Exploring a Learning Organization Philosophy to Foster Intellectual Capital Development in a Selected University

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Abstract: The Higher Education landscape is characterized by rapid change, complexity, competition and stakeholder demands. Hence, pertinent strategies are critical for universities to remain relevant and competitive. Universities play a role in contributing to socio-economic development. Therefore, these institutions are continuously exploring effective strategic approaches to remaining competitive. The Learning Organization philosophy is a concept that has been adopted predominantly by organizations in the private sector to foster and institutionalise intellectual capital development to remain competitive. The aim of this study was to explore the Learning Organisation philosophy as a strategic option to foster and institutionalise intellectual capital development in the university. The problem is the prevalence of a silo mentality and the lack of an institutionalised overarching philosophy to foster intellectual capital development in the university. A survey design was used to conduct this study. Moreover, the study was underpinned by a post-positivism philosophical worldview. Hence, a cross-sectional design was adopted. Stratified simple random sampling was used to select 291 participants from a population of employees at a selected public University of Technology. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative data. Overall, the findings of the study revealed that the adoption of a Learning Organization philosophy would foster intellectual capital development across the University. Participants indicated that a Learning Organization philosophy would eradicate the silo mentality and create a conducive environment for cross-functional collaboration in the university. In addition, the results showed that intellectual capital development was critical for the university to gain competitiveness and remaining relevant. A Learning Organization philosophy is regarded as an overarching philosophy that fosters continuous improvement through continuous learning in an organization. Therefore, this study provides organizations, especially Universities of Technology, with necessary insights into the adoption of a Learning Organization philosophy as a strategic option to promote and institutionalise intellectual capital development across the institution.

Keywords: Learning organization, Knowledge sharing, Continuous improvement, Higher education, Intellectual capital development

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving contemporary environment in which public and private organizations operate, the effective utilization of organizational resources, including intellectual capital, is critical. Lin et al (2020) emphasise that complex challenges require new approaches to develop innovative and effective solutions. This applies to universities as well. A Learning Organisation philosophy is critical for universities, as Wang and Rashid (2022) state that these institutions continue to face unpredictable and rapid change. This concept is key to fostering continuous learning, cross-functional collaboration and knowledge sharing in an organization. According to Githuka, Kinyua and Muchemi (2022), a learning organization fosters a strong institutionalized culture in an organization where employees continuously acquire and share knowledge to gain a competitive advantage. Ahmad et al (2023) posit that the learning organization concept is regarded as the lungs for organizational success and competitive edge. Intellectual capital, on the other hand, is regarded as a key factor to improve organizational effectiveness (Hariyono and Narsa 2024). Furthermore, Anggraeni et al (2023) posit that intellectual capital refers to the intangible resources in an organization. This study was conducted in a selected university of technology in Durban, South Africa. The study is motivated by a lack of an overarching philosophy to institutionalise and internalize intellectual capacity development. Fared and Darmawan (2021) succinctly state that when each department or unit focuses on its functions and fails to understand the contribution of other departments, this encumbers organizational effectiveness. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore a learning organization philosophy to enhance intellectual capacity development in the university. Given the environment in which universities operate, the adoption of the learning organization concept is central to enhancing intellectual capacity development, knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration and organizational effectiveness. Farooq and Ahmand (2023) posit that in a highly competitive environment, intellectual capital is key to improving an organization's performance to gain a competitive advantage.

