and its external environment. It consists of the exchange mechanisms required to bring in the resources required by the system and to export those things that help shape the environment for the system” (Schwandt, 1997, p.56).
- **Goal attainment**: identifying the goals of the system and mobilizing and managing resources to attain and gratify those goals.
- **Integration**: the establishment of control, which inhibits deviant tendencies and maintains order and coordination between parts, while avoiding severe disturbances.
- **Pattern maintenance**: the accumulation and distribution of energy in the form of motivation. This function ensures the alignment of the system of actions (Rocher, 1975; Schwandt, 1997).

These functions can be categorized by their relative focus—whether internal or external to the system—and their purpose (i.e., input or means vs. output or end-state; Figure 2). The prerequisite functional patterns of actions provide a better understanding of the dynamic social nature of collective learning. Parsons’s (1937) theory serves as the foundation of the organizational learning model developed later in the text.
Organizational Learning

Schwandt (1994) argued that the increasingly complex, ambiguous, and nonlinear nature of human systems necessitates a model to understand the social system and organizational learning. He based his model on three assumptions:

- Organizations, as human social entities, are always learning.
- Organizational learning is “a result of interrelated patterns of human actions” (p.39).
- Parson’s (1951) theory of action represents the complexity in human systems and establishes a link between the actions of members of social systems and their ability to adapt to internal and external environments.

If organizational leaders think critically or reflect, they will facilitate creativity, which is positive for the organization’s survival. However, in order for reflection to occur, information must be captured and transported into the system to be processed and integrated into the environment in order to facilitate organizational learning (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000).

Organizational learning represents “a complex interrelationship between people, their actions,
symbols, and processes within the organization” (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000, p.19).

Organizational learning refers to how the collective internalizes, learns, and acts or reacts as a result of information gathered.

The term organizational learning focuses on the ability of a system to adapt to its environment through learning, performing, and repeating the cycle (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000). More explicitly, change is an outcome of both learning and performance, and in line with Parsons’s (1951) explanation of actions as systems and subsystems. Change is traditionally defined as performance plus learning, but for this context, change was defined as performance times learning. In the first example, it is possible for learning to equal zero, allowing the organization to attain change via performance only; therefore, change would equal performance; however, both contributions of performance and learning are critical (Schwandt, 2000).

Additionally, the organization's ability to systematically integrate its social aspects with environmental objects and processes highly depends on its capacity to learn, where the environment includes both what is external and internal to the organization. It is also important to understand the subsystems of the performance system which is indicative of organizational dynamics (Figure 3).
The Organizational Learning System

To some extent, all of the existing theories of organizational learning account for the role of socialization in the creation, sharing, and transfer of knowledge. Socialization, including interactions, symbols, and dialogue, and the associated meanings reflected in these dialogues, is key to facilitating knowledge sharing, the valuing of information, and its subsequent conversion to knowledge. In the OLSM, an organization’s actions can be directed toward learning or performance, and either orientation may be appropriate for an organization under differing circumstances. That is, an organization directs resources along a continuum between learning and performing over time to respond to multiple internal and external concerns (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000).

The collective learning system comprises the four interactive subsystems shown in Figure 1. The area of interest in this study was the actions of the organization aimed at enhancing and

facilitating knowledge sharing behaviors as perceived by the study participants. The purpose of
the study was to seek a better understanding of organizational members’ perceptions of activities
that promoted or inhibited organizational learning capacity by examining influences on
organizational actors’ knowledge sharing behaviors.

Schwandt and Marquardt (2000) indicated that the memory and meaning subsystem acts
as a foundation “from which the other subsystems draw guidance and control” (p. 197) because
this subsystem includes the culture, values, underlying assumptions, language, and artifacts of
the organization. The components influence actions through the exchange medium of
sensemaking as actors interpret past organizational actions through a lens including a certain
level of shared understanding, values, and meaning in efforts to understand current events. This
process of sensemaking and response is aimed at or consists of maintaining the general learning
system’s pattern of action. As noted by Schwandt (2005), sensemaking is “not simply the
interpretation of information; rather, the continuous interaction with information [which] allows
meaning to emerge” (p. 182).

Schwandt (2005) noted that sensemaking depends on the nature of the sensemaking
frameworks and the sensemaking process itself. The results of the process can vary considerably
due to the complexity of the framework within which it occurs and the differing circumstances
under which it happens. As these frameworks—composed of relationships, cues, and ideas
around knowledge—change and interact with the dynamic process of sensemaking, it becomes
necessary to reevaluate approaches to the management of knowledge within an organizational
context.

The diffusion and dissemination of subsystem is the most observable of the
subsystems and represents those collective actions facilitating coordination between the different elements of the learning system (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000). This subsystem is responsible for the flow of information and knowledge through the collective. Diffusion techniques are represented by actions such as friendly communication, real-time collaborative acts, and impromptu discussions, while dissemination actions are purposefully directed and reflect more established practices sanctioned by formal policies and procedures (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000). The output of this subsystem is the structuring exchange medium, which facilitates the integration of the learning subsystems. As noted by Vincent (2006) as referenced by Schwandt & Marquardt (1999): “Structuring symbolizes the connection and order that facilitate the learning of the collective” (p. 71). Structuring reflects a dynamic nature and integrates the norms, roles, policies, procedures, and structure of the organization to enable learning (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000).

In addition to organizational learning, the second construct to comprise the theoretical framework for this study was organizational innovativeness. Wang and Ahmed (2004) developed a scale to measure an organization’s overall innovative capability. According to Wang and Ahmed (2004), five areas determine an organization’s creative ability or innovativeness: product innovativeness, market innovativeness, process innovativeness, behavioral innovativeness, and strategic innovativeness. Product innovativeness is defined as the “novelty and meaningfulness of new products introduced to the market in a timely fashion” (p. 304). Market innovativeness is defined as “the newness of approaches that companies adopt to enter and exploit the targeted market” (p. 305). Process innovativeness “captures the introduction of new production methods, new management approaches, and new technology that can be used to improve production and management processes” (p. 305). Process
innovativeness indicates an organization’s overall innovative capability (Wang & Ahmed, 2004). Behavioral innovativeness is a “synergy based on group dynamics” (p. 305) demonstrated through the creation of an innovative way of working which is not only receptive to but generates new ideas (Wang & Ahmed, 2004). Strategic innovativeness has been defined as “an organization’s ability to manage ambitious organizational objectives, and identify a mismatch of these ambitions and existing resources to stretch or leverage limited resources creatively” (p. 305–306).

The five dimensions of innovativeness are all interdependent and represent an organization’s overall level of innovativeness, each with different focus areas. Product and market innovativeness are more externally focused and based on the market specifics; whereas behavior and process innovativeness focus more internally (Wang & Ahmed, 2004). Strategic innovativeness, in contrast, represents an organization’s ability to identify and align external market and industry opportunities to internal capabilities and resources (Wang & Ahmed, 2004). The goal of this study was to research the correlation between organizational learning and innovativeness as illustrated in Figure 4.

![Conceptual framework](image)

Figure 4. Conceptual framework.
A Review of Related Literature

In the relevant literature, three additional organizational learning scholars were identified based on existing cognitive, behavioral, and social theory that was all comparable to Schwandt (1997). The first was March (1991). According to March (1991), organizational learning emerges from the relationship between exploration (e.g., risk taking, experimentation, and innovation) and exploitation (e.g., efficiency, stability, and routinization). Organizational leaders can improve performance and strengthen the firm's competitive advantage by leveraging what the organization has learned in the past and nurturing their ability to create new knowledge. March (1991) stressed the importance of finding a balance between exploration and exploitation to avoid “over stabilization” or instability. March's (1991) theory about organizational learning connects to the contingency model of organizational leadership. A company that focuses on performance may overly stimulate exploitation and under support exploration, thus limiting the possibility of new product or service creation (March 1991).

Conversely, an organization that focuses only on innovation may not develop the processes it needs to exploit resources and maximize the efficiencies to contain costs. March (1991) cautioned organizations focused mainly on exploitation that their reputation for reliability may lead to self-destruction when a competitor enters the market with a new product. If the organization has not invested regularly in innovation, they will be slow to respond to such market change and thus be at risk for obsolescence. Because market conditions change, March (1991) contended that an organization must continually monitor its environment.

The second related scholar was Nonaka (1994). Nonaka's (1994) theory of organizational knowledge was constructed by hands-on research and practical experience that evolved during his work in Japanese firms; however, the principles have a general application that can be
applied to many organizations. Nonaka (1994) argued that an organization should be studied from the viewpoint of how it creates knowledge rather than how it processes it. There are many ways for organizations to create knowledge, but Nonaka (1994) asserted that the root of organizational learning is its people. People within the organization engage in dialogue, and this dialogue is an essential component for learning. Without discussion, individuals cannot share ideas and discuss possibilities. Without dialogue, the organization cannot evaluate its processes and explore new ideas. Therefore, Nonaka (1994) concluded that there needs to be a continual and purposeful dialogue between individuals within an organization. The concept of exchange between people is a tradition in Japanese culture, known as *ba*, which Nonaka (1994) observed in his studies of Japanese organizations (Helgesen, 2008). *Ba* refers to a dialogue between two or more people—it is never a solitary activity—that results in shared knowledge. This idea persists throughout Nonaka's (1994) work.

The third set of authors reviewed was (Crossan, Lane and White, 1999). Crossan et al. (1999) grounded their theory in the premise that organizational learning occurs during four dynamic processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing (i.e., the 4Is), which connect on three levels: individual, group, and organizational. Crossan et al. (1999) built upon March’s (1991) argument that the relationship between exploration and exploitation connects to organizational performance. However, by defining the 4Is and the three levels of learning, Crossan et al. (1999) demonstrated the importance of a relationship between the social and psychological processes. Furthermore, by connecting social and psychological processes, Crossan et al. (1999) connected cognition to action and action to cognition.

Contrary to the model proposed by Nonaka (1994), Crossan et al. (1999) argued that the connections between the processes are two-way instead of one-way, with exploration being
supported by feedback. Knowledge creation as a two-way stream of information consists of the feed-forward path proposed by Nonaka (1994) along with a feedback path generated by the organization. The feed-forward is new knowledge stemming from new information generated and processed by individuals and groups. Feedback results from the maturation of new knowledge into institutionalization. Crossan et al. (1999) noted that these paths are not innately balanced. Feed-forward (i.e., exploratory) learning can be challenged by the significant cognitive and behavioral needs of new knowledge, while feedback (i.e., exploitative) learning can be reinforced by the natural business processes of following accepted practices and efficiency.

Convergence and Divergence

Schwandt (1997), March (1991), Nonaka (1994), and Crossan et al. (1999) converged and diverged on their demonstration of systems theory, the process by which learning is created, the role of people in the learning creation process, the role of different levels of the organization in learning creation, and connections between organizational learning and strategy.

Systems. Comparing the four approaches, each of the scholars defined their models for organizational learning in terms derived from open systems theory defined by Katz and Kahn (1978). Schwandt (1997) presented an open, differentiated, integrated system of social processes in which each process passes differently-coded information as throughput. March (1991) emphasized openness and negative entropy (e.g., new employees) and added organizational choice as a homeostatic factor. Nonaka (1994) emphasized differentiation and throughput as a process for knowledge conversion and deemphasized openness and negative entropy. Crossan et al. (1999) focused on openness, cycles, differentiation, and integration. All four were concerned
with how information flowed within an organization and how it transformed into organizational knowledge.

**Learning creation.** Schwandt (1997), March (1991), Nonaka (1994), and Crossan et al. (1999) asserted that cognition and action connected the series of learning processes that transformed learning into knowledge. The authors diverged, however, in how they defined the process by which learning is created, and the role of individuals, groups, and organizations in the learning creation process. Independently, Schwandt (1997) and March (1991) saw organizational learning as being socially constructed simultaneously by individuals and the collective. Each of Schwandt’s (1997) four subsystems connects directly to the other, creating a complex nonlinear system of information flows. March (1991) emphasized the mutuality of individual and organizational learning as well as intergroup learning and how each influences the other (e.g., socialization). Comparatively, Nonaka (1994) and Crossan et al. (1999) argued that learning begins at the individual level, with social processes transforming individual learning into organizational learning. Nonaka (1994) defined four processes connected in a linear “spiral of knowledge” (p. 20) while the 4I model was similarly linear (i.e., one process leading to another), it included a congruent reversed flow of information. The overlapping streams of knowledge in the models by Schwandt (1997) and Crossan et al. (1999) suggested hidden tensions within the learning process that may generate resistance to organizational learning.

**Organizational levels.** All authors saw organizational learning occurring at different levels of the organization. Schwandt (1997), Nonaka (1994), and Crossan et al. (1999) concluded that organizational learning occurs at the individual, group, and organization levels. March (1991) considered two levels of learning: individual and organizational. The 4I model by Crossan et al. (1999) was the most explicit in mapping specific learning processes to specific
organizational levels: intuition to individuals, interpretation and integration to groups, and institutionalization to organizations. Nonaka (1994) was less explicit in his mapping, recognizing the existence of the three levels but connecting each mode to social processes rather than a specific level. However, Nonaka (1994) asserted that organizational knowledge could be justified as true by the organization’s standards, transforming it into objective knowledge that is held tacitly or explicitly. Schwandt (1997) theorized subsystems of organizational learning involve individuals working in formal and informal groups, engaging in ongoing information exchange, pulling from and adding to the institutional knowledge base. March’s (1991) model showed individuals contributing to the knowledge base.

