ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING OF NEW HIRES IN THE NEW ZEALAND WORKPLACE

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Abstract - Given a large number of international graduates transitioned from study to workplace in New Zealandand the increasing importance of how organisational learning contributes to the capability of learning of contemporary organisations, this paper investigatesthe learning experience of New Zealand international graduates as new hires in the New Zealand workplace. Based on SECI model suggested by Nonaka & Konno, a pilot study was conducted to exploredifferent types of knowledge that were acquired by the new hires, including what triggered the transfer of these knowledge in a workplace, and how the knowledge were transferred through socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation stages at individual, group, and organisational levels. Suggestions for future research were presented at the later section of the paper.

Index Terms - Organisational learning, international graduates, new hires, New Zealand workplace.

I. INTRODUCTION

To stay competitive in ever-changing, highly dynamic and uncertain business environment,organisational learning (OL) is essential for contemporary organisationsthat emphasize on strategic, product, market, technology, and behavioral innovations (Ortenblad, 2013; Lewis, 2014; Maditinos, Chatzoudes, & Sarigiannidis, 2014; Wakeman & Le, 2015). OL refers to the process to acquire knowledge among stakeholders within an organisation at individual, group and organisational levels in order to achieve the goals of the organisation(Popova-Nowak & Cseh, 2015; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). Given a large number of international graduates transitedfrom study to workplace in New Zealand (Park, 2017), this paper aims to understand their OL experience in the New Zealand workplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

OL earned its importance in human resource literature especially after the introduction of learning organisation (LO) by Peter Senge in 1990s(Ortenblad, 2013; Jenkin, 2013; Popova-Nowak & Cseh, 2015; Hong, Snell, & Rowley, 2017).A review of literature indicates that OL was conducted in a wide range of industries. For instance, manufacturing(e.g., construction materials production, plastic manufacturing, metal, packaging, food and beverage production, agricultural products processing, SMEs based supply chain), service (e.g., hospital, higher education., insurance, banks and other financial sectors, professional services such as scientific research and support), engineering, and e-businesses (e.g., Morgan & Turnell, 2000; Raymond & Blili, 2004; Dijkstra, et al., 2006; Hong, et al., 2006; Tan, 2011; Bjerg Hall-Andersen & Broberg, 2014; Onağa, et al., 2014; Zgrzywa-Ziemak, 2015; Field, 2017; Thomas, et al., 2017; Geppert, 2018). These studies commonly involved qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods.

For example, case study of a specific organisation;comparative study between high and lower business performance firms; surveysand interviews with managers and employees concerned across a wide range of sectors mentioned above in a specific organisational setting, location and/or national context(e.g., Morgan & Turnell, 2000; Raymond & Blili, 2004; Mallon, et al., 2005; Dijkstra, et al., 2006; Hong, et al., 2006; Bjerg Hall-Andersen & Broberg, 2014; Onağa, et al., 2014; Zgrzywa-Ziemak, 2015; Field, 2017; Thomas, et al., 2017; Jeong, McLean, & Park, 2017; Kidwell, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2018; Geppert, 2018). However, mixed outcomes on how OL worksleads to the question on the nature of OL and the study of OL.

1) Organisational Learning Capacity

An organisation that is interested in OL often examined the ability of the organisation to learn, namely Organisational Learning Capacity (OLC) as it leads to innovativeness and performance of an organisation (e.g., Morgan & Turnell, 2000; Onağa, et al., 2014; Thomas, et al., 2017). For example, the OLC model proposed by Morgan & Turnell (2000) included managerial commitment, knowledge sharing, experience and openness, dialogue, knowledge transfer, participative decision-making, and risk taking. Likewise, five out of seven OLC measurements in the model suggested by Onağa, Tepecib, and Ayçe Başalpc(2014) are similar to the first model (e.g., shared purpose, open-mindedness, comparative learning capabilities, organisational memory).

The last two dimensions (i.e., customer orientation and competitor orientation), however,indicate the importance of responsiveness of OL in an organisation towards its business environment. This leads to the need to understand the mechanisms and processes that may affect OL in an organisation.

2) Infrastructure and processes that influence OL in an organisation

Based on the review of literature, a wide range of knowledge management infrastructure and processes that may affect OL in an organisation was identified. To name a few, organisational culture, human resource (e.g., training, job design, learning resources and capability) and management activities, power and politicsare some of the factors that may influence the extent to which how individuals are motivated to learn in an organisation(e.g., Morgan & Turnell, 2000; Raymond & Blili, 2004; Joseph & Dai, 2009; Onağa, et al., 2014; Thomas, et al., 2017).In addition to the above, organisational structure and sophistication of the info structure are also critical for supporting and facilitatingcommunication as well as knowledge generation and integration within an organisation (e.g., Singh & Kumar, 2017). Most importantly, how a learning agent perceived these infrastructure and processes in his/her workplace in light of OL is suggested to be the key to understand how OL happens in a workplace.