2. Literature Review

Peter Senge is regarded as the initiator who introduced and popularised the concept of the Learning Organisation in his book 'The Fifth Discipline' (Githuku, Kinyua and Muchemi 2022). Senge (2006) defined a

Learning Organization as an organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire; where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured; where collective aspiration is set free; and where people are continually learning how to learn together. This is an expansive definition. Interestingly, the learning organization has been defined in many different ways. Senge's theory on the learning organization is, according to Sandhane, Patil and Joseph (2025), a comprehensive theory. An organization that becomes a learning organization will excel in future because of the ability to learn to Sandhane, Patil and Joseph (2025). This paper captures definitions from Peter Sege and Garvin. According to Garvin (1993), a Learning Organization is an organization that is skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights. One of the objectives was to examine the influence of a Learning Organization on intellectual development. Based on the findings, participants indicated that adopting a learning organization would be of great benefit to the university. For the theoretical perspective, this study relied on two theories, namely those of Peter Senge and Marsic and Watkins (1993). Both theories emphasise continuous learning at the systems level and also knowledge acquisition and sharing across the organization. Furthermore, Peter Senge is regarded as a person who popularised the Learning Organization concept. These theories provide an appropriate lens to understand learning in an organization. In the present study, this alludes to learning in a university context.

3. Gaining a Competitive Advantage Through Intellectual Capacity Development

Intellectual capacity is the most important factor to enhancing organizational performance and gaining a competitive advantage, according to Mukaro, Deka and Rukani (2023). Furthermore, Kianto, Cabrilo and Uziene (2025) emphasize that intellectual capital has been identified as key for organizations to become competitive in a rapidly changing business environment. Exploring effective strategies to enhance intellectual capacity development is critical for both private and public organizations. This also applies to universities. Afshari and Nasab (2021) describe intellectual capital as intangible assets accumulated through knowledge acquisition, innovation and knowledge creation. Intellectual capital has three dimensions, namely human capital, structural capital and relational capital. According to Barket and Beh (2018), intellectual capital is regarded as a source of competitive advantage. Consequently, to maintain competitive advantage and survival, organisations, according to Truong, Ngyen and Vrontis (2023), must embrace innovation because successful innovation depends on the effective use of intellectual capital. Without the ability to compete and evolve, no organization can stand the test of time (Darius 2022). Therefore, an overarching philosophy is critical to institutionalize and internalize intellectual capital development in an organization. Bratiano and Bejinaru (2019) state that intellectual capital is used for value creation in organizations. This is critical, given the competitive nature of the environment in which organizations operate. Hence this study explores a Learning Organization philosophy in that context.

4. The Effects of a Learning Organization on Intellectual Capacity Development

Intellectual Capital is, according to Darius (2022), a strategic tool for all organizations to remain competitive. In addition, Kianto, Cabrilo and Uziene (2025) describe intellectual capital as a dynamic force to drive innovation in an organization. The learning organization concept is described by Rai (2024) as referring to the new knowledge constantly acquired, created and shared by employees across the organization. Afshari and Nasab (2021) posit that promoting learning in an organization is critical to maintaining a competitive advantage and the effective use of intangible resources. In a rapidly changing business environment, the importance of maintaining competitiveness cannot be overstated, according to Darius (2022) . Continuously changing conditions in the environment have generated interest in organizational learning. Hence, organizational survival is key in the era of unpredictability and complexity. Hence, Bratiano and Bejinaru (2019) refer to intellectual capital as knowledge of the workforce. The painful reality is that universities, like other organizations, are facing competition and they have to respond to the latest trends as well as to the needs of the stakeholders.

5. Institutionalizing a Learning Organization to Enhance Knowledge Sharing

Modern organizations are moving away from internal boundaries or functional boundaries towards creating internal networks to foster interrelationships in organization (Dirani et al 2021). Furthermore, they state that there is a need to explore the learning organization as a phenomenon in an interdepartmental collaboration context. Matic (2022) argues that the ability to learn and effectively manage acquired knowledge is key for organizations operating in an ever-changing business environment. Watkins and Marsick (1993) state that a learning organization has an enhanced capacity to learn, and this happens across the organization. Learning is considered as critical to improving organizational performance and effectiveness (Rai 2024). According to Matic (2022), a Learning Organization is regarded as critical for organizations to compete and survive.

