

Scientific Investigation of the diversified Impacts and Effects of Corruption on Organizational Learning: An HR Perspective

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Abstract:

Works on corruption are found with different names such as; evil doings, workplace deviance, employee theft, unethical decision making but these practices are discussed as separate subjects. Literature shows that the lack of or absence of accountability is among core reasons of corruption in organizations. It has also been observed that corruption exists in different forms and at different levels in organizations. Literature also reveals that corruption has negative effects on organizations; however, literature does not have any evidence of the positive impacts of corruption on organizations. This research discusses different forms and causes of corruption and investigates how it impedes organizational learning, and what are the ways to unlearn destructive practices. Furthermore, this study suggests establishing mechanisms to detect and prevent corruption when such bad practices are identified. This study provides the best practical implications to learn some good things from evil doings.

Key Words:

Corruption, Organization Learning, Employee Performance, Organizational Development, Learning, Unlearning

Introduction:

Corruption is considered to be a worldwide phenomenon that is not only restricted to any particular race, political system, creed or even geographical location. Neither is corruption a relatively contemporary phenomenon as traces of corruption have been found in ancient civilizations including those that provided the impetus for modern democracy. Thus, the effects of corruption have been felt and are still being witnessed across the globe from the most developed nations on earth to the less developed ones (Agbibo, 2012). Mostly corruption is considered as one of the major hurdles to social, as well as economic advancement. (Aguilera & Adera, 2008). Corruption has become a global issue and is almost prevailing in each organization whether it is a religious, sports, profit-making, or non-profit-making organization. Corruption is the abuse of power, it refers to a situation whereby one's authority is immorally applied to attained special benefits (Agbibo, 2015).

Corruption has many negative long-lasting effects as disturbing economic development, lessened the level of trust of stakeholders in government, and lowered the legitimacy of the democracy and the market economy as well. Given its unfavorable effects, by a large segment of researchers, corruption is considered as cancer in the society. Such unethical behaviors by employees must be investigated and should be controlled to make sure to maintain the integrity of the organizational learning culture (Kimemia, 2014). According to Mason and Leek (2008), organizational learning is an upgradation or advancement in the practices of an organization. Organizational learning is assumed to perform a very critical role in the survival, development and obtaining & maintaining competitive advantage in rapidly changing business environment (Mason, Oshri, and Leek, 2012; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). There could be found a big number of researches that verify the impacts of organizational learning on organizational performance (Milia and Birdi, 2010; Oh and Kuchinke, 2017). Organizational Learning enables the organization to face unanticipated business circumstances and improve performance (Chiva et al., 2007). In the field of contemporary management, the organizational learning is being considered a strategic tool for the attainment of competitive advantage (Saadat and Saadat, 2016).

Contribution:

Although there is a valuable contribution to corruption and organizational learning in separate domains. But a few literatures have been found which shows relation between corruption and organizational learning. Hence, in this research by utilizing case study research methodology, investigates how corruption effects on organizational learning by identifying, investigating, and producing insights into:

This research supports to understand the corruption and its diversified effects on organizational learning; it discusses how organizations overcome negative effects. How unlearning evil practices and learning constructive practices can lead to organizational development. Any change in routines is linked with organizational learning” (Nooteboom & Bogenrieder, 2002; Egidi, 1995; Orlikowski, 1996; Feldman, 2000). Postrel and Rumelt (1992) see this as organizational change, where individuals are ‘unlearning old routines and learning new ones’ (p.412).

This study will be a good addition in the management sciences domain and will be practical as well. It will not only reflect different causes and types of corruption but will study its impacts on organizational learning. Although much work has been done about corruption and its impacts on the economy and organizations’ growth. But there is not much work on the relation between corruption and organizational learning. This study will explore the said area further by understanding corruption’s effects on organizational learning. It will discuss how corrupt practices could be unlearned, and how constructive practices could be learned or developed for higher organizational performance and growth.

Literature Review:

Corruption:

Corruption is assumed to be a leading barrier to both economic as well as social development (Aguilera & Adera, 2008). Corruption is a product of weak state administration that comes forward when an individual or organization has control and power over a good or service, authority over decision making and, limited or no accountability (Kiltgaard, 1998). Corruption is the main issue, particularly in the developing countries.

