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A learning public organization as the condition for innovations adaptation

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Abstract

The current conditions of the public organizations functioning determine the creation of innovation process whose successful implementation is related to continuous organization learning, fostered by shaping the culture of learning. The significance of the problem undertaken in the study allows to state that undertaking activities focused on innovations by the organizations of the public sector is an expression of their development and the consequence of searching for methods of increasing efficiency of actions. The study is of theoretical nature, it is the result of analysis of the subject literature with regard to the issue undertaken.

Keywords: innovation, learning organization , learning public organization, learning culture, organizational change.

1. Introduction

The contemporary discourse concerning effective public sector functioning clearly stresses the need for innovation process creation in public organizations. The experienced researchers in this field notice the multiplicity of understanding innovation, especially articulating the issues that the contemporary innovation is no longer of incidental nature, but constitutes deliberate operation, which should be predictable in every aspect. Therefore, both in Poland and around the world, the need for effective innovation process management is being noticed (Pomykalski, 2010), which implies interpretation of this category in the context of the result (the product) and the process. The tendency to create and implement innovations in the public sector organizations is a result of evolution of their

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functioning, which is reflected in the departure from the traditional bureaucratic organization, based on the paradigm of Weber's administration towards the New Public Management oriented at effectiveness and performance as well as professional approach to the citizen-client and the contemporary concept of co-management emphasizing the ancillary nature of administration towards the citizens and partnership in relations with the clients. In the paradigm of co-management, public organizations learning gains special importance. Performance of public duties at this point is understood as a process of social learning, in which actors of varied social statuses and formal character take part (Van de Walle & Hammerschmid, 2011). The attributes of innovative organizations are characterized by creativity, involvement, responsibility, flexibility and learning (Vigoda-Gadot, Shoam, Schwabsky, & Ruvio, 2008; Fard, Rostamy, & Taghiloo, 2009).

In this article, the author attempts to justify the claim that the current conditions of the public organizations functioning determine the creation of behaviors focused on shaping the culture of organization learning, such as creativity, involvement, responsibility, openness to changes and continuous learning, which is the condition of effective undertaking innovative operations as well as an effective innovation implementation.

The purpose of the study is an attempt to show the role of organizational learning in shaping the culture of learning, which constitutes the condition of effective undertaking innovative operations as well as an effective innovations implementation in the public organization. The study is of theoretical nature, it is the result of analysis of the subject literature with regard to the issue undertaken.

2. Dichotomous innovation understanding

The defining the notion of innovations has not yet received a clear interpretation in the literature on the subject, which is justified, since the multiplicity of interpretations is determined by a number of conditions determining the specific nature and area of implementation. The issues of defining and classifying innovations in the Polish literature on the subject, supported by an analysis of the world's literature, in relation to the public sector, is multifaceted (Osborne, 1998; Halvorsen, 2005; *Oslo Manual*, 2005; Wiatrak, 2011). One of the distinguished classifications determines treating innovations in the category of a product and process. In this respect, in the first perspective innovations are changes, which lead in consequence to new products. On the other hand, the process-related context allows treating innovations as any processes of creative thinking aiming at application and use of improved solutions in technique, technology, organization and social life (Pomykalski, 2001), as a result of which it is the transformation of the idea into a new or improved launched product, or an improved operating process used in the industry or trade, or a new approach to public services performance (Pomykalski, 2002).

In the same perspective an interesting proposal is a study of the American researchers who also stress the double character of innovation, treated both as the result of a number of actions, namely the result of a certain process, and a process that is defined as "generation, acceptance and implementation of a new idea or approach in a given issue, among social entities for which the change questions current solutions and constitutes a social value as well as generates social benefits" (Bland, Bruk, Kim, & Lee, 2010]. The adopted context of innovations perception is justified by the statement that in the public sector the main innovative activities motive should be the development of public goods and creating public value. In this respect, criticism is given to general innovations understanding as "novelties in a given organization", as in the case of the public sector copying innovations from one organization to the second, without considering its specific nature is a replication rather than innovation (Light, 1998 acc. to Bland, Bruk, Kim, & Lee, 2010). Their opinion is justified by the specific nature of the public sector, in which, as opposed to the business sector, the criterion of profitability is not enough, and what is desirable is consideration of complexity of public problems and justification of social benefits.