**Organizational learning and strategy.** According to the four models, organizational learning connects with organizational strategy, but in different ways. Schwandt (1997) saw an organization’s strategic thinking processes as integrated with the organization’s learning processes so that new learning drives new strategy and vice versa. March (1991) emphasized decision making as an essential component of systems thinking because organizations need to make the right choices at the right times to pursue either exploitation or exploration in a business strategy. Crossan et al. (1999) built upon March’s (1991) work to suggest that the tension between exploitation and exploration can be a source of strategic renewal across the organization to support both continuity and change. Nonaka (1994) saw organizational learning as having strategic choices embedded within it, from the choices made in justification of knowledge to the selection of the managers that accelerate or suppress knowledge creation. His focus on the individual suggested an inherent need to hire and retain workers who can individually contribute. Table 1 outlines the highlighted scholars as well as the convergence and divergence of their arguments.
Table 1

Review of Select Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning Scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Main ideas</th>
<th>Unique contributions to organizational leadership</th>
<th>Convergence/ divergence among OL scholars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schwandt (1997)</td>
<td>New knowledge creation requires change. Interchange media. Four core functions: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance.</td>
<td>The process of social interactions is used to translate knowledge used and applied in action. Sense-making and structuration. Adapting to internal and external influencing factors. Knowledge is constantly being created.</td>
<td>Knowledge creation continues with each social interaction. Collective learning in the organization. Cognitive dimensions of learning, dialogue, and cooperative relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March (1991)</td>
<td>The role of routines and stability on organizations and the evolution over time. Mutual learning model beliefs. Importance of innovation in an organization.</td>
<td>Exploration and exploitation through different levels of organization and impact each decision has on knowledge overall. Need to balance exploration and exploitation.</td>
<td>Risk assessment for possible gains and losses. Strategic development similar to Nonaka (1994) in a more corporate setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonaka (1994)</td>
<td>The organization’s influence on the individual. Personal and reflective interactions effect on decision making. Reflection is essential to organizational development.</td>
<td>Spiral creation of a flow of knowledge at the individual, group, and institutional levels. Organizational knowledge built from personal perspectives and values. Middle-up-down management</td>
<td>Divergence from Schwandt (1997) and March (1991), learning begins at the individual level, rather than collectively as an organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossan et al. (1999)</td>
<td>Leadership requires character; there is a cross-enterprise leader. Shared and strategic leadership.</td>
<td>4Is: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing. Focuses on learning flow vs. production flow.</td>
<td>Converges with Nonaka’s (1994) tacit knowledge and March’s (1991) need for strategic development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. OL = organizational learning

According to Rhodes, Lok, Hung, and Fang (2008), knowledge transfer and learning asserts a positive relationship on innovation performance that is mediated by organizational systems, a topic covered in the next section.

The Linkages Between Innovation, Organizational Learning, and Performance

Management literature emphasized the key roles that both innovation (Baker & Sinkula,
2002) and organizational learning play in enhancing a firm's market position. The premise is that learning stimulates new knowledge, which when utilized or applied, enhances company performance (Jimenez & Sans-Valle, 2011). Some studies suggested that organizational learning is a precursor for innovation (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). The takeaway for scholars is that learning plays a crucial role in enabling companies to achieve speed and flexibility, which in turn continually enhances the innovation process (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995).

**Historical context.** As the fourth industrial revolution unfolds—focused on technology, speed, and the knowledge economy (Schwab, 2016)—it is important to reflect upon the beginnings of innovation and innovativeness due to the proven economic impact for organizations (Wang & Wang, 2012). Innovation is an area of interest for scholars and business leaders alike, as it is believed that how an organization defines innovation will subsequently determine how it will manifest (Knight, 1967). Innovation has been represented in several ways. Schumpeter (1934) defined innovation as “a new product or set of modifications brought to an existing product” (p.91). In comparison, Rogers (1962) in his seminal work *Diffusion of Innovations*, defined innovation as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (p. 11). In contrast to Schumpeter (1934), he also spoke of innovation and technology being one in the same.

Additionally, Wang and Ahmed (2004) defined innovativeness as “an organization’s overall capability of introducing new products to the market, or opening up new markets, through combining strategic orientation with innovative behavior and process” (p. 304). Hence, innovation has been referred to as the actual product or service created, whereas innovativeness has been seen as the process by which it happens. Business researchers highlighted both as
essential to either creating solutions to existing problems or advancing current methods to solve problems that are not yet in existence.

Over the years, innovation has been categorized in a number of ways, most commonly by the nature of the innovation itself, degree of change, and degree of novelty (Figure 5). These classifications and their associated scholars are explored further in the next section.

**Figure 5.** Common innovation types.

**Innovation characterized by nature.** The work of Joseph Schumpeter has greatly influenced today’s theories of innovation. Schumpeter (1934) contended that innovation serves as a stimulus for economic development while revolutionizing the economic structure. He argued that through this dynamic process, technologies replace the old, an activity which he coined as “creative destruction” (Petrescu, 2012, p. 116). Schumpeter (1934) further defined innovation as the commercial application of something novel—“a new product, process, or
method of production” (p.107). Product or service innovations introduce new products or services which the firm creates, sells, or gifts, while process innovations introduce new elements relating to how products or services are created.

Adding to Schumpeter’s (1934) work, the third type of innovational nature is organizational innovation, which Quintane, Casselman, and Reiche (2011) defined as “duplicable knowledge considered new in the context it is introduced to and demonstrated useful in practice” (p. 533). The goal of organizational innovation is to enhance business performance by introducing new ways of operating and includes activities such as reducing administrative or supply costs or improving satisfaction at work (Petrescu, 2012). Generally speaking, organizational innovation refers to changes within the internal operations. One example is organizational structure innovation, which includes altered work assignments, reporting structures, communication systems, or formal rewards systems. Knight (1967) contended that organizational structure innovation complements process innovations as it includes the interactions among the participants carrying out the production process.

Knight (1967) investigated a fourth type of innovation nature: the impact of direct changes on the people within an organization. He referred to these as “people innovations,” (p.482) which he defined as either the hiring or terminating of employees or modifying the behavior or beliefs of the current population via intentional techniques (i.e., education). The fifth and final innovation nature in the research was a marketing innovation defined by Petrescu (2012) as a “new marketing method involving significant changes in product packaging, design, promotion, branding, pricing, or placement” (p.78). Marketing innovations have the objective of increasing revenue by better visualizing and addressing customer needs or newly positioning a product or service in the market. A distinguishing characteristic would be the implementation
of a brand-new marketing strategy not previously utilized. Innovations can also be categorized by effect or degree of change, which is explored further in the next section.

**Innovation characterized by degree of change.** Using the terms "revolutionary or radical," "evolutionary or incremental," Tushman and Anderson (1986, p.119) described what materializes from innovative efforts. Revolutionary innovations are represented by the fundamental re-conceptualizing of a business (Markides, 1998) and are defined as radical and continuous leaps to fresh and novel offerings, opening up new business opportunities focused on the orientation of tomorrow’s customers (Christian, 2012). Radical innovation affects an established industry focused on long-term goals with technology as the priority (Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald, 2015). One type of radical innovation is disruptive.

Introduced by Clayton Christensen in 1995, *disruptive innovation* refers to a process by which a product or service displaces established competitors by beginning small and advancing quickly. Christensen et al. (2015) postulated that while incumbents focus on improving their existing products and services to meet the demand of their loyal consumer base, they may exceed the needs of some segments and ignore the wants of those in untapped markets. The secret to success is targeting those overlooked markets, by offering more advanced functionality at a lower price (Christensen et al., 2015). Disruptive innovations tend to be produced by entrepreneurs and start-up companies rather than existing market-leading companies (Newman, 2018).

The effects of radical innovations are much more complicated than what Leonar and Rayport (1997) characterized as incremental, which only improve upon existing products, services, and processes. Incremental innovations, as defined by Banbury and Mitchell (1995), are “refinements and extensions to established products leading to substantial price benefits or
functional users” (Petrescu, 2012, p. 120). A product can be improved upon through the use of higher performing materials that are perhaps lighter, faster, or of a higher quality. Rather than defining via the effect or degree of change of the innovation, other scholars have characterized radicalism versus incrementalism based on perceived success.

One way to classify an innovation as radical or incremental is to assess the diffusion, permeation, or adoption rate. Rogers (2003) argued that the introduction of an innovation naturally creates uncertainty which then motivates individuals to seek new information to cope with or provide answers to the newly created uncertainty. In this case, information is defined as “a difference in matter-energy that affects uncertainty in a situation where a choice exists among a set of alternatives” (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981, p. 64). Information about the innovation is sought out, and the information exchange regarding a new idea occurs through a convergence process involving interpersonal networks leading to diffusion. According to Rogers (2003), the diffusion of innovations is a social process in which information which begins as subjective is communicated to others thereby allowing the meaning or effect of the innovation to evolve gradually through a process of social construction.

Rogers (1995) concretely defined diffusion as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through specific channels over time among the members of a social system” (p.88). According to Rogers (1995), how well and how quickly an innovation is diffused or disbursed within the market determines the level of success as well as the degree of change. The more consumers buy into the effects of the innovation, the more radical it becomes. In this case, both the innovation and the social system need one another to exist. In 1957, George Beal, Everett Rogers, and Joel Bohlen introduced the technology adoption lifecycle (Figure 6), which is a sociological model detailing the adoption or acceptance of a new product or
innovation according to the demographics and psychological characteristics of defined adopter groups. Although the process of adoption follows a normal distribution (i.e., bell curve), the model categorizes individuals and their likelihood to adopt ahead of their peers. The classifications include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. The demographic and psychological profiles for a study researching the diffusion of farm practices were published later in 1957 by the North Central Rural Sociology Committee and included the following:

- **Innovators**: capital owning, educated, prosperous, and risk-oriented
- **Early adopters**: educated, young professionals and community leaders
- **Early majority**: conservative but open to new ideas, active in the community, and influential to neighbors
- **Late majority**: slightly older, less educated, fairly conservative, and less socially active
- **Laggards**: very conservative, oldest, and least educated


Although critics argued against utilizing adoption rates to measure innovation effectiveness, stating there was no way to evaluate reliability and validity (Goldsmith & Hofacker, 1991), the model has been adapted for technology adoption and was widely utilized into the late 20th century.

Building upon the work of Beal (1957) et. al, Moore (1991) focused on marketing high
tech products during the early start-up period. Moore (1991) argued there is a chasm between the early adopters (i.e., the technology enthusiasts and visionaries) and the early majority (i.e., the pragmatics). Moore (1991) postulated the two groups have very different expectations and suggested specific marketing techniques to “cross the chasm.” In line with the work of (Petrescu, 2012), Moore (1991) argued the importance of choosing target markets, complete product understanding, product positioning, marketing strategy, distribution channels, and pricing.

Utilizing Moore’s (1991) model, Norman and Verganti (2014) added to the discussion positing that revolutionary ideas not only need targeted marketing strategies but rely upon evolutionary increments to survive. Initially radical innovation attracts early adopters due to its novelty. To cross the chasm and capture the mass market, the innovation needs to gradually become optimized to meet customer user and experience needs, which is “accomplished through steady incremental steps, typically leveraging insights gained by employing customer-centered methodologies” (Moore, 1991, p.66). Succeeding in the marketplace, however, requires climbing up the hill to the peak through evolutionary progress (Figure 7). More explicitly, “sustainable innovation is not about either evolution or revolution—it’s about both” (Christian, 2012, p.3).
In the literature, authors also defined linkages between learning, innovation, and performance. Wang and Wang (2012) studied the quantitative relationship between knowledge sharing, innovation, and performance. The study explored both tacit and explicit knowledge sharing and the positive correlation with innovation, which in turn contributes to organizational performance. Salim and Sulaimun (2011) also studied the impact of organizational learning on innovation finding a positive relationship between innovation and performance, providing further evidence that organizational learning contributes to innovation capability and that innovation positively relates to firm performance. For this section, innovation speed is defined as the time elapsed between initial development and commercialization whereas innovation quality results from a comparison between the result (i.e., product, process, or service innovation) and the potential outcome (Kessler & Chakrabarti, 1999).

**Organizational learning and innovation.** Scholars have proposed several models for
explaining the relationship between organizational learning and innovation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Innovation requires individuals to acquire and disseminate knowledge. Knowledge acquisition requires two things: the organization's current knowledge base and the acquisition of external information and knowledge (Salavou & Lioukas, 2003). In this case, prior knowledge could include fundamental ideas or shared vernacular, but may also include the most recent developments in the industry. Thus, prior related knowledge confers, there is an ability to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it as needed. These abilities collectively constitute what Cohen and Levinthal (1990) called a firm's "absorptive capacity," (p. 129). The acquisition of knowledge from outside the company depends on the “capacity of the firm to absorb new ideas, that is, the firm's ability to understand, assimilate, and apply the new external knowledge to commercial ends” (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990, p.19). Innovation also requires the transformation and exploitation of existing knowledge which takes place when employees share information. Building upon the previous section, as Nonaka (1994) suggested, “innovation occurs when employees share their knowledge with the organization and when this shared knowledge generates new and common insights” (p.88). In short, organizational learning allows the systematic acquisition of knowledge which enhances organizational innovation.

Organizational learning is the “process by which the firm develops new knowledge and insights from the collective experiences of people in the organization and has the potential to influence behaviors and improve the firm's capabilities” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, p.27). Following Huber (1991), this process comprises four sub processes). The first is knowledge acquisition, which refers to how the company obtains new information and knowledge. The second is knowledge distribution, relating to how information is shared by employees. The third is
knowledge interpretation, which happens as social construction takes places and individuals give meaning to the information and transform it into new (and shared) knowledge. Finally, organizational memory refers to how the new knowledge becomes a part of the culture going forward.

Organizational learning is thus a basis for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage and a key variable in the enhancement of organizational performance (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Firms that learn can sense events and trends in the marketplace (Tippins & Sohi, 2003). Subsequently, learning organizations are usually more flexible and faster to respond to new challenges than competitors which enables firms to maintain long-term competitive advantages (Tippins & Sohi, 2003).

**Innovation and performance.** Researchers have conceptualized innovation in the literature as both a process and an outcome (Knight, 1967; Rogers, 1995). However, most of the definitions of innovation imply the new idea must be adopted in order to be deemed innovative. Researchers have also distinguished different types of innovation. The classification most extended and accepted is the one Damanpour (1991) proposed distinguishing between technical and administrative innovations. In this case technical innovations may include a new process and new products or services while administrative innovations refer to new procedures, policies, and organizational forms (Dewar & Dutton, 1986).

Innovation helps companies navigate the turbulence of the external environment and therefore, is one of the critical drivers of long term success in business, particularly in dynamic markets (Baker & Sinkula, 2002). To survive in highly advanced and globalized environments, organizations must be able to cope with increasing complexity and rapid change (Brown & Eisenhard, 1995). In these contexts, “companies with the capacity to innovate will be able to
respond to challenges faster and to exploit new products and market opportunities better than non-innovative companies” (Brown & Eisenhard, 1995, p.74).