6. Research Methodology

A quantitative research approach was used to achieve the objectives of the study. This approach was adopted because, according to Pregoner (2024), it uses a scientific and systematic investigation that focuses on quantifying the relationships between variables through numerical data. In addition, findings from a quantitative study can be generalised to large populations. The study adopted a survey design, rooted in a positivist philosophical worldview. According to Holtom et al (2022), the survey design remains a popular data collection method, particularly in social science research. Sanders et al (2022) argue that every research study should be guided by a philosophical worldview. Consequently, a cross-sectional design was adopted to conduct this study. Ghanad (2023) states that a cross-sectional design is data is collected at a specific time. Participants in the study were selected from the employees of a selected university of technology in Durban, South Africa, using a stratified sampling technique. This sampling technique allows the researcher to divide the population into strata, for example, academics and administration (Isaac 2023). The population comprised academic and administrative staff. The study utilized a self-administered questionnaire with 5 – point Likert scale statements to collect quantitative data. Using a questionnaire instrument in the survey design is the most common method to collect quantitative data (Taherdoost 2023). Hence, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software was used to analyze data. The analysis of quantitative data involved inferential and descriptive analyses. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the measuring instrument with an overall reliability score of 0.912.

7. Profile of Participants

This section presents descriptive statistics based on the biographical information of the participants in the study. Participants were selected from both academic and administration staff at the selected university of technology. Therefore, to profile the participants, information was solicited in relation to whether they were part of the academic or administration sector in the university.

8. Sector in the University of Technology

The sample was selected from two different sectors (academic and administration), as presented in Figure 1 below.

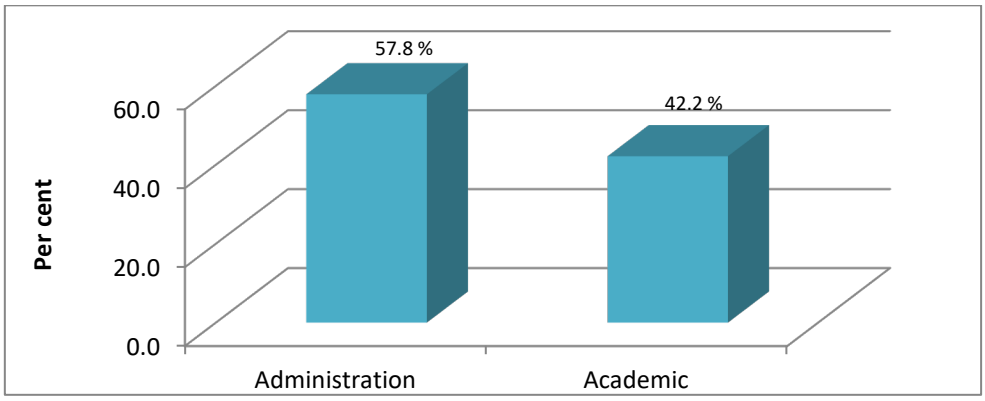


Figure 1: Sector in the University of Technology

The results show that 58% of the participants were from the administration sector, and 42.2% from the academic sector. In addition, it was found that the number of respondents was almost in the ratio of 6:4 for the administrative and academic sectors. Overall, this revealed that at this selected university, the workforce was predominantly more administrative staff than academics. According to Anggraeni et al (2023) intangible resources are key aspect to achieving organizational goals.

9. Results and Discussion

Descriptive and inferential statistics are presented and discussed in the next section. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS. Inferential statistical tests performed included ANOVA and Pearson Chi-Square tests. Descriptive statistics allow the researcher to present research data and provide interpretations in a comprehensive and meaningful way (Ghanad 2023). On the other hand, the Chi-Square test was used to assess statistical relationships between variables.

10. Opportunities for the Application of a Learning Organisation Philosophy in the University of Technology

This section examined opportunities for the application of a Learning Organisation philosophy at the University of Technology. Figure 2 below presents participants' responses on opportunities for the application of a Learning Organisation philosophy at the university.

