

# The Role of Organizational Learning in Conflict Management

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## Abstract

Conflict is a state of disagreement experienced between two individuals or parties, which can result from many factors. When conflict occurs at organizations, it may lead to many problems such as unaccomplished goals, decreased effectiveness, and low levels of individual and overall performance. However, organizational conflict may positively influence organizations under certain circumstances. The recent literature especially places emphasis on conflict management rather than conflict resolution, as conflicts are likely to enable organizations to enhance their performance and productivity when they are managed in an appropriate way. In this sense, organizations have to develop strategies that are aimed at improving the constructive aspect of conflicts instead of trying to reduce and remove them. As the first step toward this goal, organizations have to provide a learning environment so that they can benefit from conflicts. Since it is considered a key concept for the survival and adaptability of an organization, organizational learning stands out as an effective means of fostering such favorable effects. For this purpose, this article discusses the role of organizational learning in conflict management by examining the factors that facilitate and result from it.

**Keywords:** Organizational learning, learning enablers, learning outcomes, organizational conflict, conflict management

## 1. Introduction

This article discusses organizational conflict as a positive phenomenon for organizations with an emphasis on the role of organizational learning in conflict management. The recent viewpoint on organizational conflicts is to manage them, instead of resolution, because conflicts potentially contribute to an improved organizational performance and effectiveness if they are managed in an appropriate manner. Therefore, organizations should adopt strategies designed to focus on the productive aspect of conflicts rather than eliminating them.

For this purpose, organizations have to possess the ability to benefit and learn from conflicts, which means that an organizational environment of learning is required.

Organizational learning is a vital concept for an organization's adaptability and survival, and it is likely to serve as an effective way of enhancing the positive impact of conflicts. Organizational learning is triggered by the changes in the environment, the internal factors of organizations, and individual factors related to the organizational members through reciprocal interactions. Accordingly, organizations should be well familiar with the antecedents and outcomes of organizational learning in order to create a learning environment and become a learning organization. From this perspective, organizational learning is discussed regarding its involvement in the effective management of organizational conflicts.

Conflicts are currently recognized as inescapable but constructive and favorable signs of potent management in organizations. In other words, organizational conflicts to a certain extent are considered essential to organizational efficiency. Conflicts bear the potential to result in favorable work outcomes when they lead to develop creative ways of problem solving or effectively fulfill the goals of the organization that would not be achieved otherwise. On the other hand, conflicts may result in poor judgments, lack of productivity and activity when the conflict is little or when there is no conflict at all. Conflicts may also lead to unfavorable consequences if they remain unsolved.

Therefore, organizations need to enhance their understanding of productivity and learning in order to have an influential strategy to respond the conflicts and constantly changing environment. It is now a well-known fact that organizations, whether they want it or not, must learn as fast as possible considering the requirements of the contemporary era. This means that improved organizational learning, which is closely related with long-term productivity, stands out as a primary goal to be achieved for conflict management in today's organizations. In this context, this paper will examine organizational learning as well as its enablers and outcomes. Regarding the factors enabling organizational learning, managerial commitment (leadership), organizational culture, and empowerment are observed. The outcomes of organizational learning, in turn, are analyzed through innovativeness, organizational development, and organizational performance. Following such enablers and outcomes, organizational conflict and organizational learning in conflict management are presented.

## **2. Organizational Learning**

Organizational learning has very different definitions and interpretations in the literature; however, a consistent and uniform understanding of its meaning does not still exist. Although scholars use various approaches, they all agree that organizational learning is a practice that should be performed by organizations.

According to Argyris and Schön (1978), organizational learning refers to a process that is mediated by the collective questioning of individual employees. The members of an organization, the individuals, serve as the representatives of organizational learning since each one of them changes the existing organizational practices by establishing and adjusting errors, and contributing to the development and learning of the organization (Haho, 2013).

Organizational learning is frequently confused with individual learning; however, it is a more dynamic and complex phenomenon as it involves a wide range of different individuals rather than a single one (Pham & Swierczek, 2006). On the other hand, organizations learn through their members, i.e. individuals (Mills & Friesen, 1992). This means that learning is an

individual concept, from which the organization benefits through the individual.