As Simpson, Siguaw, and Enz (2006) pointed out, innovation is an expensive and risky activity, and although it may generate positive outcomes, it can also lead to adverse consequences such as increased costs, increased exposure to market risk, disengaged employees, or changes which may have been unwarranted. However, despite these risks, research has shown innovation positively correlates to performance. Zhu, Liu, and Chen (2018) conducted an empirical study indicating the relationship between high-performing work systems and corporate performance and asserted the relationship is more positive when organizational learning is stronger, yielding more significant innovation. Relative to the global staffing industry there are many innovation trends that impact both the industry and its employees alike, which is covered in the next section.

**Global Talent Workplace Trends**

In a worldwide market where only a handful of high-profile brands such as Amazon, Apple, and Google truly stand out, the challenge for most talent leaders is to ensure their employer brand closely aligns with the views and desires of the candidates they hope to attract and retain (Kiger, 2007). Digitization of businesses, redefinition of work, and the outsized impact of technology have all reshaped the outlook of employers and candidates while also increasing the complexity of the environment (Wolf, 2011). What employees and employers want from one another, how the workplace experience will change, and what defines the perfect employer are all evolving. In many aspects, expectations have not shifted much from traditional drivers, but in other areas, there is a departure from convention. Globally, 76% of employers agree that talent scarcity is a top concern (SHRM.org, 2019). It is more critical than
ever to understand the impact of these changes to remain competitive and drive growth.

According to a global staffing provider’s 2019 Workforce Trends survey of 1700 working professionals and 800 leaders across 17 countries, two critical trends have swept the globe: the impact of artificial intelligence and automation on workplace productivity and job security and challenges with creating a nurturing candidate and employee experience. Each of these areas currently has a substantial impact on the world of work.

**The Rise of Automation**

The Society for Human Resource Management recently reported that rising expectations contribute to low employee engagement (Wilkie, 2017). Greater scrutiny over worker satisfaction, accelerated pace of change in the workplace, and other factors contribute to burnout in the workforce. In the Workforce Trends (2019) survey, 44% of the employees reported trouble keeping up with technological changes, while 46% worried they did not have the skills needed for the future workplace. According to the same survey data, although most C-suite (i.e., chief-level) leaders consider artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics as enabling better productivity and efficiency, 44% of employees reported concern they may lose their job in the future. Concerns about job security may be one reason why the gig economy has grown globally. Pofelt (2016) reported that as a result of feared downsizing, corporate workers have turned to freelancing to control their destinies. Those who can make it as freelancers gain economic stability and as a result, geographic flexibility. This movement has been enabled by the rise of freelancer management systems and the human cloud (Rafter, 2016). Companies such as Hourly Nerd and UpWork have launched platforms to match independent contractors with organizations in need of talent. According to Intuit Chief Executive Officer Brad Smith, the gig economy is estimated to be about 34% of the workforce and expected to be 43% by the year
 Freelancer management systems automation has allowed many skilled individuals to connect with companies for project-based work more efficiently. Subsequently, although automation and AI will inevitably lead to the displacement of some workers, employers do have an opportunity to redeploy those resources through continuous training and development.

For many employees who fear they do not have the skills that will be highly sought in the future, the answer is education and training. Working professionals value an employer that can help them keep their skills current through learning and upskilling. Although some companies make opportunities for advancement visible, employees see technological barriers for moving forward. Nearly 60% of workers say if they had broader digital and technology skills, they would have more roles to choose from (Workforce Trends, 2019). Career opportunity is an area of great concern for employees, and data show a disconnect, as 50% of leaders feel like they offer great career progression opportunities and only 31% of employees feel the same (Parker, 2016). The findings may explain why according to Gallup (2019), a staggering 87% of workers are disengaged. Armed with this data, employers are taking a hard look at the end-to-end candidate and employee experiences. The delicate balance of technology with the human element is known today as tech and touch. The next section discusses the role of technology in the workplace.

The Nurtured Candidate: Tech

Research has shown that 77% of talent leaders rate their company’s candidate experience as either excellent or very good, and 84% of working professionals have reported having a bad candidate experience while searching for a job, with 52% reporting this has occurred more than once (Workforce Trends, 2019). Corporate career portals are often a candidate’s first experience
with an employer brand. The ease or complexity of the platform can make quite a difference in whether or not a candidate stays the course. In a recent employer brand study, candidates struggled with broken links, incomplete information, and posted jobs that were no longer available (Monster.com, 2017). These experiences result in time wasted and a negative brand perception. Other communication channels can have a considerable influence as well, and according to the 2019 Workforce Trends study, there is currently a discrepancy between what candidates and employers view as most important (Table 2). The gap may result in a substantial disconnect between where the focus lies and where resources are invested. The most significant area overlooked by employers is the network of current employees, although ranked in the top four of importance for candidates, the opinion and perspective of existing employees is not mentioned from an employer perspective.
Table 2

Candidate Versus Employer Job Search Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Top 5 sources candidates rely on during job searches</th>
<th>Top 5 sources employers prioritize for job searches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company website</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job boards</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current employees</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data according to 2019 Talent Trends Quarterly. Randstad Sourceright.

Furthermore, the channels utilized to eventually apply for job opportunities are equally as significant. Although job boards remain important, job seekers have found it is easier to apply using their social profiles and smartphones. In one study, LinkedIn and mobile applications were utilized by nearly one quarter of applicants studied (Bounds, 2019). Most favorable is the use of AI chatbots and short message service (SMS) text technology to expedite and optimize the application process (Bounds, 2019). Companies using mobile recruiting tout many benefits for the end-user experience such as spam reduction, faster response times, and the ability to provide real-time event reminders (Bounds, 2019). However, to maximize their potential and enhance the candidate experience, technology investments must be made by employers. Thus, although professionals expect their employers to provide such tools, only one in five say their employer does (Workforce Trends, 2019). Although technology is an increasingly important tool in the attraction, sourcing, and management of candidates, the human touch is also essential for conveying a positive experience.
The Nurtured Candidate: Touch

According to research, 36% of working professionals say a constructive in-person interview, rather than a tool, helps to create a positive candidate experience (Mitchell, 2016). Furthermore, the same 2019 Workforce Trends study highlighted a gap between what employers and employees believe has the most significant impact on the recruitment and talent experience (Figure 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors impacting recruitment and talent experience—according to employers</th>
<th>Factors impacting recruitment and talent experience—according to employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35% HR and talent analytics tools</td>
<td>19% Role transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% Training and development platforms</td>
<td>18% Feedback on selection reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11% Talent networks and social search</td>
<td>16% Speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11% Recruitment marketing platforms</td>
<td>15% Communication throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% applicant tracking systems</td>
<td>13% The ability to address questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Figure 8, concerning competing in the open marketplace for talent, the human touch is even more critical than technology. The need to pay as attention to capturing, engaging, and winning the hearts and minds of people cannot be lost on talent acquisition professionals. As the competition for talent intensifies, mobilizing and reskilling teams will become even more critical to securing business success, and soft skills are equally as important as technical skills. Data shows that although 43% of working professionals will pursue technical skills development such as data analysis, coding, and programming, 41% will seek to improve soft skills such as presentation skills, conflict resolution, critical thinking, communication, and time management (Workforce Trends, 2019). By offering training programs, employers have the
opportunity to attract talent who value development and growth. As candidates become contributing employees, employers must also consider the experiences of employees as well.

The Nurtured Employee

Although important, offering excellent pay alone will not designate a company as an employer of choice. Research has shown there are several factors unrelated to compensation that can support talent retention including evidence that an organization is financially healthy and can provide job security and work-life balance (Korn Ferry, 2018). Additionally, employers have tried a variety of methods to better recognize and reward their talent (Society for Human Resource Management, 2019). Offers of unlimited vacation time (Wilkie, 2018), workplace power naps (Lansat & Aydin, 2018), adoption reimbursement (Market Watch, 2018), and more have led to growing expectations and frustration for employees. Although many of these offerings are meant to differentiate the company’s talent experience, they do not always hit the mark. It is vital to understand and align with the values and drivers of the organization’s culture.

One way that companies have succeeded in this area is with pulse surveys. Rather than traditional, lengthy, annual employee engagement surveys, some companies administer brief surveys covering targeted areas that can be completed in less than five minutes to get a real-time pulse on how employees feel (Qualtrics, 2019). Technology platforms can offer insights to business and organizational leaders to quickly determine both strength drivers as well as drivers focused on future improvement. Pulse surveys can be extremely useful not only for traditional benefits and perks inquiry but also for just-in-time feedback during times of organizational change (Qualtrics, 2019). As with traditional surveys, the key to effective pulse surveys is two-fold transparency in addressing the feedback and timeliness of actions. The top reason for a diminished employee response rate is the perception of time wasted if there is no visible
resulting action (Freedman, 2019).

The world of work is rapidly evolving. The convergence of technological innovation, the embrace of flexible working, and growing competition for skills has led employers and workers to rethink what a workday, job, or even a career entail. The rise of digitization is advancing so quickly that it is creating tremendous challenges even for companies on the cutting edge of innovation. Simultaneously, with millennials now accounting for the largest segment of the workforce, how they interact, communicate, and what they expect of companies has shifted. Pressure has grown for both employees and employers to learn and understand how to capitalize on the current challenges of automation and the candidate and employee experiences.

**Conclusion**

The business world is one of disruptive and radical change (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000) whereby organizations are consistently expected to produce greater efficiency and value through unique combinations of innovative actions, effectiveness measures, and consumer customization. Clutching onto the familiar will not maximize creativity. Original and novel solutions must fluidly replace antiquated operations, history, and bureaucracy. To this end, organizational leaders must continuously exploit diverse thinking and actions (Nonaka, 1994). In this disruptive world, an organization’s capacity to learn—to acquire, apply, and spread new insights—has been touted as the fundamental strategic capability (Fiol & Lyles, 1985) resulting in varying degrees of innovation. Chapter 3 covers the design of the study measuring organizational learning and innovativeness within ABC Staffing by utilizing two survey instruments, the Organizational Action Survey (OAS) developed by Johnson and Schwandt (1998) and the Organizational Innovativeness tool developed by and Wang and Ahmed (2004).
Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this research was to understand the orientation of organizational learning and innovativeness as perceived by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company. The results of this research were utilized to generate knowledge and provide strategies and recommendations to not only assist ABC Staffing with their market position but to equip their client base with this new knowledge. This chapter presents the research design and methodology, site demographics, an in-depth look at the survey instruments—including validity and reliability methods—data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Research Design and Methodology

Creswell (2015) pointed out that in quantitative research studies, the research questions should be asked in a fashion that produces measurable results. Descriptive statistics guided by the research questions will determine the outcome. Qualtrics was the platform used to answer the following questions:

RQ1. What is the learning orientation across the four subsystems of an organizational learning systems model as perceived by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company?

RQ2. What is the level of innovativeness across the five factors of innovativeness as perceived by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company?

Sub question: To what extent is there variation across functional areas?

The approach also included one open-ended, free-form questionnaire allowing the researcher to combine elements of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, thus adding dimension (Cr
Research Paradigm

The constructivist paradigm is based on the theory that learning occurs while learners are actively involved in processing, meaning-making, and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information (Ponterotto, 2005). The constructivist paradigm is critical as it allows the researcher to recognize the importance of the subjective creation of meaning and the potential duality of meaning (Baxter & Jack 2008). Although this was a quantitative study, the lens of constructivism was critical because it allowed the participants to offer their interpretation and social construction of reality-based personal experiences both inside and outside of the selected site (Searle, 1995).

Context of the Study

Case study is an approach to research that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Through this approach, the researcher can ensure an issue is not explored through a myriad of lenses, allowing for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be investigated and understood. A case study is not intended for the study of an entire organization but rather, for a particular subject, issue, or unit (Noor, 2008). Within the context of this study, the phenomenon analyzed was the extent to which learning is utilized to design, implement, and deploy innovation efforts within one staffing and recruitment organization. Through the explanatory case study, the researcher explored and described learning, performance, and innovation within the organization while also investigating causal relationships (Yin, 2009).

Ngungu Abbot and McKinney (2013) viewed case studies research as a way of focusing on how and why things happen, which allows for the investigation and interpretation of what was
planned versus what occurred. This kind of research can be particularly beneficial when the intention is to dig deep within a unit for rich information versus the desire to take a more broad-based approach. Case studies allow for generalization and can be useful in capturing the emergent and immanent properties in an ever-changing environment. Furthermore, this was a holistic, single case study with embedded units, enabling the researcher to explore the case of innovation while considering several distinct audiences, including those tasked with ideation versus those charged with leading.

**Site Selection and Description**

The site was selected based on several factors: (a) it was preferred that the firm have knowledge of the external environment from an innovation standpoint; (b) the firm needed to have a global perspective, and (c) a representative sample of key and support roles, functional areas, and levels within the organization was critical and the most essential factor in choosing a site.

The overarching research site for this study was a global staffing and recruitment firm with a North American headquarters located in the Southeastern United States, hereafter referred to as ABC Staffing. The firm employed over 32,000 people across 52 countries across a vast array of service offerings ranging from staffing production workers to advising C-suite human capital leaders. At a more localized level, the specific division studied focused more on recruitment of permanent, salaried professionals and HR advisory services. The site employed 755 full-time professionals, and the organizational structure is shown in Figure 9.
Figure 9. Organizational structure of ABC Staffing, $n = 755$.

**Population and Sampling**

Participants included director- and higher-level employees with a minimum of 6 months tenure at ABC Staffing, excluding the researcher and relative direct reports for a total of 151 invitees. Participants were purposefully sampled to include all ages, races, ethnicities, and genders represented within the organization across all functional areas. This comprehensive sample of informed sources included members of the organization who understood the organization’s innovation efforts. Interviewing middle- and top-level managers is increasingly common in research due to their ability to provide detailed information based on organizational knowledge gained from their daily responsibilities (King & Zeithaml, 2003). ABC Staffing is a virtual organization, and none of the participants were co-located.

The rationale for the eligibility and selection criteria for this study was based on the researcher’s need to compare responses from varying departments and levels at the same research site (Creswell, 2015). The researcher intentionally collected data from employees in higher positions within the organization due to their exposure to organizational strategy and practices. Figure 9 illustrates the structure of the organization. Invitees included 151 middle
managers and leaders (e.g., directors, vice presidents, senior vice presidents, executive vice presidents, presidents, and C-level employees) were invited to participate in the survey. Although 105 started the study, only 87 completed it.