3) Learning interests of a learning agent

Learning agent plays a major role in creating knowledge as his/her belief and commitment in learning will affect the acquisition of knowledge and his/her willingness to communicate with others in an organisation (Nonaka, 1994;Argyris & Schon, 1996). As organisation is a social entity where the shared interests of learning agentsmay differ and affected by individual identity and interests (Nonaka, 1994). The extent that a knowledge is transferredfrom individual to group and organisational levelsindicates the importance of understanding what knowledge are important to a learning agent, what triggers the acquisition of a specific knowledge and how the learning agent interacts with others in a workplace.

4) Learning within a knowledge domain and across knowledge domains

Although a wide range of knowledge is acquired at a workplace, they can be classified into tacit knowledge and explicit knowledgein general (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchim, 1995; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Panahi, Watson, & Partridge, 2012; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018).

Tacit knowledge refers to personal knowledge that are not always structured and readily expressed by an individual (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka, 1994; Dampney, Busch, & Richards, 2002; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). Highly personal to a learning agent,tacit knowledge are formed by the mental models developed by the learning agent and they are used as working modelsto make sense of the world (Nonaka, 1994; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). For example, know-how, crafts, and skills that the learning agent may apply in specific contexts (Nonaka, 1994; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). On the other hand, explicit knowledge refers to articulated, structured knowledge that are more easily recognised, codified, expressed and communicated to others (Nonaka, 1994; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). This know-that and know what may be shared and codified into readily access knowledge for use within an organisation (Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018).

To acquire these knowledge, a wide range of learning modes were also identified, such as implicit and explicit learning (Dienes & Altmann, 1997), as well as single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Along this line, SECI model, one of the well-known conceptual models, proposes that learning within an organisation happened in the form of "spiral evolution of knowledge conversion and self-transcending process" at individual, group, and organisational levels (Nonaka & Konno, 1998, page 43). This process involves four stages: 1) socialisaiton, 2) externalisation, 3) combination, and 4) internalisation (Nonaka & Takeuchim, 1995; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Bratianu, 2010;Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018).

During socialisation, a learning agent transforms tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge whenhe or she creates new knowledge through day-to-day social interaction, communication and shared daily experience with another individual at a workplace (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018).

These tacit knowledge may convert to explicit knowledge during externalisation when the learning agent creates new knowledge through interaction, communication and shared daily experience with other individuals in a group setting more formally ina work setting (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). During this stage, knowledge generalised from socialisation is developed into shared work practices (e.g., processes, procedures, policies, and documents) (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018).

These explicit knowledge are then combined with the knowledge that the change agent collected from outside of the organisation,modified, and processed to generate more complex and systematic explicit knowledgeduring combination stage(Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). These explicit knowledge are shared among the members of the organisation through conversations, meetings, and exchange of documents, to name a few (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018).

Though internalisation, the learning agent learns, makes sense, and re-absorbs these explicit knowledge acquired so they became his or her tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). Under the right condition and triggers for learning, the cycle continues.

This indicates that learning within and across knowledge domains in an organisation involves learning agent(s) in dynamic, integrated, multi-level learning processes.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS

In order to understand the learning experience of international graduates who transitioned from study to work as new hires in New Zealand workplace, SECI model was selected as a theoretical framework for studying international graduates from Level 7 diplomaas this isone of the largest groups of international graduates that transitioned to the New Zealand workplace in recent years (Park, 2017). Using the questionnaire built on SECI model, this pilot study was conducted on30 participants from private tertiary establishments (PTEs) between July and October 2018 to identify the types of knowledge that were acquired by the new hires during the first year of their employment in the New Zealand workplace after graduated as this period can be marked as a starting point of the career closer to their selected professions. It is also the period where most learning may take place.

This self-administratedquestionnaire consists of 9 questions on demographic factors, types of knowledge acquired, what triggered the transfer of these knowledge in a workplace, and how the knowledge were learned at each stage. The current study aimed to identify the common themes that emerged on organisational learning before conducting further research on a larger population at a later stage of the study.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographical factors

4.1.1Gender, Age, and Nationality

Out of the 30 participants, there are 16 female and 14 male. The participants in the current study range from 21-25 years (n=4), 26-30 years (n=10), 31-35 years (n=7), 35-40 years (n=6), to 41-45 (n=3).