On the basis of experiences described by the American authors and researchers of the innovations management process in business as well as in the public sector (Cooper & Edgett, 2007; Tidd, 2006; Twiss, 1993; Urban, Hauser, 1993 acc. to Pomykalski, 2010; Bland, Bruk, Kim, & Lee, 2010) with regard to the specific nature of the public sector the author proposes differentiation of five, consecutive phases of the innovation understanding process is suggested Fig. 1.
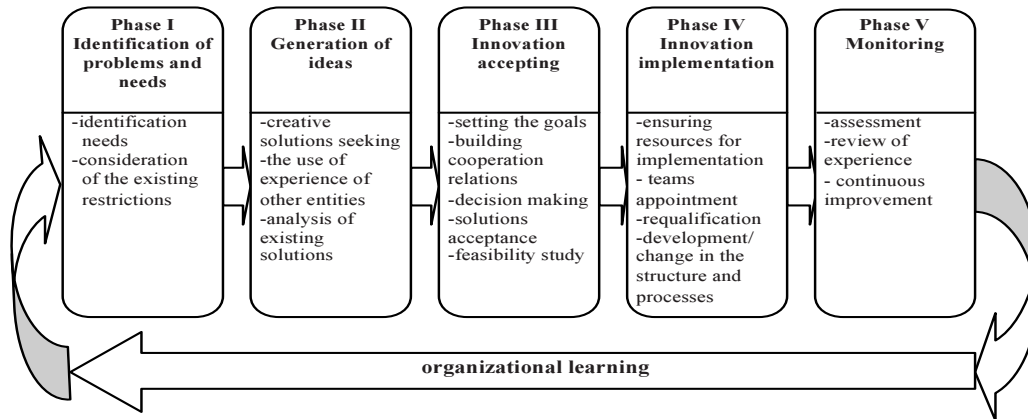
Phase I Identification of problems and needs	Phase II Generation of ideas	Phase III Innovation accepting	Phase IV Innovation implementation	Phase V Monitoring
-identification needs -consideration of the existing restrictions	-creative solutions seeking -the use of experience of other entities -analysis of existing solutions	-setting the goals -building cooperation relations -decision making -solutions acceptance -feasibility study	-ensuring resources for implementation - teams appointment -requalification -development/ change in the structure and processes	-assessment -review of experience - continuous improvement

organizational learning

Fig. 1. The process of public organization innovations conditioned by organization learning
Source: prepared by the author on the basis of (Bland, Bruk, Kim, & Lee, 2010; Pomykalski, 2010)

The first phase focuses on recognizing the problems and the needs for innovation, which is extremely important, since the public sector organizations are interested, above all, in costs reduction and increasing the quality of offered products and provided services. However, these assumptions are not of purely business nature, because in the situation of social problems' complexity, the potential costs of unsuccessful solutions have a wide context and are very severe for the users. Therefore, the correctness of identification of needs and consideration of the existing constraints must constitute the starting point in the process of innovation in this field.

The next phase is generation of ideas. It should be focused on seeking creative solutions and may also determine the use of experiences of other entities, the business sector or non-profit organizations where model solutions may be sought. In the phase of accepting ideas the aim should be reduction in conditions of bureaucratic structure, typical of the public sector, for the benefit of decentralization, opening to proposals of cooperation with external entities, reducing formalization and creating conditions for shaping participation, whose condition is an increase in access to knowledge and information and fostering creativity.