Demographics for management level and role at ABC Staffing are shown in Table 3. Sourcing and recruitment made up 38% of the total roles, followed closely by support staff roles at 23%. The label *support staff* includes traditional corporate positions such as human resources, sales, marketing, finance, and administrative support. Managers and directors and above were nearly equal at 19% and 17% respectively. Of the total population, 28% are people leaders, although only 72% of managers and above had direct reports.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level and Role Demographics of ABC Staffing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/vice president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven divisions were represented (Table 4), including those performing sourcing, staffing, and recruitment functions, making up 77% of the population and leaving 23% of the population as support functions. The largest division was RP, which comprised nearly half of
the U.S. operations with 318 employees (42%). Many of the roles which were considered more strategic fell within the CB and Su teams, which made up 51% \((n = 76)\) of the leadership team.

Table 4

*Divisions of ABC Staffing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All employees</th>
<th>Leadership invited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the average tenure of workers is 4.6 years. Compared to this data point, ABC Staffing is a well-tenured organization with nearly 50% \((n = 375)\) of the employees having been with the company for more than 5 years (Table 5). Over 41% of the leadership team had been employed for more than 10 years and nearly 30% had been with them for 15 years or more.
Table 5

*Organizational Tenure Demographics of ABC Staffing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All employees</th>
<th></th>
<th>Leadership invited</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 years</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–15 years</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organizational Action Survey**

The OAS (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998) was used to measure the four factors and eight sub factors of both organizational learning and organizational performance. The OAS was developed by researchers at the George Washington University Center for the Study of Learning. The OAS is theoretically and empirically grounded based on the combined work related to OLSM by Parsons (1951) and Schwandt (1997). They posited that change results from both learning and performance, where organizational learning actions plus organizational performing actions equate to organizational performance (Johnson & Schwandt, 2000). As shown in Figure 10, the survey measures each of the four functional factors and subsystems for both organizational learning and organizational performance (Schwandt, 1994, 1997, 2000).
Validity tests, considered the most critical aspect of research design (Muijs, 2011), confirm if an instrument measures what is intended. There are four types of validity: face, content, criterion, and discriminant. To test an instrument’s face validity, 200 items of the OAS were vetted by an expert panel, resulting in 144 items being selected for a pilot study (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998). Construct validity was tested utilizing confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis was also used to investigate the constructs of organizational learning and organizational performance (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998).

Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency of the measure. There are three types of consistency, over time (i.e., test–retest), across items (i.e., internal), and across measures (i.e., interrater). The individual indices were measured utilizing coefficient alpha producing reliability measures within a range of 0.50 and 0.60, which is considered to be best practice (Churchill, 1979). Item analysis and item intercorrelation also showed gamma and tau-\(b\) scores to be well within the predefined range. The pilot study which produced the final survey included...
236 respondents. Johnson (2000) reported the following reliability coefficients for the learning and performance constructs: environmental interface (0.78), action–reflection (0.64), dissemination/diffusion (0.81), meaning and memory (0.74), acquisition of resources (0.62), production/service (0.76), management and control (0.76), and reinforcement (0.71; p. 87). The final survey items are shown in Table 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation learning</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing predicts the changes occurring in the staffing industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing tracks how competitors improve their products, services, and operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental interface</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing deliberately reflects upon and evaluates external information (e.g., competitors or the overall staffing industry) to help make decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal learning</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing has set goals for researching and developing new services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing effectively uses organizational structures (e.g., chain of command, personal networks) when sharing ideas and innovations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action/reflection</td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has clear goals for individual development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration learning</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing provides opportunities for employees to develop their knowledge, skills, and capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing's leaders support quick and accurate communication among ALL employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination &amp; diffusion</td>
<td>● In my experience, there are systems in place to share new operational processes and procedures throughout the entire organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has established teams, networks, workstreams, and other collaborative arrangements to help the organization adapt to change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency learning</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing uses ideas and suggestions from its employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing believes that continuous change is necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has a strong culture of shared values, beliefs, and norms that support individual development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory &amp; meaning</td>
<td>● In my experience, people in ABC Staffing believe that acting upon what customers say is critical to reaching organizational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive performing acquisition of resources</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing effectively uses organizational resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing effectively acquires external resources required to meet its goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal performing/production service</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing's leaders are effective at achieving organizational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has clear performance goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has established achievable strategic objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative performing</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing holds teams accountable for achieving established goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing implements changes to help employees be more effective in doing their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management &amp; control</td>
<td>● In my experience, managers and leaders have the skills needed to guide organizational change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, the solutions of collaborative teams are of much higher quality than anyone of us could have produced alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency performing</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing uses historical references to let people know how they should perform their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing publicly acknowledges employees for outstanding performance (e.g., featuring them on intranet communications, plaques, and in person).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing believes it needs to continuously improve customer service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has a strong culture of shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide daily work activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Organizational Innovation Assessment

Wang and Ahmed (2004) utilized the Organizational Innovation Assessment to measure the critical elements of innovativeness and innovative ability of ABC Staffing. The assessment tool incorporates the organization’s strategic orientation as a prime factor of innovation. It consists of 20 items assessing five dimensions of innovativeness on a 5-point Likert scale: behavioral innovativeness, product innovativeness, process innovativeness, market innovativeness, and strategic innovativeness.

To validate their survey instrument, Wang and Ahmed (2004) solicited 1,500 companies with a minimum of 50 employees to complete the initial 29 survey items and analyzed the 231 responses using confirmatory factor analysis. The initial item tests resulted in weak square multiple correlations, low regression weights, high error variances, and extensive error covariances. The results of this analysis led to the elimination of nine of the original questions, reducing the survey to 20 items (Wang & Ahmed, 2004). A second order of confirmatory
analysis was performed on the remaining 20 items which revealed that all of the items converged into a single organizational innovativeness construct which were then segmented into five factors: behavioral, product, process, market, and strategic innovativeness. Wang and Ahmed (2004) reported the following reliability coefficients: behavioral innovativeness (0.59), product innovativeness (0.68), process innovativeness (0.71), market innovativeness (0.80), and strategic innovativeness (0.79; p. 8). The final survey items are shown in Table 7.
Table 7

**Organizational Innovativeness Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>● We get a lot of support from managers if we want to try new ways of doing things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● At ABC, we encourage individuals to do things in different ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● At ABC, we are willing to try alternative ways to meet our goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● At ABC, we encourage teams to be original in their thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>● Our recently launched services and solutions are only minor changes from our previous iterations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing's services and solutions often rank up there with new and emerging competitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In comparison to our competitors, our marketing program is revolutionary in the market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In new service introductions, ABC is often at the cutting edge of technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>● In comparison to our competitors, in the past 5 years, ABC has introduced more innovative services and solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In comparison to our competitors, ABC Staffing's solutions have a higher success rate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● When we see new ways of doing things, we are first at adopting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>● We are constantly improving our business processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC changes service offerings at a great speed in comparison with our competitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● During the past 5 years, ABC has developed many new management approaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● When we cannot solve a problem using conventional methods, we improvise with new methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>● The resources of our research and development team, also known as the Talent Innovation Center (TIC), are adequate to handle the evolving needs for new services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Leadership is willing to take risks to seize and explore new or innovative growth opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Senior executives constantly seek unusual, novel solutions to problems via the use of ideas from employees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Procedures

Upon receiving site approval from both the chief human resources officer and the chief operations officer (Appendix A) the student researcher designed the study. ABC Staffing’s human resources department provided a list of all invitees which met the criterion inclusive of initial demographic data such as organizational tenure, level, and role. Upon completing informed consent (Appendix B), potential participants were invited (Appendix C) to complete a web-based, online survey via Qualtrics with 47 survey items; each scored via a 5-point Likert scale and one future-perfect open-ended question. A future-perfect question allows for the participant to utilize creativity to generate an ideal state rather than to become mired in the present practices. To complete the survey, a response to all questions was required. The survey remained open for 2 weeks with reminder emails distributed halfway through the cycle and on the final day of the study (Appendix D). A thank-you communication was auto-generated upon completion of the survey (Appendix E). Following the survey (Appendix F), the participants were invited to complete optional demographic data to include: tenure within the role and industry, the highest level of education completed, and geographic location. The survey responses were analyzed within the Stats IQ section of the Qualtrics platform.

Data Analysis

This study followed a quantitative and qualitative explanatory design to collect and analyze the numeric data utilizing Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool (Creswell, 2007). In Creswell’s (2007) work, he outlined the appropriate procedures for analyzing quantitative data, many of which were utilized in this study:

1. the use of descriptive statistics to identify general tendencies in the data (e.g., frequency count and mean) and the spread of scores (i.e., standard deviation),
2. the use of inferential statistics to analyze data from a sample to draw conclusions, and
3. the use of thick description to draw deep insights from open-ended text question (Geertz, 1973).

**Ethical Considerations**

Data was solely stored and analyzed within the Qualtrics system. Only the researcher and principal investigator had access to the data. No identifying information was collected from the participants, and therefore there was no risk of a confidentiality breach. There were no known risks to the participants for this anonymous, confidential, and optional survey. The principal investigator signed an assurance form (Appendix G). The researcher completed a course on protecting human research participants as required by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research (Appendix H). The findings were only presented in an aggregate manner, and no responses were linked to individual participants.

**Limitations**

In designing this research study, it was critical to understand the limitations. Although the company was global, the study focused solely on one division within North America and its top two levels of leadership. The use of an anonymous survey tool helped to control bias, but human subjects who are exposed to the same company-wide initiatives and efforts will process information disparately based on their constructed reality, lived experiences, and perceptions of success versus failure. Although the instruments utilized were deemed valid and reliable, the inputs were based on self-report bias. Additionally, there were three other variables to consider when reviewing limitations: (a) the researcher was employed by the site; (b) some of the participants were responsible for creating and influencing innovative efforts and thereby may have felt the need to rate higher for self-preservation, and (c) some participants could have felt fear surrounding the outcome and actions taken in response to the results. These three factors could have potentially influenced participants’ responses.
Conclusion

This chapter outlined several aspects of this quantitative case study. The single-site research design allowed for an in-depth examination and descriptive analysis of ABC Staffing’s perception of the current rate and state of organizational learning and its relationship to innovation and performance. Specific information regarding the methodology was provided, beginning with the context of the study and closing with ethical considerations and limitations.
Chapter 4: Analysis of the Findings

This chapter provides an analysis of the results from the two survey instruments administered. The results included the answers to questions on a 5-point Likert scale, rank order, and an open-ended question ascertaining a future-perfect state. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses created the picture of perceptions felt by the leadership teams relative to organizational learning, organizational performance, and innovativeness. The chapter begins with demographic data of the participants, and continues with an overview of the OAS factors, descriptive statistics for both the OAS (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998) and Organizational Innovativeness survey (Wang & Ahmed, 2004), an analysis of highest and lowest ranked questions, rank order questions, and a text analysis of the open-ended question.

The purpose of this research was to explore organizational learning and innovativeness as perceived by the North American leaders of a global HR solutions company utilizing the OAS (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998) and Organizational Innovativeness survey (Wang & Ahmed, 2004) as well as unstructured commentary.

Respondent Demographics

Invitees included 151 leaders who were asked to complete the survey over a 2-week period. Respondent demographics are shown in Table 8. Although 105 people began the survey, there were a total of 87 respondents (58%) who completed it, and 56% ($n = 84$) answered the free form question. All participants completed the optional demographic questions. Of the respondents, 85% ($n = 74$) were directors or vice presidents, and 15% ($n = 13$) served on the executive leadership team.
Table 8

Organizational Leadership of ABC Staffing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Invited</th>
<th></th>
<th>Responded</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/vice</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>president</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were seven divisions or functions within ABC Staffing. The biggest group of respondents fell within the Su division, 37% (n = 32). The Su division was inclusive of traditional corporate roles such as human resources, sales, marketing, finance, and administrative support. The second-largest grouping was the RP division at 26% (n = 23). Both groups together comprised greater than 60% of the respondents. The breakdown of all groups is shown in Table 9.
Table 9

*Divisions of ABC Staffing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Invited</th>
<th></th>
<th>Responded</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tenure was captured in three ways: tenure within the company, tenure in the current role, and tenure within the staffing industry. The results of the tenure data were widely disbursed (Table 10). The largest populations were those that had been with the company for 3–5 years \((n = 23)\), followed by 5–10 years \((17\%, n = 39)\), and 1–3 years \((17\%, n = 27)\). Although the largest pool of respondents \((31\%, n = 27)\) had only been in their role for 1–3 years, 66\% \((n = 57)\) had been in the staffing industry greater than 15 years.
Table 10

*Organizational Tenure of ABC Staffing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational tenure</th>
<th>Tenure in role</th>
<th>Tenure in staffing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–15 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Descriptive Statistics**

The next section includes data analyzed for organizational learning, performance, and innovativeness. There were four key findings:

1. The overall dimensions of the OAS (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998) showed a relatively balanced perception of organizational learning versus performing. However, forced-rank items and analysis of highest versus lowest scoring questions weighed more heavily towards organizational performing.
2. Organizational innovativeness was perceived as significantly lower than organizational learning.
3. There were significant variations across tenure and division.
4. Open field commentary portrayed the organization as one of performance rather than learning.
This section includes an overview of OAS learning and performing factors (Table 11) and continues with mean and standard deviation statistics for the stated dimensions.