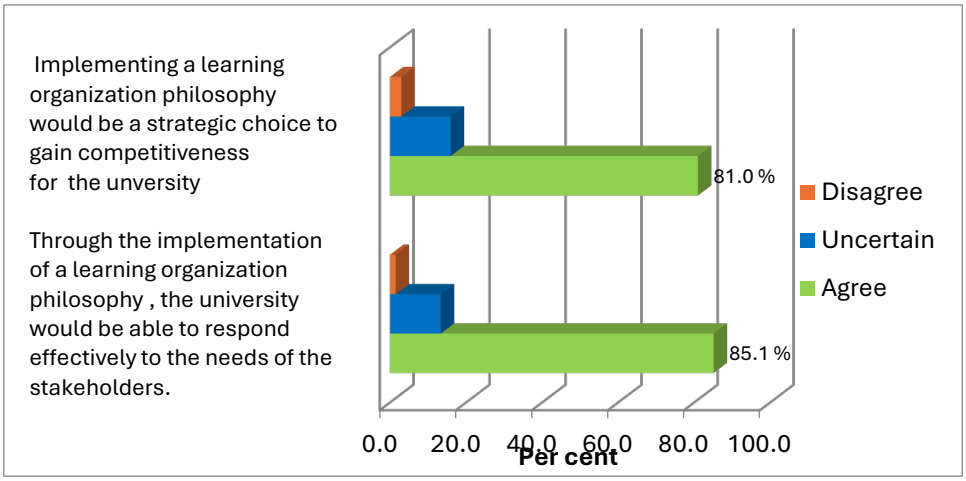


Figure 2: Opportunities for the application of a Learning Organization

According to Watkins and Marsick (1993), a Learning Organization is able to transform itself through institutionalized continuous learning. Anggraeni et al (2023) state that a conducive environment to achieve organizational goals is critical to motivate organizational members. Most of the participants, approximately 81% of whom felt that applying a Learning Organization would be a strategic choice for university. Furthermore, 85% of the participants indicated that through the adoption of a Learning Organization, the university would be able meet the needs of the stakeholders. Overall, participants were optimistic about the application of a Learning Organization in the university. The findings revealed that there was a conducive environment to implement a Learning Organization in the university.

11. University Governance and Institutional Culture from the Employees' Perspective

There were items in the questionnaire to assess participants' perspectives on the institutional culture and governance in relation to organizational learning in the university. Austin and Jones (2024) argue that governance is key to the effective functioning of the university at all levels. Figure 3 below provides a summary of the responses illustrating the views of participants on university governance and institutional culture.