Corruption has diversified range of detrimental effects. Corruption has very harmful effects on societal and economic growth & development has been spread in all sects of society and economy (Dimant and Tosato, 2017). Tamer (2016), also believed that corruption damages economic growth by hurting political stability and reducing human capital growth. According to Neudorfer and Theuerkauf (2014) corruption paralyses the formal setup of organizations and bring economic inequalities among different sects of the society, which ultimately leads to political uncertainty. Further, Farzanegan and Witthuhn (2017), observed a positive correlation between corruption and political instability. According to Bicchieri and Ganegonda (2017), corruption is a “complex social phenomenon” and source of motivation to be involved in corrupt actions which are in diverse variety and is the outcome of interactions at the micro-level, meso-level and macro-level.

“The abuse of official duty by public officials, entailing a direct or indirect benefit derived from a public service position for an individual or a group by privileging private interests over the common good and encompassing the violation of rules regulating public service behavior or the ethics of public service” (Heywood and Meyer-Sahling, 2014).

According to Ashforth and Anand (2003), corruption is about misusing of power to facilitate corrupt actors for the gain of authority or position and delegating knowledge to others for personal gain. When such unethical practices are adopted in organizations, organizational learning is converted into bad learning and evil doings (Brief et al., 2001: 473). Absence of moral engagement plays the role of facilitation to grow corrupt practices within the organization by diminishing employees’ moral values (Butterfield et al., 2000).

As personal values or norms are considered one’s own set of moral standards or beliefs, Tavits (2010) stated that personal norms may also contribute to one’s learning of unethical or dishonest behaviors. On other hand (Dong et al., 2012; 5) pointed out “individuals are more likely to commit crimes when those around them do”. Tavits (2010) stated that people are supposed to be more inclined to unethical or corrupt practices when they perceive that corrupt behaviors are accepted by their seniors and common among their colleagues. Roberts et al., (2007) expressed that those workers who have no or weak moral values are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors at workplace, such as cheating, theft and other types of corruption.

Hammed (2018), defines corruption as the illegal and dishonest behavior of the government officials. Corruption when becomes the norm of the day then employees tend to learn corrupt practices as a favorable and decent actions (Anand et al., 2005). This evolving widespread of organizational corruption has severely affected reputation of public sector organizations and lowered the confidence & faith of stakeholders in the integrity of organizations and their leadership (Stanusch and Simha, 2013). When corruption becomes a learned norm the organizational performance is decreased and its image is distorted. Corruption and deviant workplace activities have become big challenges for every organization. Organizations are taking every possible step to eradicate these evil doings. These behaviors are unethical, illegal, and harmful to environment of every organization. (Ahmad et al., 2012)

Organizational learning:

Organizational learning brings technological innovation and process improvement which results in product enhancement (Gomes and Wojahn2017). Even though the concept of Organizational learning has been defined in a variety of ways according to academic perspective (Baxter et al., 2017), the one of the most common definitions is that “organizational learning” is an organizational change which is acquired through experiences. The question arises, changes in what? Although researchers have debated whether organizational learning should be defined as a change in cognitions or behavior, that debate has faded. Generally learning involves obtaining knowledge, knowledge sharing, knowledge employment and also new success. (Gumusluoglu and Ilsev 2009).

One core aim for learning is to aid organizations to behave in a participatory method for the use of learning opportunities. The drive behind learning is to define the level that organizations can learn. Leaders’ aim is to form a "demand pull" system, which encourage people in the organization to learn more (Senge, 2004). Furthermore, leadership is crucial to organizational learning and leaders of learning organizations act as facilitators and mentors (Senge, 2004). Peter Senge (1990) also encouraged the importance of information sharing to make organizations successful.

It is very important to understand that organizational learning is indispensable for the sustainability and growth of the organizational (Peter A.C. Smith, 2012). According to (Gowen et al., 2006) learning and knowledge management has a great impact on

organizational performance. There are two crucial variables that determine organizational performance; organizational learning and innovation, both have positive causal effect, these both vigorous proficiencies are strategic. A plenty of research has explored the connection between learning and innovation (Kalling, 2007), and it has been stated that learning is a necessary fragment of innovation.