Organizational learning can be considered as a process of cognition or an outcome (Pham & Swierczek, 2006). In case of a cognitive process, the dynamics are more of a concern rather than whether there are favorable consequences associated with learning. In this context, the learning process model of Nevis, DiBella and Gould (1995) contains three stages: acquisition, sharing, and utilization of knowledge. Knowledge acquisition refers to developing or creating awareness, relationships, and skills, whereas knowledge sharing means distributing the learned information. The third stage, knowledge utilization includes the integration stage in order to make the learned information accessible to everyone and applicable to new situations.

In case of approaching organizational learning as an outcome, the focus is on improving performance (Pham & Swierczek, 2006). This means that the goal of organizational learning is to develop knowledge beneficial to the organization. Several scholars such as Senge (2006) and Garvin (1993), who advocate learning organization, have also emphasized the positive value on learning. According to Garvin (1993), organizations with a learning ability feature five primary skills: systematic problem solving, experimentation using novel approaches, learning from previous experiences and from others' best practices, and quickly and effectively generalizing knowledge.

The first step toward organizational learning is to support an organizational environment that contributes to learning. An organization with a learning capability is likely to empower its members to create in a positive manner. Such organizations progress because of that learning (Honey & Mumford, 1992; Marquardt & Reynolds, 1994). Furthermore, when an organization involves a workforce that has the ability to learn faster, it gets a sustainable and competitive edge, which is essential for organizations to adapt and survive (De Geus, 1988). In order for organizational learning to happen, individuals need an environment where they can deliberately interact with other individuals through education and by means of experience (Honey & Mumford, 1992). Accordingly, an organization that aims for learning needs to focus mainly on valuing, guiding and improving personal development of its members (Scarborough, Swan & Preston, 1999).

### *2.1 Organizational Learning Enablers/Facilitators*

Although the available literature presents a great number of factors with positive impact on organizational learning, there is a gap regarding an integrative framework developed for what precedes or enables learning at organizations. By reviewing and synthesizing the literature, the enablers of organizational learning will be discussed here from a sociological perspective that focuses on organizational structure and social systems. This perspective stipulates that organizational learning can be effectively developed through leadership, organizational culture, and employee empowerment. These are also the most commonly discussed facilitators in the organizational learning literature. For organizations to enhance learning, the leadership should be committed to and support learning, they should have a culture encouraging learning and organizational members should have the opportunity to work in an environment providing a continuous process of knowledge acquisition, distribution and utilization. In this context, these important antecedents of organizational learning will be presented.

### 2.1.1 Managerial Commitment (Leadership)

Leadership is one of the most important factors that encourage organizational learning. A culture of learning including certain values such as initiative-taking, cooperation, encouragement, feedback and performance is established by leaders (Teare, 1998). It is the leader or the management that sets up the internal conditions required for organizational learning. Therefore, leadership has to be committed to create a learning culture within the organization. In support of this, Nevis, DiBella and Gould (1995) suggested that the commitment of leadership is at the center of the activities that are designed for organizational learning.

The commitment of management refers that managers or leaders value the importance of learning for the success of the organization and thus, they establish an environment or a culture supporting knowledge acquisition, sharing and transfer (Jerez-Gomez, Cespedes-Lorente & Valle-Cabrera, 2003). More specifically, the commitment of management or leadership refers to the extent to which the management is involved in the process of learning, and it includes certain and actual activities indicating the importance placed on learning by the management (Jerez-Gomez, Cespedes-Lorente & Valle-Cabrera, 2003). Such activities include providing an environment in favor of learning, establishing mechanisms of learning, managing the processes of change, challenging old mindsets, encouraging the idea that learning is strategically important, motivating employees toward learning and providing processes and activities for learning (Senge, 2006; Calantone, Cavusgil & Zhao, 2002). Accordingly, the leader and the management has a critical part in the entire organizational learning process that involve acquiring the resources required for learning, establishing a mindset that is shared among all members, incorporating new knowledge into the existing one and making all knowledge available to all organizational members (Berson, Nemanich, Waldman, Galvin & Keller, 2006). At each step of this entire process, the leader or the management is highly important for creating and maintaining an efficient learning culture.