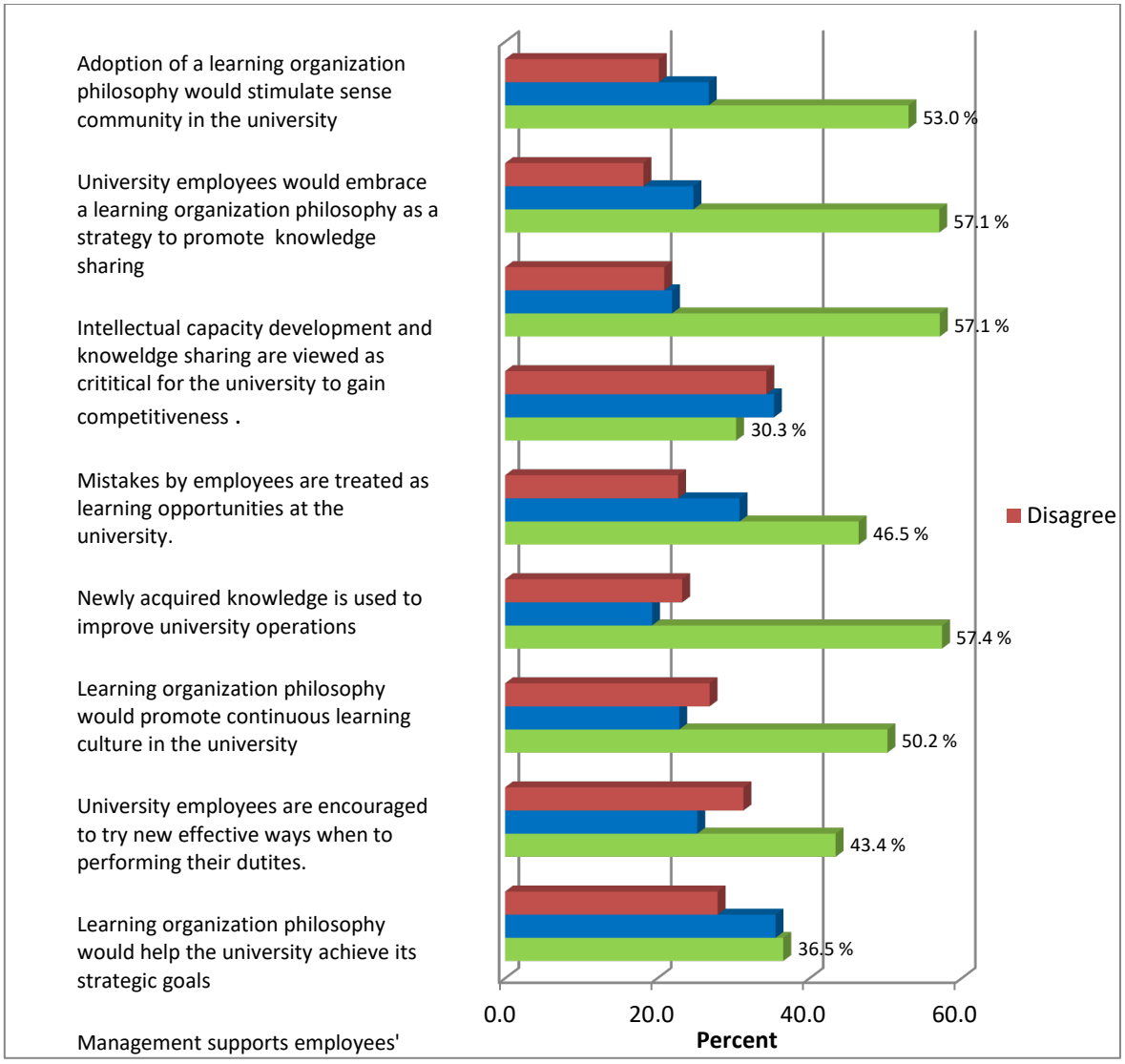


Figure 3: University governance and institutional culture

According to Anderson (2020), managers in organizations have a critical role to play in creating a conducive environment for learning to flourish. Importantly, employees should be encouraged to learn from their mistakes. Overall, the responses show higher levels of agreement for most statements. Comparatively, the findings indicated low levels of agreement on just two statements, namely mistakes by employees are treated as learning opportunities and management supports employees' initiatives to improve organisational processes in the university. Agreement levels on both variables were at 30.3% and 36.5% respectively. The majority of the participants indicated that the university is an organisation where employees strive for excellence, at 57.1%; they are encouraged to be innovative, at 57.4%; and a statement on university employees indicating that they would embrace the application of learning organization at 57.1%. Furthermore, there was a high level of agreement that adopting a Learning Organization philosophy would stimulate a sense of community, and employees are willing continuously to improve on what they do, at 53.0%. The Learning Organisation philosophy places strong emphasis on the importance of a sense of community within an organisation. Matic (2022) posits that a Learning Organization philosophy has been identified as a strategic option for competing in a highly demanding and rapidly changing environment. Based on the overall responses, participants were optimistic about the applicability of a learning organization in the university context, particularly on enhancing intellectual capital development and knowledge sharing. This is important because Ahmad et al (2023) emphasise that in a leaning organization, learning happens both at individual and collective levels in an organization. Similarly, competitive advantage is, according to Anggraeni et al (2023), the most important factor for an organization's ability to remain competitive.