Table 11

*Organizational Action Survey Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Factor descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1 Adapting to environment</td>
<td>Proactive external interfacing: seeking out information to meet unanticipated customer needs or emerging market; proactively gathering data to anticipate consumer or industry trends; tracking competitors, strategic group configurations, customer or supply chain satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attaining goals</td>
<td>Reflective planning: reflecting on priorities and goal-oriented actions, critically examining criteria for success, focusing on new knowledge and innovation, creating goals for research and development, emphasizing plausible readiness over planned change approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration and coordination</td>
<td>Network idea sharing: taking opportunities for developing knowledge, skills, and abilities; sharing new insights; collaborating and networking; using situational approaches to resource allocation and communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining cultural patterns</td>
<td>Reinforcing flexibility and growth: valuing individual and firm development, viewing mistakes as learning opportunities, critically reviewing current standards to meet future needs, recognizing and rewarding intelligent risk taking, creating a climate of trust and elasticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5 Adapting to environment</td>
<td>Reactive external interfacing: responding to intense industry competition or technological changes, reacting to governmental agencies or consumer requests, adopting new industry standards, market-driven approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attaining goals</td>
<td>Production focus prioritizing: establishing clear performance goals, consistently meeting deadlines, maintaining accountability for achieving goals, having an achievable mission, producing well-established products, emphasizing accurate planning to minimize the unexpected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factors | Factor descriptors
--- | ---
Factor 7 Integration and coordination (Integrating: performing) | Communicating and coordinating effective actions: implementing changes to make people more effective, holding leaders responsible for decision making, ensuring fair and equitable allocations of resources, enforcing formal/hierarchical communication structure, creating rigorous role responsibilities
Factor 8 Maintaining cultural patterns (Culture: performing) | Establishing performance standards: rewarding performance achievement, maintaining established standards, emphasizing systemic equity over flexibility, ensuring consistent values to guide daily activity, minimizing risk taking and norm deviance, reinforcing rule-bound reward-punishment-based systems


As shown in Table 12, although not strong scores, the overall organizational learning and organizational performing dimensions revealed a relatively balanced mean score with organizational learning reporting a mean of 3.84 (σ .95) and organizational performing reporting a mean of 3.89 (σ .95). The organizational innovativeness results were significantly lower, with a mean of 3.43 (σ 1.0).

**Table 12**

*Descriptive Statistics of Overall Organizational Learning Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational factor</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>( \sigma )</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovating</td>
<td>3.43*</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *Significantly lower mean score.*
Evaluation of the subscales of organizational learning (Figure 11) revealed that, relative to organizational learning, the adapting sub dimension was significantly higher than goal attainment with the second-highest mean of 3.94 (σ.89). Pattern maintenance showed the highest mean of 4.08 (σ.83). These scores indicated a higher focus on means (i.e., gathering information and motivating the masses) rather than on ends (i.e., execution and change).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Environmental Interface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Focus</td>
<td>(\bar{x} = 3.94)</td>
<td>(\bar{x} = 4.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(\sigma = .89)</td>
<td>(\sigma = .83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 87)</td>
<td>(n = 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Focus</td>
<td>(\bar{x} = 4.08)</td>
<td>(\bar{x} = 3.69^*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(\sigma = .83)</td>
<td>(\sigma = 1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 87)</td>
<td>(n = 87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significantly lower mean score.

Figure 11. Descriptive statistics of organizational learning sub dimension.

Findings for organizational performance subscales (Figure 12) indicated three of the four subscales had strong results, all with means above 3.9. These included: goal performing 3.91 (σ .83), latency performing 3.98 (σ .94), and integrative performance with the highest mean of 4.08 (σ .88). Adaptive performance indicated a significantly lower perception with a mean of 3.27 (σ 1.01), indicating the organization was in reactive mode relative to external market pressures and struggles to be agile or to acquire resources needed to anticipate or adopt new industry standards.
In addition, in comparing the focal points of organizational learning, the participants reported a higher external focus than internal with integrative performance and latency performance showing means of 4.08 and 3.98 respectively, which was above the adaptive performance and goal performance’s means of 3.27 and 3.91. This suggested that although there was a focus on external or client needs, enabling the environment to meet those needs may have been a challenge.

**Purpose**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Ends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Performance / Acquisition of Resources</td>
<td>Goal Performing / Production Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.27^*$</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.91$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma = 1.01$</td>
<td>$\sigma = .83$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n = 87$</td>
<td>$n = 87$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency Performing Reinforcement</td>
<td>Integrative Performance Management &amp; Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\bar{x} = 4.08$</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.98$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma = .88$</td>
<td>$\sigma = .94$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n = 87$</td>
<td>$n = 87$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12. Descriptive statistics of organizational performance sub dimension. *Significantly lower mean score.*

The descriptive analysis of Wang and Ahmed’s (2004) Organizational Innovativeness survey indicated weaker scores than both organizational performing and organizational learning (Figure 13). Although not a particularly strong rating, behavioral innovation ranked the highest with a mean of 3.69 ($\sigma .87$). The behavioral innovation mean was significantly higher than the other four subscales indicating the leaders’ perception of a culture that encourages creativity and
novel ideas. On the other hand, the remaining four scales, all with means ranging from 3.33–3.41, showed only moderate means for process, market, product, and strategic innovation. This could be attributed to the fact that leaders believed they empowered their teams to be novel and flexible; however, the other subscales were handled by other teams and thus fell outside of their control.

### Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.69$</td>
<td>$\sigma = .87$</td>
<td>n = 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.37^*$</td>
<td>$\sigma = .97$</td>
<td>n = 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.33^*$</td>
<td>$\sigma = .97$</td>
<td>n = 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.41^*$</td>
<td>$\sigma = .92$</td>
<td>n = 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 3.36^*$</td>
<td>$\sigma = 1.11$</td>
<td>n = 87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significantly lower mean scores.*

### Highest and Lowest Ranked Items

Table 13 shows the highest ranked items relative to the OAS. Of the top five highest ranking questions, four of them (80%) fell within the performing dimension. The highest ranking question pertained to latency learning, with a mean of 4.40 and reflected a belief at ABC Staffing that continuous change was necessary. The next ranked item was integrative...
performing, which had a mean of 4.36, indicating the agreement of the work output of collaborative teams.

Table 13

*Organizational Action Survey Highest Ranked Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latency learning</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing believes that continuous change is necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative performing</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>● In my experience, the solutions of collaborative teams are of much higher quality than anyone of us could have produced alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency performing</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing publicly acknowledges employees for outstanding performance (e.g., featuring them on intranet communications, plaques, and in person).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing believes it needs to continuously improve customer service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has a strong culture of shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide daily work activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 shows the lowest ranking survey items. Of the five lowest ranking items, three of them (60%) fell within the organizational learning dimension. The lowest ranked question, with a mean of 3.11, reflected ABC Staffing’s ability to effectively acquire resources to meet its goals. The next ranked item was integration learning with a mean of 3.20, indicating a lack of knowledge around process and procedure updates.
Table 14

*Organizational Action Survey Lowest Ranked Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal learning</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing has set goals for researching and developing new services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has clear goals for individual development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration learning</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>● In my experience, there are systems in place to share new operational processes and procedures throughout the entire organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive performing</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing effectively uses organizational resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing effectively acquires external resources required to meet its goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 indicates the highest ranking items for the Organizational Innovativeness survey created by Wang and Ahmed (2004). Three of the five highest ranked items (60%) fell within the subscale of behavioral innovativeness reporting means of 3.6 and above. The highest ranking question referred to a willingness to try alternative ways to succeed ($\bar{x} = 3.80$). This set of questions indicated innovativeness traits were displayed by individuals within the organization. There was also a perception of novelty among clients ($\bar{x} = 3.62$) and one within the realm of leadership strategy and the ability to take risks ($\bar{x} = 3.69$).
Table 15

*Organizational Innovativeness Survey Highest Ranked Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>● At ABC we are willing to try alternate ways to meet our goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>● At ABC we encourage teams to be original.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>● We get a lot of support from managers if we want to try new ways of doing things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>● Our new services and solutions are often perceived as innovative by customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>● Leadership is willing to take risks to seize and explore new or innovative growth opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lowest ranked questions fell within a range of 2.93 to 3.30 (Table 16). A score of 3 translated to a response of “undecided” and as a result, these answers relayed a sense of indifference. The lowest scoring question referred to the organization’s research and development resources and capabilities ($\bar{x} = 2.93$). The next lowest ranked question pertained to the dimension of process innovativeness ($\bar{x} = 3.05$), signifying a slow adoption rate to creative or innovative processes.
Table 16

Organizational Innovativeness Survey Lowest Ranked Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>● In new service introductions, ABC is often at the cutting edge of technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>● When we see new ways of doing things, we are first at adopting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>● In comparison to our competitors, ABC's solutions have a higher success rate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>● ABC changes service offerings at a great speed in comparison with our competitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>● The resources of our research and development team, also known as the Talent Innovation Center (TIC), are adequate to handle the evolving needs for new services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forced-Rank

A forced-rank section followed the Likert scale questions. Participants were provided the following prompt: “Organizational success can be achieved through a variety of organizational actions. Please drag to rank each action on its importance to YOU.” Respondents were given eight statements to rank in order of importance for them personally. The weighted results (Table 17) revealed three of the top four responses (75%) fell along the subscale of performance versus learning with the number 1 response being: “Producing services of the highest quality possible” (weight = 510). Conversely, learning activities appeared in three of the four lowest ranking items. This signified the highest priorities for leaders include meeting the needs of their client base.
Table 17

*Themes From Forced-Rank Question Regarding Organizational Success.* “Organizational success can be achieved through a variety of organizational actions. Please drag to rank each action on its importance to YOU.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Performing or Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Producing services of the highest quality possible</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying resources required to meet organizational goals</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of information and knowledge required for continuous organizational improvement</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structures that support effective customer service</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on organizational experiences in order to improve services</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement of an open and flexible organizational culture</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance goals established by the organization</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining information concerning the changes in the organization's environment</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were then asked to rank each question on its importance to ABC Staffing (Table 18). Again, three of the top four responses (75%) fell along the performing dimension; however, the number 1 response was “Performance goals established by the organization,” which conversely fell much lower on the list of priorities for leaders (i.e., 7 out of 8). Asking the question in this way allowed the participants to distance themselves from the response and think about the approach of ABC Staffing as a whole. The results indicated a disconnect in the perceptions of the leaders versus the goals of the organization, where the leaders felt they wanted...
to deliver the highest quality products, and members of the organization as a whole were much more concerned with financial performance.

Table 18

*Themes From Forced-Rank Question Regarding Organizational Success.* “Organizational success can be achieved through a variety of organizational actions. Please drag to rank each action on its importance to ABC Staffing.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Performing or Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance goals established by the organization</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing services of the highest quality possible</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of information and knowledge required for continuous organizational improvement</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying resources required to meet organizational goals</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structures that support effective customer service</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on organizational experiences in order to improve services</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement of an open and flexible organizational culture</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining information concerning the changes in the organization's environment</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Open-Ended Question Analysis**

This section provides an analysis of the responses to the open-ended, future-perfect question: “Imagine five years from now our organization is being recognized as the #1 most innovative company, describe some of the innovative practices as well as processes we've implemented to get us there.” The use of a forward-thinking question allowed the respondents to
offer supplemental information regarding their opinion about what is needed to advance the organization’s market position. Although only 84 of the 87 respondents offered written responses, there were a total of 147 suggestions given. The written responses were coded and categorized with themes (Table 19). The responses were then reviewed to identify action words describing the capabilities of organizational learning, performance, and innovation. This approach is appropriate when attempting to understand a participant’s thoughts in a specific context (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Table 19

*Themes from Open-Ended Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solutions/value to clients</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People/teams/experience</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology automation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process improvement</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data &amp; predictive analytics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the suggestions made, 34% \((n = 50)\) directly pertained to providing new solutions, advancing current solutions, and bringing value to the client base. An example of such a suggestion is: “Link staffing to climate improvement. Be the first human capital firm to support sustainable energy through sourcing and training niche workers.” The next highest ranking at 24% \((n = 35)\) was categorized as “people, teams, experience.” These were items that either spoke to redesigning teams, work, or the experiences of candidates. One respondent suggested:
We need to have a disruption team that is tasked with building, operationalizing, and monetizing new ways and innovation without being encumbered by the status quo. These people would be independent from the OpCo [Operating Company] and protected from political pressure and solely worried about where the market is heading and how we play a role.

The third highest grouping spoke specifically to technology automation, with one respondent suggesting: “AI is the standard in all of our first-level connections across the total talent landscape. We use app-based and text-based communications for everything with customers, internally and with talent.” Overall, the focus of the text indicated ABC Staffing could do a much better job at performing by learning not only from the industry but from current practices alike.

Table 20

Open-Ended Question: Performing Versus Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance Analysis

An analysis of the descriptive statistics according to level did not reveal anything significant (Table 21). Directors and vice presidents viewed the learning orientation as slightly higher than executives with means of 3.84 and 3.77 respectively. Neither indicated a significant variance from the mean. The same was valid for both performing and innovativeness, which yielded only slight differences above or below the reported means of 3.89 and 3.43 respectively.

Table 21
Upon analysis of variances across divisions, there were a few items of note. Relative to all three scales, division CB indicated significantly lower mean scores. Across all three dimensions, RP, the largest division, reported scores slightly higher than the means of 3.84, 3.89, and 3.43. Although reporting a relatively small sample size ($n = 8$), division RC showed significantly higher mean scores across all three dimensions. Additionally, division K reported a significantly higher mean score relative to organizational learning, but the small sample size did not allow for conclusions.

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Performing</th>
<th>Innovativeness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB ($n = 13$)</td>
<td>3.45*</td>
<td>3.37*</td>
<td>2.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su ($n = 32$)</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP ($n = 23$)</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significantly lower than mean, **significantly higher than mean.

Tenure data (Table 23) revealed the highest scores relative to the dimensions of learning and performance belonging to leaders with less than 1 year of tenure. This could have been
attributed to the lack of exposure to organizational dynamics or vice versa, it could have
signified a comparison with their previous organization. The lowest reported scores were from
leaders with greater than 15 years of tenure, which could be attributed to understanding external
perceptions versus organizational realities.

Table 23

*Variance Across Tenure Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Performing</th>
<th>Innovativeness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>4.16**</td>
<td>4.19**</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 years</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–15 years</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>3.58*</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *Significantly lower than mean, **significantly higher than mean*
Conclusion

A comparison of mean scores for organizational learning and performance revealed relatively balanced perceptions across leadership. Mean scores of 3.84 and 3.89 respectively showed areas of opportunity for ABC Staffing. The same was true of organizational innovativeness, with reported overall mean scores of 3.43. Upon further review, although there were no significant differences in the thoughts of directors and vice presidents versus executives, there were some notable differences across division and tenure data. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the major findings, provides answers to the three research questions, and makes recommendations for ABC Staffing. The chapter also offers and discussion of implications for theory, practice, and future research.
Chapter 5: Findings and Recommendations

This study was an exploration of the linkages between organizational learning, performance, and innovation as perceived by leaders in a global HR solutions company. A descriptive case study was designed utilizing exploratory methods with multiple data points to ascertain ABC Staffing’s orientation towards learning as a collective organization. The aim was to use the knowledge gained to elevate their solutions and enhance their market position. Data was collected in three ways: (a) via the OAS (Johnson & Schwandt, 1998), (b) via the Organizational Innovativeness Assessment (Wang & Ahmed, 2004), and (c) via an open-ended, free form future-perfect question. A version of the Qualtrics platform was utilized to provide descriptive statistics evolving into inferential analysis.