The well-established model of leaders regarding organizational learning was introduced by Senge et al. (1999). This model proposes that leaders stimulate change by being actively involved in fostering processes of development, which enables change to occur at organizations. Therefore, a leader, who wants to be successful and effective, should have the ability to encourage his/her followers to dedicate themselves in order to adopt a shared and progressive future. Although Senge et al. (1999) did not provide a precise list of leadership characteristics, their leadership definition appears comparable to the context used to describe transformational leadership. As is known, transformational leaders support, encourage and inspire their followers as well as adopting values and beliefs beneficial to all (Tucker, 2004). In this context, the study by İmammoğlu et al. (2015) reported that participative, instrumental and supportive styles of leadership have a positive effect on the learning capacity of the organization. Accordingly, organizations may benefit from supportive and participative types of leadership such as transformational style in creating a learning environment.

### 2.1.2 Organizational Culture

It is broadly accepted that an organizational culture providing all members with opportunities to learn is a fundamental factor for organizational learning. Thus, a supportive environment comes into prominence as one of the enablers of the learning process within an organization. Actually, organizational environment or culture and organizational learning are two concepts that are highly associated (Nevis, DiBella & Gould, 1995). Culture is a mechanism that

shapes and alters employees' beliefs, values, and behaviors (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Organizational culture, in turn, refers to a set of basic beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes that shapes the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 1988). It is also "a kind of collective artifact (shared meanings, symbols, rituals, cognitive schemes), constantly formed and transformed as an organization is trying to balance the requirements of internal coherence with the needs to react discovered in the environment" [Pilat, 2016 as cited in Fard, Rostamy & Taghiloo, 2009).

The culture of an organization can be viewed as a driver that motivates organizational members to share their knowledge and experience. Since culture is a set of basic beliefs, values and norms (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996), the eagerness of organizational members to share and generalize knowledge throughout the organization is likely to be determined by the beliefs, values and norms of that organization, namely the culture.

Organizations with an intent to focus on learning need to adopt a culture enabling and supporting such intent. In fact, when an organization adopts a culture focused on learning and possesses a structure enabling knowledge distribution within its members, it is more likely that human resources have a sense of empowerment toward learning. A culture focused on knowledge, therefore, challenges organizational members to share and disseminate knowledge throughout the entire organization. By creating and fostering a learning-oriented culture, organizations will also have an ability of innovation, leading to improved innovative performance of the organization.

The literature on organizational learning strongly highlights the cultural aspect of learning process in organizations. For instance, the study by Fard, Rostamy and Taghiloo (2009) established that organizational learning enhances learning, organizational learning culture, innovativeness and the extent of participation. This finding indicates that organizational culture has a significant association with organizational learning. In a similar vein, Barrett (1995) and Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2000) suggest that the only means of maintaining a long-term competitive edge in a rapidly changing and complicating environment is a learning culture that features continuous learning from failures and experiences, and inquiry and communication. Accordingly, organizational culture is likely to enable organizational learning.

### 2.1.3 Empowerment

For organizational learning, knowledge should be effectively acquired, interpreted, disseminated, and organization-wide accessible, and this requires employees who are capable and motivated to continuously learn and personally develop. As mentioned previously, organizational learning occurs through individual learning, which suggests that employees driven to learn and develop themselves become critical for organizational learning. For this, employees need to value learning and believe that they are capable of performing a given assignment in case of challenges and in a changing environment. This can be achieved by empowering employees.

Empowerment is a management practice with a potential effect on better performance (Seibert, Silver & Randolph, 2004). Employee empowerment and employee involvement are different concepts. The primary difference between two concepts is the delegation of authority to make decisions. In case of employee involvement, the management holds its control authority, whereas employee empowerment allows employees to have authority to coordinate and enhance functions related to their assignment.