Table 1: Presents ANOVA test results on university governance and institutional culture

ANOVA : Employee Perceptions						
	ANOVA	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Adoption of a Learning Organization philosophy will stimulate sense of community in the university.	Between Groups	.739	1	.739	.606	.437
	Within Groups	239.301	196	1.221		
	Total	**240.040**	**197**			
University employees would embrace a Learning Organization philosophy as a strategy to promote knowledge sharing.	Between Groups	1.805	1	1.805	1.599	.208
	Within Groups	221.371	196	1.129		
	Total	**223.177**	**197**			
Intellectual capacity development and knowledge sharing are viewed as critical for the university to gain competitiveness.	Between Groups	.209	1	.209	.171	.679
	Within Groups	236.709	194	1.220		
	Total	**236.918**	**195**			
Mistakes by employees are treated as learning opportunities at the university.	Between Groups	.792	1	.792	.723	.396
	Within Groups	217.934	199	1.095		
	Total	**218.726**	**200**			
Newly acquired knowledge is used to improve university operations.	Between Groups	1.244	1	1.244	1.214	.272
	Within Groups	200.917	196	1.025		
	Total	**202.162**	**197**			
University employees are encouraged to try new, effective ways when performing their duties.	Between Groups	1.224	1	1.224	.982	.323
	Within Groups	249.232	200	1.246		
	Total	**250.455**	**201**			
Adopting a Learning Organization philosophy would promote a continuous learning culture in the university	Between Groups	14.177	1	14.177	10.407	.001
	Within Groups	271.077	199	1.362		
	Total	**285.254**	**200**			
Learning Organization philosophy would help the university to achieve its strategic goals.	Between Groups	.269	1	.269	.220	.640
	Within Groups	239.771	196	1.223		
	Total	**240.040**	**197**			
Management supports employees' initiatives to improve organisational processes at the university.	Between Groups	6.092	1	6.092	6.016	.015
	Within Groups	197.441	195	1.013		
	Total	**203.533**	**196**			

The ANOVA test results in Table 1 reveal variables with statistically significant differences, as well as variables with no statistical significance. These variables relate to perceptions of both academic and administration sectors on university governance. Study variables with a significant difference included: Adopting a Learning Organization philosophy would promote a continuous learning culture in the university, with a p-value of **0.001;** and university management supports employees' initiatives in improving organisational processes, with a p-value of **0.015**. However, all other variables had no statistical significance.

Table 2 Pearson Chi-Square Test results on University governance and institutional culture

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
	Sector	**Department**
Adoption of a Learning Organization philosophy will stimulate sense community in the university.	0.515	0.134
University employees would embrace a Learning Organization philosophy as a strategy to promote knowledge sharing.	0.486	0.022*
Intellectual capacity development and knowledge-sharing are viewed as critical for the university to gain competitiveness.	0.287	0.189
Mistakes by employees are treated as learning opportunities at the university.	0.082	0.006*
Newly acquired knowledge is used to improve university operations.	0.263	0.015*
University employees are encouraged to try new effective ways when performing their duties.	0.641	0.267
Adopting a Learning Organization philosophy would promote continuous learning culture in the university.	0.009*	0.137
Learning Organization philosophy would help the university to achieve its strategic goals.	0.498	0.144
Management support employees' initiatives to improve organisational processes at the university.	0.182	0.158

The chi-square results in Table 2 indicate a statistically significant relationship between the academic and administration sectors on the following variables:

- University employees would embrace a Learning Organization philosophy as a strategy to promote knowledge-sharing,
- Mistakes by employees are treated as learning opportunities at the university,
- Newly acquired knowledge is used to improve university operations

In other words, participants were positive about the university environment with regard to the abovementioned variables. This was a case from both academic and administration staff. Hence, Austin and Jones (2024) highlight that collegiality is the bedrock of university governance and it is regarded as a vehicle of institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, Fared and Darmawan (2021) emphasise the importance of a holistic understanding of operations in an organization. This understanding encourages knowledge sharing within and beyond functional boundaries in an organization. In a context of intellectual capacity develop, this is key. Hence, Anggraeni et al (2023) point out that intellectual capital is recognised as the most important asset in an organization. The results further indicate that with the rest of the study variables, there was no statistically significant relationship between the academic and administration sectors. Study variables with no statistically significant relationship have a **p-value** greater than **0.05**.