This chapter provides an analysis of the significant findings of the study and provides answers to the two research questions, and one sub question put forth:

RQ1. What is the learning orientation across the four subsystems of OLSM as perceived by leaders at a global HR Solutions company?

RQ2. What is the level of innovativeness across the five factors of innovativeness as perceived by leaders at a global HR Solutions company?

Sub question: To what extent is there variation across functional areas?

Also included in this chapter are recommendations for the leadership team at ABC Staffing as well as implications for theory, practice, and future research.

Answers to the Research Questions

This research was designed to seed an understanding of two things: how leaders perceived their organizational learning and organizational innovation orientations and how to solicit insight to enhance current performance and advance toward an envisioned future state.
Organizational Learning

Research Question 1 was designed to specifically address learning orientation across the four subsystems of the OLSM. The instrument findings indicated the leaders of ABC Staffing saw the dimensions of organizational learning as favorable, producing a mean of 3.94, slightly under the 4.0 mark for agreement. This score suggests the leaders perceive the organization does relatively well at seeking out new information from varying sources. However, two things were revealed upon investigating the subscales: the subsystem goal learning produced the lowest mean (3.69) and the organization did a moderate job of reflective planning, critically examining criteria for success, focusing on new knowledge, creating goals for research and development, and emphasizing plausible readiness over planned change approach (Schwandt, 1998). This sentiment was also echoed upon further analysis of the individual questions. Three of the five (60%) lowest ranking items related specifically to organizational learning:

1. ABC Staffing has set goals for researching and developing new services (mean 3.59).
2. In my experience ABC Staffing has clear goals for individual development (mean 3.54).
3. In my experience, there are systems in place to share new operational processes and procedures throughout the entire organization (mean 3.20).

The forced-choice responses also revealed organizational learning was less a priority for the leadership team when compared to organizational performance when respondents were asked to rank the items in order of importance to leadership. Of the top four responses, 75% related to organizational performance with the top two priorities being “Producing services of the highest quality possible” and “Identifying resources required to meet organizational goals.” On the other hand, when asked to rank in order of importance to ABC Staffing, the ranking also revealed that 75% of the top four scores were relative to performance; however, the top two were “Performance goals established by the organization” followed by “Producing services of the
highest quality possible.” This finding indicates that the priorities of leaders included delivering excellent solutions first and foremost, but they also thought the primary goal of the leadership team was to first meet financial targets.

The text analysis revealed much of the same. When asked the question, “Imagine five years from now our organization is being recognized as the #1 Most Innovative Company, describe some of the innovative practices as well as processes we've implemented to get us there,” 84 of 87 respondents (97%) offered commentary totaling 147 suggestions. Of the 147 ideas put forward, 75% \((n = 110)\) related to organizational learning. Three responses to this effect are below:

- Solutions are developed and delivered from the perspective of solving a problem rather than developing a product to fill a gap. The ultimate goal is not how we can profit from solving the issue, rather how the consensus benefits from consistently alleviating issues for all parties.

- The innovation of new concepts and offerings has to go beyond sales approach and extend to service delivery with a central focus on the customer. We have to stop trying to deliver innovative outcomes with traditional and under-resourced service models throughout the life of the relationship.

- We have allowed our entry-level teams to share ideas on the best ways to do things and have a team that evaluates and implements the best ones. The best ideas often come from the ‘line.’

- We are good at identifying potentially beneficial innovations and technologies. However, I do not believe we are good at deploying them smartly and effectively. At times I feel we rush a solution before identifying the problem we are trying to solve for. We will be more successful if we first identify areas we want to improve and then search for or create innovations and technology enhancements.

Overall, the responses indicate that although the organizational factors revealed relatively balanced means for organizational learning (3.94) and organizational performance (3.89), the ranked questions and text analysis signify that ABC Staffing was more focused on performing against financial targets rather than learning to be more effective.
Organizational Innovativeness

Research Question 2 was designed to understand the perceived level of innovativeness by the leaders of ABC Staffing across the five factors of innovativeness. In comparison to the mean scores for organizational learning and organizational performance, organizational innovativeness ranked last (Table 16). The overall mean score of 3.43 signified a level of indifference as it fell more towards a ranking of 3, or undecided. Upon investigation of the subscales, the behavioral subscale ranked the highest (3.69), signifying the perception that individuals within the organization were willing to, encouraged to, and had the capacity to be creative; however the significantly lower ranking items of market innovation (3.37), process innovation (3.33), product innovation (3.41), and strategic innovation (3.36) indicate barriers. This sentiment was also echoed in the widely dispersed lowest ranked questions such as “When we see new ways of doing things, we are first at adopting them” (3.05), and “The resources of our research and development team are adequate to handle the evolving needs for new services” (2.93).

Upon review of the text analysis of the answers to the question “Imagine five years from now our organization is being recognized as the #1 Most Innovative Company, describe some of the innovative practices as well as processes we've implemented to get us there,” many of those barriers come to light with solutions offered as evidenced below:

There is a tremendous amount of bureaucracy and approvals that limits innovation and focus on innovation. There is a lot of "this is how we do things," which limits innovation. Part of that is being a mature organization, and things have worked well for a long time, but there is still an organizational resistance at a product level on how we deliver services and who gets to decide.

[We need to] take down the walls between business units who compete internally for revenue, and brought leadership into operations who is driven more so by growth than by not rocking the boat.
We would have broken down silos across LOBs, [lines of business] and we would have an agile model in place allowing us to pivot . . . and the pivot will allow us to transform our core business, grow the core and also scale the new.

[We would have an] innovation group that listens to employees and clients.

I believe that [ABC] should lead the industry in the creation of ideas, and challenging individuals to think differently. The challenge to this is that we do not have an operating system to bring the ideas to life and execute, especially when ideas threaten a traditional revenue stream.

Migration from a hierarchical structure to an agile, flexible network.

[We need] innovation teams from all functions that are empowered to develop and implement and to breakdown walls of functions, organized by the work for our clients and not traditional structures.

The overall finding for organizational innovativeness is that although innovation is encouraged and required, the leadership team felt trapped within the confines of financial targets, bureaucracy, depleting resources, siloed workgroups, and traditional hierarchical structures that lacked the agility and flexibility needed to execute creatively.

**Variation Across Functional Areas**

Although the data for organizational learning, performance, and innovativeness offered no discernable distinction between the perceptions of directors or vice presidents versus the executive leadership team (i.e., senior vice presidents through C-level), it did offer some insight across both division and tenure. There were two significant noteworthy areas regarding divisions. The first is that the CB division produced mean scores that were significantly less than the average across all three dimensions. This finding is echoed within the CB division's open text fields that included responses such as: “[We need] technology that actually provides efficiency;” “Break down walls and organize by the work needed for clients;” “[We need to] create a seamless work environment for our teams;” “[We need] better integrated technologies
versus separate tools and processes;” “[We need] to transform our employee interactions to be more thoughtful, creative, consultative, and client/candidate-focused.” The CB division was the centralized support function for recruiters and sourcers. They were intimately involved with all technologies, processes, and teams.

The second point of note was the mean scores from the RC division, which were significantly higher than the mean. The RC division worked very differently than any other division within ABC Staffing for two reasons: they operated within one technology versus upwards of five to seven comparatively which is centrally managed and updated, and second: they had a majority-regional portfolio with most of their client base (and hence their teams) located in the Northeast, which contributed to ease of communication.

The final area of investigation was tenure data. The first area of interest was leaders who had been with the company for less than 1 year, and because leaders with less than 6 months of tenure were excluded, this category encompassed those with 6 to 12 months of tenure. The data indicated this group reported significantly higher mean scores than all other populations. Conversely, those with the most significant amount of tenure, 15 or more years, reported the lowest mean scores. These results signify that the employees who have been around the longest, may be the most frustrated. This sentiment is echoed in quotes such as: “[We need] tech that meets the actual needs, tech is often too generic to meet the needs;” “[We need to] listen to the voice of the delivery teams and the voice of the customer,” and “[We need to] redesign manager and director responsibilities to best leverage roles.”
Recommendations

To the leaders of ABC Staffing, the overall recommendation is to foster a culture of organizational learning in order to become a learning organization. The following sets forth steps to do so.

A Culture of Organizational Learning

No industry is exempt from change. Technological advancements impact all markets across the globe. The need to react to the pressure to diversify by innovation either leaves organizations crippled or moving at a pace so swiftly they run the risk of mistaking or mishandling top priorities. Large-scale organizations are steeped in history, hierarchies, and bureaucracies, so many do not possess the agility needed to react to the pressures of a fast-paced global environment. The question of how to become more efficient and effective using fewer resources and facing competing priorities has left organizational leaders feeling perplexed as they try and discern when and how to change. The competition no longer lies with only those within a given industry, as consumer experiences with multi-brands such as Apple and Amazon also drive expectations. The ability to exploit external knowledge in tandem with internal, or prior knowledge, is a critical factor in an organization’s innovative capabilities (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Becoming an organization that learns dynamically is vital. A learning organization derives as a result of the learning and subsequent behavior of its people (Honey & Mumford, 1992). “The ability of employees to learn faster than the competition is the only sustainable advantage” (de Gus, 1988, p. 71). The leaders of ABC Staffing could benefit from instilling practices propelling them towards becoming a learning organization.
**Environmental Interface**

Research and development are the part of a company's operations designed to seek the knowledge needed to develop, design, and enhance products, services, technologies, or processes. In addition to creating new products and adding features to old ones, investing in research and development connects various parts of a company's overall strategy. At the time of this study, ABC Staffing did not have a research and development team, so the first recommendation is to put research and development into practice. ABC Staffing should deploy a diverse group of cross-functional, operating company agnostic research-and-development professionals comprised of all levels, from all divisions, aimed at bringing information into the system from external and internal sources. This team should include both well-tenured and newer professionals and report into a matrix of all functional leaders. Learning organizations place emphasis on the contributions of all people at all levels of the organization, seeking to gain their knowledge and learning for organizational benefit (Slater & Narver, 1995). The purpose of this function will be to learn and to understand the competitor landscape, the industry, the voice of the customer, and the candidate and employee experience. This group should pursue staffing data, HR solutions data, labor and technology trends, and HR industry disruptors like Indeed, LinkedIn, and ZipRecruiter. The group should also focus on who is in the non-competitor landscape (i.e., those that are not in direct competition, but who influence consumer expectations) such as Amazon, Uber, and Google. The data collected from the various sources should be synthesized, analyzed, and utilized to compare against the current state of ABC Staffing and determine the slate of problems to attack via obsession strategies focused on outcomes rather than inputs.
Customer obsession. In 2018, Jeff Bezos, founder and chief executive officer of Amazon, gave an interview at the George W. Bush Presidential Center’s Forum on Leadership, where he discussed four core principles for Amazon’s success. The first was customer obsession. Bezos stated:

The first and by far the most important one is customer obsession as opposed to competitor obsession; I have seen over and over again companies talk about being customer focused, but really when I pay close attention to them, I believe they are competitor focused, and it's a completely different mentality. (Tabaka, 2018)

In addition, ABC Staffing should become intimate with the customers; understand their wants, needs, buying habits, challenges, and choices. As an example, ABC conducts customer satisfaction surveys biannually, in which the customers are widely responsive. The topics cover areas such as speed, quality, innovation, and technology. In the most recent survey, Division RC, whose leadership team touted scores significantly above the mean relative to learning, performance, and innovation (Table 22), reported scores of -1.9 relative to problem solving and -20.0 relative to innovation. More explicitly, two examples of feedback were: “[The team does] not bring solutions to the table, and we are the ones who have to provide answers,” and “The interface is not user-friendly, it is very difficult and confusing and does not meet my needs.” This kind of customer data can be utilized to create a future-state strategy focusing on how to design solutions aimed at delighting. The strategy should include how to predict workforce trends, how to make smarter hiring decisions, how to deploy flexible teams of experts to get clients to steady state, and how to upskill staffing professionals to be more thoughtful, intentional, and creative in their approaches.

Candidate obsession. ABC Staffing should also utilize talent and candidate data to explore challenges with flexibility, benefits, work–life balance, and training needs. Leadership should investigate resources and options being offered by competitors and explore not only the
perceived value of solutions offered, but the reputation and brand of those with whom ABC Staffing has previously interacted. Forty-four percent of working professionals are concerned that they may lose their job in the future as a result of technological advancements (Bersin, 2019). Additionally, 43% of working professionals will pursue technical skills development such as data analysis, coding, writing, and computer programming on their own this year (Korn Ferry, 2019). It is suggested that ABC Staffing research trends within the talent market and understand where the evolution of artificial intelligence, robots, and automation and design strategies will leave gaps that will need to be filled.

**Employee obsession.** Staffing and recruitment professionals represent ABC Staffing to the clients and serve as the backbone of ABC Staffing’s business. Leadership should seek out information about why employees stay, current struggles, and employee engagement drivers. The findings should be compared with other staffing agencies, consultancies, and HR solutions providers to understand the competitive landscape as it relates to talent. Ideas should be solicited from front-line employees, those with fearlessly loyal clients, those with clients who have recently abandoned, and everyone in between. This information can be used to create a new mission that resonates with the employee base, perhaps not steeped in becoming or being the world’s largest staffing provider, but perhaps in changing the world of work or transforming careers and organizations.

**Technology obsession.** ABC Staffing should lead the way as a technology company with a human capital strategy rather than as a staffing company with technology. According to Gartner’s April 2018 forecast, worldwide information technology spending is projected to reach about $3.85 trillion in 2019, up 2.8% from 2018 (Costello & Omale, 2019). This information can be used to develop a strategy for designing technology that is inclusive of the human element
with the candidate and client experiences at the core. The new technology should be intuitive and inherently relay feasibility and functionality. Developers should be hired to build a customizable solution designed in-house to meet current and future goals for candidates and customers alike. Also, one point of entry should be created where customers and candidates can have a seamless experience meeting all of their staffing needs (i.e., full time, part time, contract, permanent, intern, or freelancer). One competitor, recently recognized as one of the top five staffing firms in the world, spoke of their technology as “a mobile-first, cloud-based platform that creates a consumer-like candidate experience and streamlines the sourcing process” (peoplescout.com). This is what clients expect, rather than four to six technologies from multiple vendors with varying price structures and access points. Customers are also attempting to navigate the waters of technological developments and industry impact. Solutions should be considered that also attack the challenges emerging technology trends create for them as well.