Empowerment is basically a process of motivation through which an employee gets the sense of being enabled (Corsun & Enz, 1999). In organizational context, empowering employees refers to grant employees power so that they can choose, decide, or affect their own actions related to work. Sigler and Pearson (2000) state that empowerment is likely to be supported when differences between management and employees are minimized as this will create the perception that the organization gives equal value to everyone. Accordingly, it has a close relationship with how individuals perceive themselves in terms of their environment at work (Bandura, 1990). As empowerment is a set of cognitions affected by working environment rather than a stable personality trait, the work environment of employees becomes important for enhancing empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Based on the available literature, empowerment is a significant factor contributing to learning in organizations. Some researchers (e.g. (Burdett, 1991; Jamali, Khoury & Sahyoun, 2006) suggest that empowerment is a crucial factor for improved ability to learn in organizations. Scholars such as Argyris (1990) and Garvin (1993) also consider empowerment and learning related to some degree. Additionally, there are empirical studies (e.g. Grinsven & Visser, 2011; Vince, 2001) reporting that organizations with empowerment practices improve their organizational learning capacity. According to [34], leadership practices that promote organizational learning result in empowering environments in organizations.

The significance of employee empowerment for organizational learning has two reasons. First, granting employees authority to manage their own actions at work assures them that they have the support and confidence of the management and this is likely to result in greater employee commitment to accomplish organizational goals. The second and the more important reason is that the autonomy granted through empowerment enables employees to utilize their own skills and capabilities, which will possibly lead to enhanced motivation and efficiency.

Employees can be empowered by granting them appropriate resources, assignments and skills to plan, utilize, and measure their own work. Employee empowerment can also be increased by encouraging them to think creatively, support their way of thinking and help them to improve their ability to deal with continuously changing environment related to work (Grinsven & Visser, 2011).

## *2.2 Outcomes of Organizational Learning*

Becoming an increasingly popular area of research, organizational learning has been mostly examined in conceptual terms, which has resulted in limited empirical studies. Such limitedness of empirical research has also been pointed out by several scholars in this field (e.g.(Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999; Dyck, Starke, Mischke & Mauws, 2005]). On the other hand, organizational learning has been shown to lead some positive work outcomes at the organizational level. Despite relationships between organizational learning and positive work outcomes, there is also a lack of empirical research to support such connections (Lopez, Peon & Ordas, 2005).

In this article, organizational learning is approached as a continuous process and an outcome is defined as the result of such process, which refers to a long-term positive effect. Within this framework, innovativeness, organizational development, and organizational performance will be examined as the positive outcomes of organizational learning.

### 2.2.1 Innovativeness

Knowledge possessed by organizations is a valuable resource that can be utilized to enhance its innovative performance (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Thus, organizational learning has been recognized as a primary asset for competitive edge as well as being related to innovativeness in the respective literature (Lopez, Peon & Ordas, 2005).

Innovation is essential to any organization or country for developing economically (Hisrich, Peters, & Shephard, 2008). Nevertheless, creativity is required in order to realize innovation on a sustainable basis in organizations (Hisrich, 2004; Bubou, Ejim-Eze & Okrigwe, 2012). Innovation aims at generating fresh knowledge to formulate long-lasting solutions for organizations. It is a process involving recognition, acquisition, management and dissemination of knowledge for the purpose of producing new knowledge that will be beneficial to manufacture and offer unique services and products (Tsai & Wang, 2004). According to Tsai & Wang (2004), innovativeness of an organization stands out as a primary source to sustain its competitive edge when it is against an environment with rapid changes.

Organizations resort to innovations when they face internal and external changes or when they need to take preventive measures in order to affect their environment. Innovation is related to an organization's ability to learn. In this regard, several scholars (e.g. Calantone, Cavusgil & Zhao, 2002; Alegre & Chiva, 2008) emphasized the antecedent role of organizational learning in innovation. Likewise, Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle (2011) pointed out that organizational learning, innovation, and performance are all related to each other. Innovation entails and it is likely to have a direct contribution in the performance of an organization, or more specifically, the innovation performance of an organization may directly influence its overall performance (Alegre, Lapiedra & Chiva, 2006).