In the phase of innovation accepting, detailed agreement of goals of operation are highlighted, building cooperation relations, decision-making and achieving acceptance for specific solutions which should include particular actions in feasibility studies. The condition of efficient solution acceptance is strict particularization of goals, eliminating conflicts and streamlining communication. Innovation implementation is connected mainly with ensuring proper resources for selected solutions implementation. A public organization, like innovative organizations of other sectors, should deliberately choose the projects for the implementation of which they have appropriate resources. These resources may be intended for research – development activity (e.g. ordered to scientific-research centres) or specified knowledge or competence transfer from the outside.

In the implementation phase, it is important to appoint teams, assign roles and responsibilities as well as introduce changes in the organizational structure or implemented processes, by changes in the procedures, scopes of responsibilities, requalification of employees or the applied technologies e.g. IT.

The last innovation process phase should be monitoring the implemented innovation, aimed at permanent assessment of the obtained results in the perspective of social, organizational and economic results using measures specific for the given solution. A review of experiences and assessments should constitute the basis for continuous learning and introducing changes necessary for improvement in the existing solutions. In this respect, it should be pointed out that observing new needs and possible faults should become the impulse to learn the organization and modify the existing solutions, which justifies marking the feedback between the first and the fifth phase of the proposed model.

3. A learning public organization and innovativeness

The current discussion concerning a learning organization defies the view that organization learning is a condition for changes implementation and obtaining the expected results. The detailed world's literature overview in this respect, made by the Polish researchers (Olejniczak, Rok, & Płoszaj, 2012) stresses the multi-aspect context of the analysis. A learning organization is conducive to the development of employees not only temporarily, but by providing specific conditions, it guarantees permanent development. Its structures, culture and resources enable individuals and teams to think creatively and pursue common goals (Senge, 2000). A learning organization evolves, learns systematically by generating ideas and their selection, seeking knowledge and experimenting, while learning is the fundamental value of such an organization (Watkins & Marsick, 1993 acc. to Sta. Maria & Watkins, 2003).

An undoubted attribute of a learning organization is openness to changes and innovativeness, which was noticed by Sta. Maria, Watkins in the conducted research based on using the behavior change model as a result of innovation adaptation Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Hall & Hord, 1987 acc. to Sta. Maria & Watkins, 2003) and a learning organization diagnosing model prepared by Watkins, Marsick (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996 acc. to Sta. Maria & Watkins, 2003). The basis for the conducted research was identification in the examined public organizations the level of innovation adaptation and using innovation by the organization as well as identification of a learning organization dimensions in the perspective of variables determining shaping the culture of learning.

The pyramid of changes as a result of innovation adaptation enables identification of seven stages of perception and commitment of employees in the innovations introduced to the organization. Since achievement of consecutive stages is evolutionary, it may be concluded that it is a kind of a test for maturity of an organization, in particular its employees to use and develop innovation. Changes in the approach and behavior as a result of innovation adaptation is presented in the pyramid in Fig. 2.
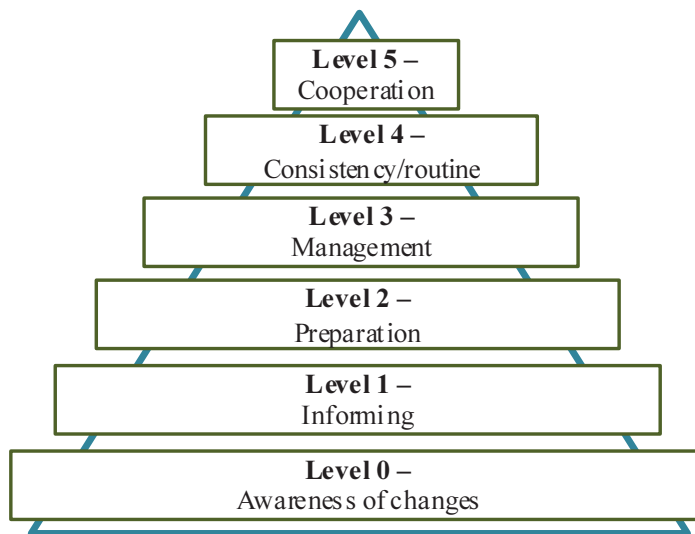