Action and Reflection

Upon determining the new strategy, ABC Staffing should use action and reflection techniques such as agile methodologies and design thinking. Many organizations have adopted design thinking as a problem-solving approach in response to the need for new ways of thinking. Design thinking is a flexible and iterative approach to problem solving that requires soliciting candid feedback, empathy, dynamic thinking, idea generation, prototype creation, and risk-taking (Brown, 2008). The literature offered many examples of organizations that have generated positive results through the use of design thinking (Brown, 2008). Design thinking is used across a myriad of industries to change management problems, product or process design, marketing challenges, and software development.
In his book *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*, Tim Brown (2009) sought to debunk traditional change management models. According to Brown (2009), traditional change management models are rooted in four basic principles:

1. Understand successful change initiatives start at the top.
2. Create a task force of leaders who can clearly articulate the vision and strategy in less than five minutes.
3. Cascade the plan throughout every level of the organization.
4. Mobilize middle management to drive change throughout.

Missing within these more traditional change management models is the concept of design thinking. The aim of design thinking is to design products, services, and change with the end-user in mind. The intention is to be insightful, creative, and empathetic relative to problem solving. Before making any change within an organization, Brown (2009) suggested visiting the place of work and researching interviews, surveys, and observations to not only listen for and document process, but more importantly, to understand how individuals experience the work. It is critical to understand what is favorable and unfavorable, to actively listen for suggestions and solutions, investigate historical information and what is missing as well as what is currently viewed as valuable. These observations will produce knowledge, learning, and insights, leading to inspiration, ideation, and thus, implementation. Design thinking serves to tap into the collective intelligence to understand the emotional, physical, and cognitive experience to design a product or service with the customer in mind utilizing 360-degree insights. “Solution design is not about applying our methods to their world, but rather understanding their world and designing something they will value” (Brown, 2009, p. 44). Using Schwandt’s (1998) OLSM to solicit information, take action, reflect, and change course as needed will be critical for the competitive advantage and future sustainability of ABC Staffing. As new solutions are built and
new teams are designed, a thoughtful change management plan to fully implement and disperse information throughout the organization will be the next critical move.

**Dissemination and Diffusion**

Burnes and Jackson (2011) found that 70% of change-implementation failures in organizations were related to diminished employee motivation to embrace the changes. One of the problems detected by researchers was the limited tolerance of transformative change by individual employees, teams, and organizations (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). Most human systems are not built for rapid, frequent, large scale changes and the impact can result in increased turnover and aggression, as well as decreased engagement and productivity. In this age of information sharing, transparency, and visibility, employees expect to be involved in decision making (Gallego-Toledo, 2015). Businesses can no longer afford to make jarring, large-scale decisions utilizing the top-down approach (Brown, 2009).

Another area where many companies could improve is by better estimating the direct impact of emotions on employee engagement, productivity, performance, well-being, and the overall business (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). There is a competing priority between the frequency and pace required of Fortune 500 organizations to innovate and evolve for sustainability and what employees need to effectively cope and maintain productivity (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). Rapid, transformational change can work to the detriment of personnel if thoughtful change management practices are not employed (Halkos & Dimitrios, 2012).

Hence, ABC Staffing should communicate the need, which will appropriately take place via whichever media (e.g., print, electronic, social, intranet sites, town halls, webinars, and roadshows) is deemed appropriate for the target audience. Key influencers are critical to this stage as it is often more effective to adopt a message via multiple equally invested stakeholders
who are all influential in their own right rather than through a single chief executive officer (Kotter, 1995). Gladwell (2000) included the cascade of information, identification of early adopters, timing, and initial activities as a part of this phase. Lastly, the plan must be thought about from all perspectives, utilizing the words of the employees and the feedback gathered in both the environmental interface and action and reflection stages in order to address those who are perceived as resistors (Brehm, 1966). In order to appeal to humans, this phase must begin with examining the compelling human reason of why a change is needed. The connection to business strategy and profits is typically inherent, but it will be important to note if some part of the change will resonate with the spirit of the employees because it will need to be stressed and reiterated during all phases of the change.

**Memory and Meaning**

In large organizations particularly, change is too complicated for one action (i.e., intervention) to do the job. Following Gladwell (2000), this is the point of post launch where repetition permeating from multiple levels within the organization is the key to success. It is also at this point in the Gladwell model where the literature showed how to measure and sustain the change utilizing methods such as financial measurement or survey feedback. The key is consistency and perseverance. Many potential leaders falter during this phase, potentially because of the need to mitigate confusion, miscommunication, and misdirection, because the leader has become the target of scrutiny, or due to unanticipated or unintended consequences. Keeping the pace and momentum while repeating the message and returning to the drawing board as needed marks the will of great leaders (Kaplan & Norton, 2006)) and will be required for a solid go-forward strategy for ABC Staffing.
Concluding Remarks

Organizational learning practices help unstable organizations overcome chaotic and changing conditions (Hanaysha, 2016). Utilizing an organizational learning model to determine gaps in the system could prove helpful in alleviating pain points relative to fragmented solutions and an unclear technology and people strategy. In addition, having a well-crafted and multidimensional strategy to implement large scale change that begins with learning, how and when to communicate, impact to company culture, organizational readiness, and technology implications will help set the stage for organizational performance. This strategy should include a multipronged leadership approach with a dynamic leadership team willing to chart the course towards achieving stated goals.

Implications

This research has a broad-spanning impact not only for business organizations, but any entity which seeks to remain relevant beyond its current status. It is grounded in theory and previous work and seeks to offer insight for practitioners as well as serves as an impetus for future research.

Implications for Theory

The findings of this study are in alignment with empirical, foundational work put forth by scholars relative not only to the field of organizational learning and innovation, but also to knowledge management. Much like organizational learning, knowledge management is a system that promotes collaboration enabling the sharing of existing knowledge, facilitating the generation of new knowledge, and providing a structure for the appropriate approach to evaluate the best means of meeting strategic goals (Gorelick & Monsou, 2005). Jerez-Gomez, Cespedes-Lorente, & Valle-Cabrera (2005) argued that knowledge and, more specifically, its acquisition or
creation, along with its dissemination and integration within the organization can become a key strategic resource and therefore, is complementary to organizational learning. As such, organizational learning is viewed as a dynamic process based on knowledge, which implies moving among the different levels of action, from the individual, to the group, to the organizational level, and back again (Crossan et al., 1999).

Garratt (1995) found that a learning organization is the culmination of both organizational development and learning. In order to satisfy ever-evolving consumer demands, organizations must develop both personal and group learning capabilities. Without knowledge management, an organization cannot develop personal or group learning abilities (Garratt, 1995).

In accordance with Schwandt (1994), the learning system is a key critical element necessary for an organization’s survival and must be considered forever evolutionary and universal for all.

**Implications for Practice**

Organizations face increasing consumer demands driven by an abundance of options, making customer loyalty a challenge. O’Reilly and Tushman (2011) contended that organizations learn based on their ability to adapt to their environment. Organizational leaders have found themselves perplexed while attempting to navigate exactly how to compete in this market, especially those who are a part of historical staples of tradition. This research offers empirical evidence which can be added to the existing bodies of literature on organizational learning, performance, innovation, change, and transformation. Cross-functional leaders from various industries can use the insights from this study to learn how to leverage internal and external knowledge to drive change, transformation, and performance. Other workforce planning, HR advisory and staffing organizations must consider how to foster organizational learning when they are obsessed with catching the next market trend. However, the rate of
change these types of companies experience and are required to endure due to the nature of the
business model may limit transferability to some areas such as higher education.

**Implications for Future Research**

The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of leaders in their current mode of operating relative to organizational learning, performance, and innovation as well as to investigate perceived barriers to innovation and to solicit feedback for improvement that could be shared with executive leadership. Although the study only offered insight into variations across functional areas and tenure, the researcher also collected additional demographic data points, including: gender, ethnicity, age or generation, highest level of education, and geographic location. Future studies would benefit from a more in-depth analysis of each of these demographics offering richer insights for executive leaders tasked with initiating targeted improvements. In addition, regression analysis indicating the relationships between the scales and subscales and related areas of positive or negative correlation could provide further detail regarding which organizational learning and performance levers would yield the most significant results.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to understand the orientation of organizational learning and innovativeness as perceived by the North American leaders at ABC Staffing. The orientation of organizational learning was measured by Johnson and Schwandt’s (1998) assessment measuring the four learning subsystems of environmental interface, action and reflection, dissemination and diffusion, and meaning and memory. These dimensions reflected how information is brought into an organization, processed and acted upon, dispersed, and eventually made a part of daily routines. Data was also collected utilizing Wang and Ahmed’s
(2004) Organizational Innovativeness survey, which measured both overall innovativeness as well as the dimensions of behavioral, market, product, process, and strategic innovativeness as perceived by organizational leaders. The third data point collected was in the form of open text, allowing the respondents to offer practices moving the organization towards a desired future state. The results of this study will add to relevant bodies of literature not only in the fields of staffing and HR solutions, but for research on how any global organization can navigate the waters of reinvention or extinction.
References


Mitchell, K. (2016, August 1). *In-person job interviews better received than video and phone options*. Retrieved from https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/person-job-interviews-better-received-video-and-phone-options


Qualtrics.com retrieved November 2 2019.


Tabaka, M. (2018, April, 15). *Amazon’s 4 keys to success, according to Jeff Bezos.* Retrieved from https://www.inc.com/marla-tabaka/jeff-bezos-says-these-4-principles-are-key-to-amazons-success-they-can-work-for-you-too.html


Appendix A

Site Approval

From: Tokea Andebrhan <tokea.andebrhan@randstadsourceright.com>
Date: Wed, Mar 20, 2019 at 5:22 AM
Subject: Research Site Approval
To: Cheryl MacMillan <cheryl.macmillan@randstadsourceright.com>

Cheryl,

I am planning ahead for the thesis/dissertation phase of my research and would like to obtain approval from you, Dan, Cindy prior to getting too far down the path. You can simply respond to this email with "approved" and next steps, i.e. go to Dan next, or "not approved" and next steps.

**The ask here is for approval to conduct research. Approval must be obtained prior to any recruitment efforts (tentatively set for July)**

Site Approval

Problem statement and purpose statement Today’s world is evolving at such a rapid pace that the only constant is change. Venturing a step further, sustained competitiveness in an international marketplace demands a culture of continuous, holistic, and rapid innovation. The purpose of this study is to investigate the process of implementing and sustaining successful and innovative change efforts in a global staffing organization.

Research goals
1. To understand how information is brought into the information, processed, transferred into knowledge, disseminated, and becomes the impetus for change
2. To determine what themes or areas of opportunity there are to process information faster, make successful decisions, and remain ahead of the market

Participants & Data Collection
Upon securing all approvals required via my EdD program, a web-based, online survey would be distributed to RSR Managers and above with a minimum of six months tenure
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

**Title of Project:** The Quest for Innovation: A Case Study exploring the relationship between Organizational Learning Systems and Innovativeness within a Global Staffing Organization as perceived by managers using a survey instrument

**Faculty Principal Investigator:** Dr. Margaret Gorman  
**Student Researcher:** Tokea Andebhran Morales

We would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey for Tokea Morales’s doctoral dissertation. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to examine how organizational learning can generate the knowledge needed to innovate. This survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary. No identifiable information will be captured. All responses remain anonymous and only aggregated findings will be shared out for the dissertation research report. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group level data as being affiliated with this project.

There is no compensation for participation, nor foreseeable risks or discomforts. Your participation helps the researcher meet her requirement for her doctoral program. Insights about the connection between organizational learning and innovation will provide insight for leadership decisions at Randstad Sourceright.

**If you have any questions about this study,** please feel free to contact Tokea Andebhran Morales at Morales.to@husky.neu.edu, who is mainly responsible for this research. Feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Margaret Gorman, at m.kirchoff@northeastern.edu

Please note that any emails sent to Tokea Andebhran Morales’s work or personal email must be deleted with no response.

**For any questions regarding electronic privacy,** please feel free to contact Mark Nardone, NU’s Director of Information Security via phone at 617-373-7901, or via email at privacy@neu.edu.

**For questions regarding your rights as a research participant,** please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

This research is solely for educational purposes for Northeastern University.
This study has been reviewed and approved by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (# xx-xx-xx). [protocol # will be provided to you by the HSRP office].

By clicking on the “accept” button below you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study. Please print out a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Tokea Andebrhan Morales
Dear RSR Leader,

My name is Tokea Andebrhan Morales and I am currently pursuing a Doctoral degree in Organizational Leadership at Northeastern University under the supervision of Dr. Margaret Gorman. As part of my research I will be administering a survey to all Managers and above who have been with Sourceright at least six months.

The survey should less than 10 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, no identifiable information will be collected, all responses remain anonymous, and only aggregated findings will be reported.

You will have a two-week window to complete the survey and an automatic reminder email will be sent on Fridays.

If you have any questions about this study, I invite you to email me at morales.to@husky.neu.edu. Please note that per Northeastern University IRB (ethics board), emails to my work email address or phone calls to me at work regarding this study must be deleted with no response. This is survey is solely student work, though it may be shared with employees of Sourceright.

The link to the survey is: here
Appendix D

Reminder Email

Dear RSR Leader,

As a reminder you have been invited to participate in a confidential, web-based online survey which will soon close. Please see below for the initial invitation.

My name is Tokea Andebrhan Morales and I am currently pursuing a Doctoral degree in Organizational Leadership at Northeastern University under the supervision of Dr. Margaret Gorman. As part of my research I will be administering a survey to all Managers and above who have been with Sourceright at least six months.

You will have a two-week window to complete the survey and an automatic reminder email will be sent on Fridays.

If you have any questions about this study, I invite you to email me at morales.to@husky.neu.edu. Please note that per Northeastern University IRB (ethics board), emails to my work email address or phone calls to me at work regarding this study must be deleted with no response. This is survey is solely student work, though it may be shared with employees of Sourceright.
Appendix E

Thank You Email

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for my doctoral studies at Northeastern University. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at morales.to@husky.neu.edu.