In order for organizations to be innovative, they have to provide their employees with an environment that they can obtain and share available knowledge. The organizational literature indicates that an organization's ability to learn is positively related with its innovative performance (e.g. [Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011; Alegre & Chiva, 2008]). For instance, the study by [48] established that learning has a positive effect on innovation, whereas innovation positively influences organizational performance. Likewise, [49] highlight the positive impact of organizational learning on innovation. Accordingly, organizations in pursuit of innovativeness should invest in learning and create a learning-enabling environment.

### 2.2.2 Organizational Development

Organizational development refers to a projected process of change with the aim of achieving organizational growth and better organizational performance (McLean, 2006). It reflects an organization-wide approach targeting an improved productivity and survival of the organization. Accordingly, organization is at the center of organizational development, and organization consists of a group who works to achieve common goals together. Organizational development, therefore, is closely related to human behaviors.

Organizational development is not a circumstantial activity, but a conscious and deliberate process. It requires a long-term commitment and dedication with the aim of enhancing organizational effectiveness and success (Karakaya & Yılmaz, 2013). Through such process, organizations aim to advance their internal capacity to the most productive extent and to get a sustainable viability.

Organizational development, as a relatively new field of research, mainly concerns with how organizations adapt to emerging conditions due to economic, social, and technological transformations. Organizational development researchers usually concentrate on certain topics such as enhanced effectiveness through internal changes or readjusting activities within an organization.

Since change management seems essential to organizational development and knowledge is required for adapting to changes, it is likely for organizational learning to predict and contribute to organizational development. In this context, the literature on organizational learning has related organizational learning to organizational development as one of the primary ways of organizational restructuring in strategic terms (Crossan & Berdrow, 2003). Accordingly, organizational learning can serve as an organizational practice aiming to increase the performance of the organization and sustain a competitive edge, which will result in organizational development and growth. In fact, the primary goal of organizational development is to make the organization become able to adapt to its environment effectively by means of improved capability in order to keep developing on a continuous basis. This requires acquisition and utilization of new knowledge, which refers to organizational learning.

### 2.2.3 Organizational Performance

Another outcome of organizational learning is the performance of the organization. It is empirically proven that organizational learning has a positive impact on financial and innovative performance of an organization (e.g. Dyck, Starke, Mischke & Mauws, 2005).

Organizational performance is a concept difficult to describe and measure, and therefore, it has been often described or used in various ways based on the context (e.g. Erbisch, 2004; Stainer, 1999). In this sense, Stankard's (2002) general definition states that organizational performance is the outcome of interactions of various components within an organization. In other words, it can be defined as the result of different processes that take place during daily operations in an organization. Another definition describes organizational performance as an organization's ability to accomplish its long-term goals (Robins & Wiersama, 1995). For the purpose of this article, organizational performance is viewed as an organization's ability to provide employment, enhance efficiency and productivity, and improve quality of work life resulting in survival and growth.

Organizations with a learning capability have a more adaptive and strong structure as they are committed to learning, adjusting emerging challenges and conditions on a continuous basis, and being open to novel ideas; they also have the ability to renew themselves according to the changing demands from the environment (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011; Kofman & Senge, 1993). Learning capability drives organizations to search for more knowledge regarding the needs of their customers, behaviors of their rivals, economic and technological advances as well as comprehending and analyzing such knowledge to the full extent (Santos-Vijande, Lopez-Sanchez & Trespalacios, 2012) Therefore, organizational learning may result in greater organizational performance.

The literature contains several studies reporting a significant relationship between organizational learning and organizational performance (e.g. Dunphy & Griiffiths, 1998; Ho, 2011; Akhtar, Arif, Rubi & Naveed, 2012). For instance, Khandekar and Sharma (2006) suggested that organizational success and growth is significantly determined by organizational learning. Wang and Ellinger (2008) found that organizational learning has a positive effect on organizational performance. Likewise, the empirical study by Lopez, Peon



and Ordas (2005) determined that performance and innovation of an organization are positively affected by organizational learning.