Fig. 2. Changes in the organization as a result of innovation adaptation
Source: prepared by the author on the basis of (Sta. Maria & Watkins, 2003)

The zero level represents the approach and attitudes in which innovation awareness has been marked in the organization, however the entities/users do not see the usefulness of change and do not undertake any actions. The first, informative level takes place when the potential entities/users are afraid of innovation and begin expressing interest in obtaining knowledge about the change. The second, preparatory level is characterized by the entities/users stressing precise plans concerning innovation use, however there is uncertainty of the need for innovation and adequacy of roles resulting from the introduced changes. The zero, first and second levels are characterized by

individual approach and the concern of entities/users about adjustment of own abilities and values to the introduced innovations and, most importantly, these are the levels where innovations are not used in practice. Only achieving the third level – management - guarantees introduction of changes and concentration of the organization's activities on issues related to innovations implementation and optimum use of resources. The entities/users of innovations identify their roles in the process of changes and engage in innovation management. As part of the next level – consistency/routine – the entities/users focus on analyzing the impact of innovations on the effects of work. Members of the organization identify the need of their competences improvement as well as undertake actions aiming at increasing the effects of their work. The fifth level is cooperation concentrated on coordination and integration of activities in the organization focused on innovation use. The highest level of innovation adaptation is the sixth stage - cooperation – focused on exploration of benefits from innovation and on the possibilities to improve the existing solutions through seeking subsequent innovations. This stage stresses the context of organization's learning and corresponds to the assumptions of a learning organization diagnosing model by Watkins, Marsick, (1993,1996), where the research problem, apart from diagnosing the attributes of a learning organization, has been oriented at shaping the culture of organization learning. In this respect the authors of the research have proven that innovation levels use achievement by the organization (third and higher levels) positively correlates with building values in the organization, the climate of organization learning culture.

The abovementioned model by Watkins, Marsick (1993,1996) identifies the learning organization attributes in seven perspectives: (1) creating conditions favourable for continuous learning, (2) promoting inquiry and dialogue, (3) encouraging to collaboration and team learning, (4) creating systems to capture and sharing learning, (5) enabling the employees to create common vision, (6) connect the organization with the environment and (7) supporting leaders and supporting knowledge acquisition process. The first two perspectives relate to employees' development, while the next dimensions are focused on teamwork creation, with particular emphasis on including the needs of interested stakeholders, which are an indispensable element of learning and in consequence organization improvement (Sta. Maria & Watkins, 2003).

The emphasized perspectives have been defined (Table 1), and the diagnosis takes place by means of a questionnaire in which each perspective is defined in the form of specified statements that are chosen by the respondents with the use of the Likert scale. Research results are discussed and constitute the basis for the development of activities designed to improve the organization towards identification with the learning organization model (Sta. Maria & Watkins 2003).

The context of identifying the dimensions of a learning organization has been also defined by Fard, Rostamy, Taghiloo (2009) in the study concerning the impact of culture on shaping a learning organization which was also verified in the field of public organizations. As the basis for defining the criteria of recognizing an organization as a learning one they assumed five perspectives, consistent with the attributes of a learning organization (table 1) emphasized by Senge (2000): (1) Personal mastery, (2) Mental models, (3) Shared visions, (4) Systems thinking and (5) Team learning. The research was conducted by means of a questionnaire, by the adoption of an appropriate scale of statements, and the detailed analysis of dependencies was published.

4. The determinants of organizational learning culture

The interest in the issues of culture shaping in an organization manifested itself in the 1980s as a result of attempts to explain social and cultural phenomena in organizations, which, by peculiar patterns and specific behaviors of their employees, have a unique character.