Tokea Andebrhan Morales
## Appendix F
### Survey Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptation learning</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing predicts the changes occurring in the staffing industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing tracks how competitors improve their products, services, and operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental interface</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing deliberately reflects upon and evaluates external information (e.g., competitors or the overall staffing industry) to help make decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal learning</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing has set goals for researching and developing new services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing effectively uses organizational structures (e.g., chain of command, personal networks) when sharing ideas and innovations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/reflection</strong></td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing has clear goals for individual development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integration learning</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing provides opportunities for employees to develop their knowledge, skills, and capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing's leaders support quick and accurate communication among ALL employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissemination &amp; diffusion</strong></td>
<td>- In my experience, there are systems in place to share new operational processes and procedures throughout the entire organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing has established teams, networks, workstreams, and other collaborative arrangements to help the organization adapt to change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latency learning</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing uses ideas and suggestions from its employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing believes that continuous change is necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing has a strong culture of shared values, beliefs, and norms that support individual development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memory &amp; meaning</strong></td>
<td>- In my experience, people in ABC Staffing believe that acting upon what customers say is critical to reaching organizational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptive performing</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing effectively uses organizational resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquisition of resources</td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing effectively acquires external resources required to meet its goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal performing/production service</strong></td>
<td>- ABC Staffing's leaders are effective at achieving organizational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing has clear performance goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In my experience, ABC Staffing has established achievable strategic objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative performing</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing holds teams accountable for achieving established goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing implements changes to help employees be more effective in doing their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management &amp; control</td>
<td>● In my experience, managers and leaders have the skills needed to guide organizational change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, the solutions of collaborative teams are of much higher quality than anyone of us could have produced alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency performing</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing uses historical references to let people know how they should perform their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
<td>● ABC Staffing publicly acknowledges employees for outstanding performance (e.g., featuring them on intranet communications, plaques, and in person).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● ABC Staffing believes it needs to continuously improve customer service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● In my experience, ABC Staffing has a strong culture of shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide daily work activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL FOR USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Before completing this application, please read the Application Instructions and Policies and Procedures for Human Research Protections to understand the responsibilities for which you are accountable as an investigator in conducting research with human participants. The document, Application Instructions, provides additional assistance in preparing this submission. Incomplete applications will be returned to the investigator. You may complete this application online and save it as a Word document.

If this research is related to a grant, contract proposal or dissertation, a copy of the full grant/contract proposal/dissertation must accompany this application.

Please carefully edit and proof read before submitting the application. Applications that are not filled out completely and/or have any missing or incorrect information will be returned to the Principal Investigator.

REQUIRED TRAINING FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Under the direction of the Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Northeastern University is now requiring completion of the NIH Office of Extramural Research training for all human subject research, regardless of whether or not investigators have received funding to support their project. This requirement will be effective as of November 15, 2008 for all new protocols.

If you have not yet completed some type of human subject protection training, Northeastern University now has an account with CITI for Human Subjects Training, which can be accessed at the following url: https://www.citiprogram.org. Once you are on the site, click the “Register” button located on the top right of the page to begin. All NU-affiliates can take the CITI training course at no charge. Please register using your NU email address and then complete the CITI Social & Behavioral Research Stage 1 Basic Course.

Principal Investigators, student researchers and key personnel (participants who contribute substantively to the scientific development or execution of a project) must include a copy of their certificate of completion for this web-based tutorial with the protocol submission.

A. Investigator Information

Principal Investigator (PI cannot be a student)  __Dr. Margaret Gorman

Investigator is: NU Faculty  X  NU Staff  ________  Other  _________

College:  Choose an item  __Northeastern University College of Professional Studies__

Department/Program  Doctor of Education: Organizational Leadership Studies

Address  __42 Belvedere, 360 Huntington Ave Boston, MA 02115__

Office Phone  __(202) 425-7111__  Email  _m.kirchoff@northeastern.edu_
Is this student research? YES __ X__ NO ______If yes, please provide the following information:
Student Name Tokea Andebrhan Morales _______ Anticipated graduation date March 2020
Undergrad ____ MA/MS ____ PhD ____ AuD ____ EdD ____ DLP ____ Other Degree Type ____
College: Choose an item. ______ Northeastern University College of Professional Studies ______
Department/Program Department of Education: Organizational Leadership Studies ______
Full Mailing Address 585 McWilliams Rd SE Unit 1803 Atlanta, GA 30315 ______
Telephone ____ (404) 787-9911 ______ Primary Email ____ morales.to@husky.neu.edu ______
Cell phone ____ (404) 787-9911 ______ Secondary Email ______

B. Protocol Information
Title ______ The Quest for Innovation: A Case Study exploring the relationship between Organizational Learning Systems and Innovativeness within a Global Staffing Organization as perceived by managers using a survey instrument.
Projected # subjects ____ 100-150______
Approx. begin date of project ______ July 2019_ Approx. end date August 2020

It is the policy of Northeastern University that no activity involving human subjects be undertaken until those activities have been reviewed and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

- Anticipated funding agency/source for project (or none) _None_
- Has/will this proposal been/be submitted through:
  - NU's Office of Research Administration and Finance (RAF) _No_____
  - Provost _No__
  - Corp & Foundations _No_____
  - Other _No_____
- Grant Title: N/A ______
- Grant ID: N/A ______

C. Will Participants Be: Yes No | Does the Project Involve: Yes No
---|---
Blood Removal? ____ X____
Investigational drug/device? ____ X____
Audiotapes/videotapes? ____ X____
Children (<18) _______ X____
Northeastern University Students? ____ X____
Institutionalized persons? ____ X____
Prisoners? ____ X____
Cognitively Impaired Persons? ____ X____
Non or Limited English Speaking Persons? ____ X____
People Living outside the USA? ____ X____
Pregnant Women/Fetuses? ____ X____
D. What are the goals of this research? Please state your research question(s) and related hypotheses.
The goal of the research is to understand the relationship between organizational learning and innovativeness as perceived by managers at global HR Staffing Company as they seek to enhance their market position.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between organizational learning and innovativeness as perceived by managers at global HR Staffing Company?

Research Question 2: To what extent is there variation depending on functional area and role?

E. Provide a brief summary of the purpose of the research in non-technical language.
The purpose of this research is to gather survey data from broad representation of managers across this global staffing company to be able to identify connections between how the company learns and its innovativeness.

F. Identify study personnel on this project. Include name, credentials, role, and organization affiliation.
Tokea Andebrhan Morales, NEU doctoral student investigator and director at Randstad Sourceright.
Dr. Margaret Gorman, dissertation chair & Principal Investigator, NEU full-time faculty.

G. Identify other organizations or institutions that are involved. Attach current Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals or letters of permission as necessary.
Research Site: Randstad Sourceright, has been granted permission to conduct dissertation research; Chief People Officer, Cindy Keveaney and the Chief Operating Officer, Daniel Oakes (see appendix A).

H. Recruitment Procedures
Describe the participants you intend to recruit. Provide all inclusion and exclusion criteria. Include age range, number of subjects, gender, ethnicity/race, socio-economic level, literacy level and health (as applicable) and reasons for exempting any groups. Describe how/when/by whom inclusion/exclusion criteria will be determined.

All Managers and above from various departments across Randstad Sourceright with at least six months of tenure will be invited to complete a secure, anonymous, online survey.
This group will include all Randstad professional managers who are working adults across a range of ages, races, and ethnic backgrounds. Only the student researcher and her three direct reports will be excluded from the study due to their familiarity of the topic.

Describe the procedures that you will use to recruit these participants. Be specific. How will potential subjects be identified? Who will ask for participation? If you intend to recruit using letters, posters, fliers, website, email, PsyLink description, HIT, etc., copies must be included as attachments for stamped approval. Include scripts for intended telephone recruitment.

No identifiable information will be collected those participants completing the survey. The student researcher will send a blind-copy email from her husky account inviting volunteer participation and including an embedded link to secured Qualtrics survey. The first page of Qualtrics will include the informed consent statement which will prohibit advancement into the survey without agreement to informed consent. The survey will remain open for two-weeks. A reminder email will go out on Fridays at the end of weeks 1 and 2, as well as the final day of the survey. Appendix B shows the introductory/informed consent text to appear on the first screen, Appendix C shows the invitation letter, Appendix D shows the reminder email, and Appendix E indicates the thank you communication for completing the survey. The only email address provided for the student-researcher will be morales.to@husky.neu.edu, see Appendix I to confirm email forwarding is not active. The Human Resources department will furnish the student investigator a list of emails for employees meet the criterion (manager level up + 5 years). No employee names or emails will be cross-referenced for any purpose and this email list will remain locked.

What remuneration, if any, is offered?

None.

I. Consent Process

Describe the process of obtaining informed consent*. Be specific. How will the project and the participants’ role be presented to potential participants? By whom? When? Where? Having the participant read and sign a consent statement is done only after the researcher provides a detailed oral explanation and answers all questions. Please attach a copy of informed consent statements that you intend to use, if applicable. Click here for consent form templates.

If your study population includes non-English speaking people, translations of consent information are necessary. Describe how information will be translated and by whom. You may wait until the consent is approved in English before having it translated.

The informed consent will be obtained when the potential participant clicks the link to enter the survey. The first page will include a description of the critical IRB areas, and participants will be required to click “accept” in agreement in order to advance to the survey.
If your population includes children, prisoners, people with limited mental capacity, language barriers, problems with reading or understanding, or other issues that may make them vulnerable or limit their ability to understand and provide consent, describe special procedures that you will institute to obtain consent appropriately. If participants are potentially decisionally impaired, how will you determine competency?

N/A

*If incomplete disclosure during the initial consent process is essential to carrying out the proposed research, please provide a detailed description of the debriefing process. Be specific. When will full disclosure of the research goals be presented to subjects (e.g., immediately after the subject has completed the research task(s) or held off until the completion of the study’s data collection)? By whom? Please attach a copy of the written debriefing statement that will be given to subjects.

N/A

J. Study Procedures

Provide a detailed description of all activities the participant will be asked to do and what will be done to the participants. Include the location, number of sessions, time for each session, and total time period anticipated for each participant, including long term follow up.

A one-time survey will be administered to employees who meet the study criteria. The survey will be opened for two-week period. The survey is anticipated to take 10-15 minutes to complete, it contains 61 likert-scale items, followed by a standard demographic list of items to include tenure at the organization, tenure within the industry, highest education completed, level within the organization, and gender.

Who will conduct the experimental procedures, questionnaires, etc? Where will this be done? Attach copies of all questionnaires, interview questions, tests, survey instruments, links to online surveys, etc.

The student researcher will utilize Qualtrics to ensure confidentiality of the survey administration and data. The survey was written by the student researcher and does not belong to any other person. The survey link will be controlled only by the researcher. (appendix F). The survey link is here: 

K. Risks

Identify possible risks to the participant as a result of the research. Consider possible psychological harm, loss of confidentiality, financial, social, or legal damages as well as physical risks. What is the seriousness of these risks and what is the likelihood that they may occur?

There are no known risks to the participants for this anonymous, confidential, optional survey. The findings will only be presented in an aggregate manner and no responses will be linked to individual participants.
Describe in detail the safeguards that will be implemented to minimize risks. What follow-up procedures are in place if harm occurs? What special precautions will be instituted for vulnerable populations?

This is not a vulnerable population, these are adults and the topics is work-related. No identifying information will be collected.

L. Confidentiality

Describe in detail the procedures that will be used to maintain anonymity or confidentiality during collection and entry of data. Who will have access to data? How will the data be used, now and in the future?

Tokea Andebrhan Morales will administer the survey & analyzed within the Stats IQ portion of Qualtrics. Dr. Gorman, dissertation chair, will have access to all survey data, to be utilized as required by the Northeastern University IRB should there be a complaint regarding this study. The data will be used to complete the dissertation project.

How and where will data be stored? How will electronic data be encrypted? When will data, including audiotapes and videotapes, be destroyed? If data is to be retained, explain why. Will identifiers or links to identification be destroyed? When? Signed consent documents must be retained for 3 years following the end of the study. Where and how will they be maintained?

Survey responses will be kept in a password-protected file for a maximum of five years. Tokea Andebrhan Morales will have sole responsibility for maintaining the survey data.

M. If your research is HIPAA-protected, please complete the following; Individual Access to PHI

Describe the procedure that will be used for allowing individuals to access their PHI or, alternatively, advising them that they must wait until the end of the study to review their PHI.

N/A

N. Benefits

What benefits can the participant reasonably expect from his/her involvement in the research? If none, state that. What are potential benefits to others?

Potential benefits include insights into learning and innovation to be utilized by Randstad Sourceright to make leadership decisions.

O. Attachments

Identify attachments that have been included and those that are not applicable (n/a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C, D, E</th>
<th>Copy of fliers, ads, posters, emails, web pages, letters for recruitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Scripts of intended telephone conversations*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Copies of IRB approvals or letters of permission from other sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**P. Health Care Provision During Study**

Please check the applicable line:

___ X ___ I have read the description of HIPAA “health care” within Section 4 of the Policies & Procedures for Human Research Protection. I am not a HIPAA-covered health care provider and no health care will be provided in connection with this study.

_____ I am a HIPAA-covered health care provider or I will provide health care in connection with this study as described in Section 4 of the Policies & Procedures for Human Research Protection. This health care is described above under “Study Procedures,” and the Informed Consent and Health Information Use and Disclosure Authorization form will be used with all prospective study participants.

If you have any questions about whether you are a HIPAA-covered health care provider, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection at n.regina@neu.edu or (617) 373-4588.

Completed applications should be submitted to Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection with the exception of applications from faculty and students of the College of Professional Studies, which should be submitted to Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator for CPS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nan C. Regina, Director</th>
<th>CPS applications only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern Univ., Human Subject Research Protection</td>
<td>Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360 Huntington Ave., Mailstop: 560-177</td>
<td>Northeastern Univ., College of Professional Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA 02115-5000</td>
<td>Phone: 617.390.3450;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 617.373.4588; Fax: 617.373.4595</td>
<td><a href="mailto:k.skophammer@northeastern.edu">k.skophammer@northeastern.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:n.regina@northeastern.edu">n.regina@northeastern.edu</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The application and accompanying materials may be sent as email attachments or in hard copy. A signed **Assurance of Principal Investigator Form** may be sent as a scan, via fax or in hard copy.