Destructive learning:

One point of view of learning suggests that organizations may learn anything that would not be sound or useful, organization may learn things that are malicious for institutions. Hamilton and Sanders (1999) call destructive learning malevolence, which refers to “doing or having a tendency to do hurt; pernicious, naughty, biased”. Institutions and the people inside their boundaries are, to be in undoubtedly, capable of malevolence exercises in the first sense. Associations do not precisely need to do detestable; however, their individuals potentially confer malicious acts (Hamilton and Sanders, 1999).

According to Snell (2001), organizational learning systems supposed to face failures as they lack in required moral values. Such critique could not be ignored in the organizational learning literature as these moral values are considered to be the soul of organizational philosophy. In Argyris and Schon (1996) view, organizational learning should not be considered beneficial for the organizations all the time. Researches has explored that unaccepted behavior and abusive supervision produces poor work performance at the organizational workplace (Bilal, Rafi, and Khalid, 2017). Bad learned practices such as organizational politics have very disastrous effects on organizational in multiple ways. As Karatepe (2013) argued that such type of destructive organizational politics causes the employees' perception of work environment risky and ambiguous which gradually results in poor work engagement.

Unlearning:

The concept of unlearning in modern era has gaining tremendously large attention of researchers and practitioners in the context of organizational learning. Ten decades ago, once an individual gained some knowledge, it was considered for his life time and same was passed down to generations and was considered highly useful (Delahaye 2000, p.49). In recent era this percept has been changed. Now a days it has been observed that knowledge becomes obsolete after some time when new arenas of knowledge emerge. This rapid change in knowledge acquisition has strengthen the concept of “unlearning process”.

(Becker, 2005, p. 661) illustrates learning as;

“the process by which individuals and organizations acknowledge and release prior learning (including assumptions and mental frameworks) in order to accommodate new information and behaviors.”

Common understanding is that organizations require new knowledge by discarding old practices to compete with changing environment which is necessary for innovation (Tsang, 2008). But on the same time, it is important to understand that when an organization matures with the passage of time than its age becomes a considerable barrier to unlearn prevailing practices (Tsang and Zahra, 2008). Some researchers have criticized the concept of unlearning such as Howells and Scholderer (2016) proposed to remove this concept as it is insincerely imported from the literature of psychology. In response to critiques of these researchers, Tsang (2017a, 2017b) defended the concept of forgetting and unlearning.

Regardless of our awareness of such relationship that connects organizational age and forgetting, we are still unable to deeply understand that how different routines become the part and parcel of the organizational system when organizations grow.” *It is important to note that unlearning is not a unitary concept since, for example, intentional or unintentional unlearning characterizes two different processes that both require adequate articulation and distinction”* (Fernandez and Sune, 2009). According to operational viewpoint the organizational learning is supposed to be a considerable change in organizational belief system, norms & values, policies & processes and physical objects (Tushman, 1986; Sinkula, 2002).

Constructive Learning:

Authoritative learning is a procedure of progress in thought and activity both individual and shared inserted in and influenced by the foundations of the association (Vera and Crossan, 2004). Authoritative learning alludes to a hierarchical change in information, nearness supplements the data being referred to, the change, or degrade (Çınar and Eren, 2015). Hence authoritative learning assumes an imperative part to increase the upper hand (Mena and Chabowski, 2015). Authoritative learning has essential significance to build future that association wishes (Aydin and Ceylan, 2009). This study contends that debasement can influence and shape authoritative learning.

Knowledge is necessary for innovation and the attainment of competitive advantage. (Kaufmann and Todtling, 2002; Lee et al., 2010). To obtain and sustain this competitive advantage, organizations are striving for the acquisition of knowledge and learning (Nonaka et al., 2000). Argyris and Schön (1996) expressed their views of learning as;

“Generically an organization may be said to learn when it acquires information (knowledge, understanding, know-how, techniques, or practices) of any kind by whatever means. In this overarching sense, all organizations learn, for good or ill, whenever they add to their store of information, and there is no stricture on how the addiction may occur.”