According to the definition of Schein (1984), the organization culture can be identified as "…a set of basic assumptions that the group invented, discovered or developed during confrontation with environment problems and internal coordination problems, which operated so well that they have been recognized by the group as proven and binding and which are transferred to new group members as the proper manner of perception. Interpretations and actions towards the aforementioned problems, external adaptation and internal integration...". The issues of organizational culture impact on the innovations adaptation process in an organization is an up-to-date research field, which has been mentioned in the above deliberations. Fard, Rostamy, Taghiloo (2009) in their deliberations concerning public organizations, when appointing the typology of organizational cultures, developed by Hellringel,

Slocum (Hellringel & Slocum, 1994 acc. to Fard, Rostamy, & Taghiloo, 2009) identified the features of a learning culture. The mentioned model (Fig. 3) classifies the organization culture in the perspective of two variables: adaptation to the environmental conditions and internal integration.

Table 1. The perspectives of diagnosing a learning organization in the public sector

Model by Watkins, Marsick	
Dimensions	Definition
(1) Create continuous learning	Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the opportunities job; opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth.
(2) Promote inquiry and dialogue	People gain productive reasoning skills to express their views, and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others; the culture is changed to support questioning, feedback and experimentation.
(3) Encourage collaboration and team learning	Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking; groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded.
(4) Establish systems to capture and share learning	Both high- and low- technology systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided; and systems are maintained.
(5) Empower people towards a collective vision	People are involved in setting, owning and implementing a joint vision; responsibility is distributed close to decision making so that people are motivated to learn what they are held accountable for.
(6) Connect the organization with its environment	People are helped to see the impact of their work on the organization; people scan the environment and use information to adjust work practices; organization is linked to community.
(7) Leaders model and support learning	Leaders model, champion and support; leadership learning uses learning strategically for business results.
Model by Fard, Rostamy,Taghiloo	
Dimensions	Definitions
(1) Personal mastery	Create an environment that encourages personal and organisational goals to be developed and realised partnership
(2) Mental models	Know that a person's internal picture of their environment will shape their decision and behaviour.
(3) Shared visions	Build essence of group commitment by developing shared images of the future.
(4) Systems thinking	Develop the ability to see the big picture within an organisation and understand how change in one area affect the whole system.
(5) Team learning	Transform conversational and collective thinking skill, so that a group's capacity to reliably develop intelligence and ability is greater than the sum of its individual member's talents.

Source: prepared by the author on the basis of (Sta. Maria & Watkins 2003; Fard, Rostamy, & Taghiloo, 2009).

The model distinguishes between four types of an organization culture: The bureaucratic culture whose distinguishing feature is a low level of adaptation both to the environmental conditions as well as low internal integration. The bureaucratic culture characterized by inflexibility, rigid regulations, high level of centralisation and affirmative leadership style.

The competitive culture where it is possible to notice high sensitivity to environment conditions and low internal integration, characterized by high flexibility, low integration, contract relations between employee and the organisation, low loyalty, low cultural identity, achieving to quantitative objectives