### **3. Conflict Management**

Organizational conflict has become a popular field examined by several disciplines such as psychology, business, and communication researchers. Despite this, there is not any brief description of conflict yet. In general sense, conflict is defined as “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources and interference from others in achieving their goals” and conflict management styles are defined as the “patterned responses, or clusters of behavior, that people use in conflict” (Wilmot & Hocker, 2013).

As an inherently inevitable phenomenon, conflicts occur at organizations due to human interactions. Such conflicts may take place at the individual level or between individuals or between the group and the individual or among the groups; however, they have to be dealt and managed in order to get the greatest benefit from them. Although organizational conflict is recognized as a form of interaction and a certain degree of conflict is considered as a factor motivating individuals and enhancing performance both at the individual and group levels, conflict may become deleterious and negatively affect performance and effectiveness of an organization if it is high in level or intensity.

Regarding dealing with conflicts, the literature provides two approaches; conflict resolution and conflict management. While resolution concerns with reducing or removing conflicts, conflict management focuses on the constructive aspect of conflicts and gives priority to organizational learning in order to get the maximum benefit and minimum harm. Actually, recent business literature suggests that conflicts based on task to a certain extent are favorable and functional. On the other hand, conflicts based on relationship are suggested to be detrimental at the workplace. For instance, while conflict related to tasks improves the quality of decisions among top management members, conflict related to relationship impairs such quality. From this framework, for a conflict management practice to be effective, it should enable employees to embrace a conflict style suitable for the circumstance, as they have to balance the degree and type of conflict they experience.

#### *3.1 Types of Conflicts in Organizations*

Organizational conflicts have been classified in various ways; however, for the purpose of this article, conflict will be discussed in three basic types based on scope: task conflict, interpersonal conflict and procedural conflict.

Task conflict occurs when there is a disagreement regarding the substance of the discussion. Task conflict, or as sometimes called cognitive conflict, is basically about different perspectives and opinions among group members, and involves disagreements on decision contents. This type of conflict may be constructive as it enhances the decision quality and the way of critical thinking. Task conflict is often considered connected to two beneficial effects that are related to each other. The first effect is the quality of group decisions. When groups face conflicts about tasks, they are apt to produce better decisions due to the improved cognitive understanding of the matter in question, which is triggered by task conflict. Such effect has been proven to occur at both the individual level (e.g. Putnam, 1994) and the group level (e.g. Fiol, 1994). The second positive effect is that the group decisions are accepted affectively. Several studies have demonstrated that the level of satisfaction with the group decision is enhanced and the desire to stay with the group is increased by task conflict (e.g.

Amason, 1996; Korsgaard & Schweiger, 1995).

The second type, interpersonal conflict, occurs when there is a disagreement between personalities of individuals. Interpersonal conflict involves one's disagreement with another person due to reasons that are not related to the matter of discussion. Sometimes called as a personality clash, this conflict type involves an opposing comment related to the individual traits of a member within a group or ignoring any goals of the organization in order to oppose a specific member of the group. Therefore, interpersonal conflict mostly manifests itself by non-verbal actions (Henry, 2009). Such actions may include lack of eye contact or frozen looks. Since this conflict is likely to have a greater adverse effect on group performance, it should be well managed for the group to maintain their co-existence.

The third and the last type is procedural conflict, referring to a disagreement regarding which procedures have to be followed in achieving the goals of the group. For managing this type of conflict, procedures may be renewed, and even the goals of the group may be revised. As is the case with task conflict, procedural conflict is likely to result in productive outcomes.

#### **4. Organizational Learning in Conflict Management**

In today's organizations, organizational learning acts as one of the most important tools to be used in conflict management, which includes acquisition, sharing and distribution of knowledge as well as maintaining knowledge for access in the future (organizational memorization) (Osabiya, 2015). Thereby, all members of the organization become collectively and actively involved in diagnosing and reacting against occurring problems. Although individual learning is required, it is not enough for organizational learning because there has to be a structure toward transferring the individual learning to collective learning.