A majority of the participants come from The Philippines (n=10), and the rest from India(n=5), Russia (n=3), Colombia (n=2), Brazil (n=2), Japan (n=3), Korea (n=2) and Indonesia (n=3).

4.1.2 Employment

14 out of 30 are employed in managerial position at the time of the research, while the rest in non-managerial positions (n=16) in a wide range of sectors, such as healthcare, retail, hospitality, construction, entertainment/ service, healthcare, freight forwarding and logistics, financial, mining, fabrication/ manufacturing, tertiary education, property, telecommunication, education (primary, secondary, and tertiary), and government agency. Although 97 percent of New Zealand's enterprises are classified as SMEs that employ less than 20 employees (Ministry of Business, 2017), 19 out of 30 participants in the current study worked in large organisationswith a range of employees from 35 to 5000. The rest worked in SMEs(n=11). 26 out of 30 were employed full-time while the rest worked part-time or engaged in volunteery jobs. 25 out of 30 participants indicated that New Zealand is their first overseas employment.

4.1.3 Types of knowledge acquired by new hires

Participants of the current study reported seven types of knowledge acquired at their workplace, ranging from technical (n=86), communication (n=25), social (n=17), negotiation (n=3), emotion (n=4), conceptual (n=5) to self-awareness related knowledge (n= 4). The first three appeared to be the most frequently reported knowledge by the new hires.

Stage 1: Socialisation

During socialisation, technical knowledge isthe most common tacit knowledge reported by the participants, followed by social, communication, negotiation, and emotion related knowledge. The participants reported a transfer of tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge through day-to-day social interaction, communication and shared daily experience with another individual including supervisors, colleagues, and customers at their workplace.

Tacit knowledge reported at this stage are triggered by the job demands when the new hires recognised a gap between what they know and what are required in the new job. For example, one of the participants who worked as a dealer/croupier in entertainment industry reported on how she recognised the need to learn atechnical skill through socialisation with a colleague.

"I have been working in casino for more than ten years. But there was this mental calculation technique that I have learnt from my co-worker recently that made my calculation faster and accurate. I have tried it and now (it) became part of my daily job."

Participants also reported that they learned better under a supportive work environment that encourages informal communication on work related matters. For instance, one of the participants who was the personal assistant reported the use of instant messenger for communication with her colleaguesat her workplace, below.

"My new workplace uses an informal communication style. I am learning to communicate in a friendly (and) professional way. For example, I have never used WhatsApp to request my colleagues (to provide me) a document or similar."

In addition to the above, cultural differences and observation are frequently reported during this stage, as highlighted below.

"…Being sensitive and cooperative on the work ethics in a typical New Zealand workplace as there will be differences as compared to my previous workplace…different cultures…needs to help each other to have good working harmony in the workplace. Be observant on the working style of others."

Stage 2: Externalisation

During externalisation, technical knowledge is still the most common knowledge reported, followed by communication, social, emotion, and negotiation related knowledge. Participants reported that they generated these knowledge through interaction, communication and shared daily experience with other individuals in a group setting more formally at their workplace. These knowledge are then developed into shared practices, such as work processes, procedures, policies, and documents to improve or solve problems at a workplace.The following is a typical response with the above features highlighted by an office manager in a construction company:

"As I am the only office worker (Office Manager), I have no idea about the situation of each site because I haven't seen them directly. So I need to get sufficient information from our site manager or board members who know well about the sites. Therefore, we got regular meeting and I get involved to understand…the current situation of the sites actively through this meeting…I need to file all features of each site separately to see and understand them clearly after (the) meeting."

Interesting, the participantswho reported higher level of satisfaction on learning at this stage highlighted the importance and influence of infrastructure and processes within an organisation on OL. Human resource (e.g., training, apprenticeship, job design, learning resources and capability) and management activities, supervisors within an organisation, and sophistication of the infostructure(e.g., online learning support, online database, emails, skype calls, and interactive group online courses) for communication and sharing of information were highlighted as the factors that triggered learning at this stage.For example, one of the participants who worked as a frontline crew emphasised on the importance of accessing the online database in their organisation:

"The company needs to give more authority to direct online access for the branch inventory levels which makes easier and less time consuming to deliver currencies to other branches."

Stage 3: Combination

Similar to previous stages, the explicit knowledge that are most frequently reported by participants are technical knowledge, followed by communication, and conceptualknowledge in combination stage. Combined with those explicit knowledge collected from outside of the organisation, more complex and systematic explicit knowledge are modified, processed and shared among the members of the organisation through various ways, such as conversations, meetings, and exchange of documents. A typical example is presented, below.