The participative culture characterised by high level of internal integration, but a low level of adaptation to the environmental conditions and the learning culture, where both adaptation to the environmental conditions and internal integration are at a high level. The determinants of this culture are low flexibility, high integration, loyality, personal commitment, team working, high level of society acceptance and tendency to satiability.
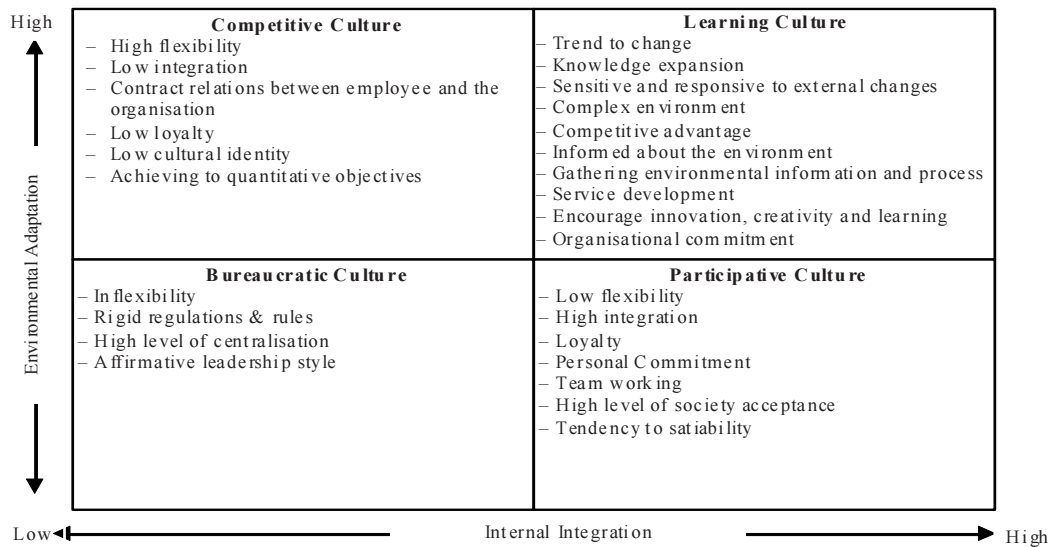
Fig. 3. Attributes of four types of an organization culture
Source: prepared by the author on the basis of (Fard, Rostamy, & Taghiloo, 2009)

The primary model has been supplemented with a particularization of distinctions of different types of organization culture, which enables identification of a particular type in a specific organization. The desired type for a learning organisation in the public sector is a learning culture characterized by focusing on changes, broadening knowledge, sensitivity and reaction to the needs of external environment (user-citizen), taking into consideration the complex needs of stakeholders, striving to achieve competitive advantage, which, in the case of public organizations is also a significant parameter, care for transparency of functioning and informing the external environment, improvement in the package of services performed and seeking new possibilities to satisfy social needs and encouraging employees to innovativeness, creativity and ongoing learning and involvement in organization matters. The practical implication of the mentioned features enables undertaking innovative activities and effective implementation of innovations both in a public organization functioning and in the process of provision of services.

5. Conclusion

The significance of the problem undertaken in the study allows to state that undertaking activities focused on innovations by the public sector organizations is an expression of their development and the consequence of searching the ways of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of operation, in particular with regard to public service provision. It constitutes a result of research with regard to possibilities to satisfy the constantly growing social needs, with simultaneous permanent deficiency of funds for meeting their demands, and is the answer to changes in technological knowledge, organizational and the way of perceiving the citizens, whose needs begin to constitute a source of changes inspiration in public organizations. Currently, the need for introducing innovations in the public sector was included in the White Paper where it is stipulated that "innovations in public services sector are necessary to meet economic and social challenges of the 21st century", as well as in government documents of other countries such as Great Britain, Canada or Australia (Osborne & Brown, 2011). Osborne, Brown (2011) claim that innovation is a significant part of the process of providing effective public services, however, its support and management requires diverse approach, due to specific conditions of implementation (ibid.).

The innovativeness of an organization is defined as the ability to continually search, implement and disseminate innovations, it should become the main creative force of any organization, entered for good in its management system and culture (Pomykalski, 2001). According to this article, the innovativeness of an organization also involves its participation in the implementation of the innovations processes activities, and, at the same time, the development

of knowledge. A significant factor influencing innovativeness are organizational conditions enabling effective flow, creation and use of knowledge in the innovation processes, which justifies displaying organizational culture as a factor substantially determining the organization's learning. All organisations, including public organisations, must be adaptive in a rapidly changing environment, if they wish to continue their businesses. The changes in organizational culture are a prerequisite in the implementation of public sector innovation-oriented delivery of public services, increased accountability to citizens, permanent response to the changing needs of the system and the. development of a system conducive to organizational learning and creating value.

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