Learning is determining and amending errors, and has two types: single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop type of organizational learning leads to changes in cognitions and behaviors within an existing mindset, whereas double-loop type results in changes outside the existing mindset and thereby, creates a new mindset. For an effective management of conflicts, double-loop learning should be encouraged instead of single-loop (Rahim, 2002). In order to implement an efficient conflict management system, there should also be a macro-level change in the organization, suggesting that a certain degree of conflict (task conflict and procedural conflict) has to be promoted while interpersonal conflicts should be minimized at all levels. This can be achieved only by implementing changes in culture and leadership of the organization (Rahim, 2002).

The strategies for conflict management should meet particular criteria in order to be successful (Rahim, 2002). The most important of such criteria is whether the strategy enhances organizational learning. Rather than handling conflicts within the organizations' current process and structure, organizations have to challenge the current conditions through allowing their employees to challenge the existing goals, processes, and beliefs.

#### **5. Conclusion and Organizational Implications**

This article focused on management of conflicts rather than conflict resolution, considering its potentially positive effects at the organizational level. This means that conflicts are inevitable due to human interactions within groups and they do not need to be avoided, but instead used as an opportunity to achieve improved organizational outcomes. The emphasis of conflict management is that conflicts may be functional and constructive, leading to increased efficiency and learning in organizations.

As one of the most rising topics of the modern literature on management, organizational learning enables organizations to successfully create, obtain and transfer knowledge as well as reflecting such knowledge in modified behaviors (Garvin, 1993). Through creation and utilization of knowledge, organizations gain the capability to adapt themselves to their changing environment. Although the management literature contains a considerable amount of research on learning, the past research has usually focused on learning at the individual level within an organization, which has resulted in much less interest in team/group development (Lahteenmaki, Toivonen & Mattila, 2001). The recent research, in turn, has started to value and analyze groups more than single individuals, which indicates that interactions within groups are important and learning involves a social aspect (Lick, 2006). In terms of such interactions, leaders play a major role since they are the primary factor that architectures the environment of interactions as well as configuring and shaping those interactions. In this context, very specific and clear recommendations have been introduced by Davenport and Prusak (1998) about the leaders' role in organizational learning. Some of these include that leaders encourage the significance of knowledge and learning; formulate, realize and supervise the organization's learning framework; guide how to develop a knowledge and learning strategy based on the available resources and thereby contribute to the improved skills of learning.

For organizations with a desire to improve organizational learning, a fully committed management is of great importance. Within this framework, management should create and support an organizational culture that appreciates acquiring, producing, and distributing knowledge as the core values of the organization. In organizational context, culture allows for the best possible way of using knowledge and experience in order to achieve organizational goals and to learn from the insightful ideas and behaviors based on knowledge (Bierly, Kessler & Christensen, 2000). Accordingly, management should approach learning strategically by focusing on it as a valuable tool that influences the accomplishment of long-term goals. Additionally, management should make all organizational members understand and recognize the importance of learning and motivate them to be actively engaged in all related processes. Finally, management or leadership should advocate change and undertake responsibility to shape an organization with the ability to reconstruct itself under new and challenging conditions (Jerez-Gomez, Cespedes-Lorente & Valle-Cabrera, 2005). To this end, leaders have to learn authority delegation among organizational members and organizations have to support participatory management styles since empowerment and participation in decision-making processes are known to enable organizational learning.

In conclusion, this article aimed to discuss the role of organizational learning in managing organizational conflicts. In this sense, some of the enablers and outcomes of organizational learning are discussed. However, there are several factors facilitating and resulting from organizational learning. Although those examined within the scope of this article are important, they do not provide a full understanding of the entire learning process at organizations. Therefore, more empirical studies are required to obtain a clearly identified framework of both individual and organizational factors in this regard.

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