Research Methodology:

Case study as research methodology:

Case study as a research methodology has been employed in this research to understand how corruption affects Organizational Learning (Destructive learning, unlearning, constructive learning). The findings/results are based on semi-structured interviews (N=18) with managerial and non-managerial staff working in PLOC (virtual name of the company has been used to ensure privacy). It is very important to understand research philosophy as it provides foundation for how a researcher approach his research (Wilson, 2014). According to Baskarada (2014) case study is very famous among researchers who are interested in qualitative research. “In qualitative research, case study is one of the frequently used methodologies” (Yazan, 2015). No doubt there is a rich literature on case studies in general but still there are a few research pieces on relevant steps to effectively conduct case study research (Hancock and Agozzine, 2016). According to Yin (2017), a few studies have attempted to produce required practical details about completing case study process.

Through the past studies’ reports, the case study research tries to explore and understand complex issues of social nature. When holistic, detailed and detailed inquiry is required than case study research method is strongly recommended. Many social sciences studies opt case study as a tool and it is increasingly being utilized and becoming prominent in issues regarding education (Gulsecen and Kubat, 2006) and problems prevailed in a community (Johnson, 2006) such as poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, illiteracy, etc. One of the reasons for the recognition of case study as a research method is that researchers were becoming more concerned about the limitations of quantitative methods in providing

holistic and in-depth explanations of the social and behavioral problems in question. Through case study methods, a researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective. By including both quantitative and qualitative data, case study helps explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997). Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Perry, 1998). Case study as a research approach emphasizes on understanding about the dynamics that is present within particular settings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Discussion and Conclusion:

There are several implications from this research and findings support the effects of corruption on organizational learning.

Corruption, its causes and types:

Corruption is a disease which kills the organization performance. It is any misuse of position and power for personal interest. Organizational environment, individual character, a corrupt colleague, injustice and absence of law causes corruption and bad learning practices. Corruption could be on individual, group or organizational level. People get corrupted when they are not treated fairly and equally. To balance this injustice, they do wrong things. Low salaries, low ethical orientation in grooming phase and lust for wealth and power also forces behind corruption. To fight with corruption, management has to show his willingness and they must practice accountability system. Corruption all deviant behaviors could be discouraged by punishment mechanism.

Impacts of corruption on Organizational learning:

Presence of corrupt practices in organizations are affecting organizations in various ways. Employees are more concerned about developing links with influential people to get promotions and incentives. Employees are interested in learning only those things which are helpful for their survival. This is result of penetration of evil practices in the organizations. The lack of fairness and transparency is impeding the unlearning of bad practices. Leaders should demonstrate the best behavior to promote organizational norms and values of honesty, integrity and transparency.

Unlearning bad practices and learning good practices:

Normally there were different forms of corruption including stealing fuel. However, the accountability has major role to overcome explicit bad learning practices such as corruption in financial matters, stealing of fuel and illegal mixing of impurities in the fuel. Implementation of accountability in organizations effectively by ethical leadership is very much important. Accountability can play a vital role in unlearning bad practices and adopting good learning practices. When everyone's performance is measured with one yard stick it assures transparency, justice and rule of law. This approach gives the feelings of trust and fairness. Therefore, people adopt to the best practices and learn good habits of performing well. As unlearning is a systematic and time taking process, therefore management should demonstrate patience. To make people unlearn destructive practices, management should introduce punish & reward system. If PLOC, a state-owned company can improve its condition than why not other governmental institutes.

Limitations and future Research:

There are numerous potential limitations of this study needs to be addressed. First, this research was the first effort to study the impacts of corruption/evil doings on organizational. So, there is a need to reproduce these findings. Second, this study using case study method used one organization, in future research there should be included more organizations in study. Third, this research was narrow in scope as it used some specific factors/types of bad practices and organizational learning. Future research should also analyze the other factors of corruption and deviant behaviors, its effects on employees' moral. Many meetings with employees of PLOC were in Urdu as it is a national language and easy to understand and grasp the deep meaning, interpretation into English may add to the restrictions. It is also important to know that Companies with different financial conditions and market position belonging to different sectors across the globe have common understanding of corruption and its impacts on organization. But it might have different understandings of corruption's effects on organizational.

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