"I always prepare and send some quotes and invoices which are very fundamental documents to clients because I am the office manager. When I trade with other companies, sometimes I can find some good designed and organised documents that are very easy to understand and clear. These examples are quite helpful to improve and update our company's existing document forms…I can do benchmarking from subcontractors when they sent us formal documents such as invoice or quote to improve our existing ones…"

Similar to stages 1 and 2, willingness of a learning agent plays an important role in stage 3, said one of the participants who works as an assistant store manager:

"During the off peak times, our revenue reduced dramatically. Therefore, I suggested to the staff to come up with new ideas to increase our income during the off peak times. Each staff member came up with very innovative and valuable solutions. We discussed each strategy during a staff meeting… strategies…to reduce the cost, giving vouchers for customers, and increase up selling through a friendly communication with customers.Willingness of the staff to share their knowledge for the development of the company is crucial."

Stage 4: Internalisation

The most common tacit knowledge that the participants reported during internalisationis technical knowledge, followed by social, self-awareness, conceptual, communication, and emotion related knowledge. Participants reported that they learned and made sense before turning the explicit knowledge back into their daily practice, as highlighted by one of the participants, below.

"(I learnt) Intermediate Statistics…(by) reading through various infographics, making sense of forwarded charts, mind maps, and other reports throughout the Ministry."

Similar example is also demonstrated in a comment by one of the participants who became aware of the important of communication skills in her profession.

"I need to develop communication skills which involve to adapt to new style and organisational culture. I realised that I need to understand vocabulary and ask before follow an instruction considering English is my second language."

Experience adapting to New Zealand work life

When asked to sum up own experience adapting to the work life in New Zealand through the four stages above, the most common factors reported by the participants are: 1) flexibility and openness to cultural differences, workforce diversity, new experience and challenges, 2) the needs to improve English, 3) work-life balance, and 4) informal communication and management styles. A typical example of those who highlighted the importance of cultural differences in

the New Zealand workplace demonstrated the appreciation for these differences.

"The most important factor which I have realised in the workplaces in New Zealand is the cultural factor. New Zealand is multicultural so is the workplace where I have worked in. I learnt that it is important to respect different cultures in workplace. Every person coming from different countries has different and knowledge and skills to share which adds up to the success of the businesses.", commented participant A.

Another interesting finding is that the acquisition of the knowledge reported involvesboth explicit and implicit learning in the four stages of OL. In particular, implicit learning of social and self-awareness, conceptual, communication, and emotion related knowledgeis commonly reported at the stage of internalisation and socialisation.

The tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge reported in the current study can be classified further into task, social, and emotional related knowledge. Some of these knowledge appeared to be affected by cultural factors. Therefore, openness to new experience is one of the keys to adapting to a workplace, as summed up by one of the participants, below.

"Work life in New Zealand was hard at first because of cultural differences. One just has to be open to new experiences, good or bad, and use it to improve yourself, to make a better version of yourself"

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that OL of international graduates as new hires in the New Zealand workplace required an awareness and appreciation for the complex and contextual nature of OL because leaning happened when…

1. A learning agent uses different learning modes (e.g., explicit and implicit learning during the four stages of learning as per SECI model)
2. and learning interests that directed the focus of learning agent
3. in dynamic, integrated, multi-level learning processes
4. to generate knowledge within and across knowledge domains (tacit and explicit knowledge, task, social and emotional related knowledge)
5. at individual, group, organisational levels

In other word, the theoretical soundness and practicality of an OL model depend on how well the model addresses the complexity and contextual nature of OL in terms of scope and depth. Therefore, OL investigation should be a multidisciplinary study that involves business and management (e.g., knowledge management, organisational change, human resources), psychology (e.g., learning, cognitive, behavioural, industrial and organisational, and social), learning science and philosophy, and information technology, to name a few. As per this study, not all learning agents are reflective about own learning experience and be able to express in a self-administered questionnaire readily, especially if the knowledge is acquired through implicit learning.In addition, acquisition of knowledge at the four stages appeared to be triggered by how well a learning agent became aware of the gaps of learning and the needs to learn.This indicatestransfer of learning is essential for future research on OL (e.g., near transfer and far transfer). Given the complexity and contextual nature of OL, it is suggested to apply in-depth interviews in addition to self-administered questionnaire in the next stage of the study to investigate OL on a larger population of new hires in the New Zealand workplace.

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