12. Adaptability and Continuous Learning in the University

This section deals with the continuous learning culture and adaptability in the university. Continuous learning is key, as Austin and Jones (2024) emphasize that universities continue to face a myriad of challenges globally.

Figure 4 below presents a summary of the responses from the participants.

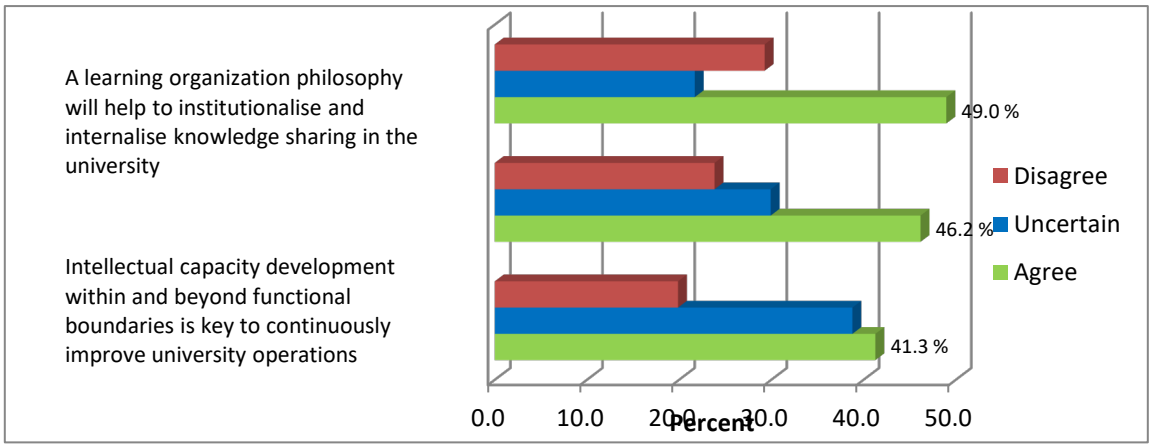


Figure 4: Adaptability and continuous learning in the university

The levels of agreement on all variables are less than 50% in this section. The findings revealed that 49% of participants were of the view that the implementation of a Learning Organization philosophy would promote learning at both the individual and collective levels. The results indicate that learning and sharing of knowledge was critical to responding effectively to the needs of the university's stakeholders. Although levels of agreement with statements in this section were less than 50%, the information helps to provide the perspective of participants on statements raised in this section. The findings resonate with the argument presented by Hariyono and Narsa (2024) that intellectual capital is a critical factor to improve organisational effectiveness. In addition, the findings highlight the importance of a conducive environment to promote continuous learning within and beyond functional boundaries in the university. Importantly, participants were positive that adopting a learning organization philosophy would create a conducive environment to institutionalise and internalise intellectual capital development in the university. Knowledge is acquired through learning, and participants regarded knowledge as a key resource to gain competitive advantage in the university. Highlighting the importance of a learning organization, Ahmad et al (2023) state that a learning organization has the ability to evolve and adapt, which is critical given the environment in which organizations operate.

13. Research Contribution

This study contributes to existing literature by capturing the influence of a learning organization philosophy in enhancing intellectual capital development, particularly in the university context. Furthermore, this study discusses intellectual capital development from a learning organization perspective but in a university context. Practically, this provides necessary insights to adopt a learning organization for the purposes of enhancing learning, fostering intellectual capital development and effectively managing acquired knowledge. Consequently, this leads to survival and gaining a competitive edge. This study presents a learning organization as a necessary overarching philosophy to institutionalise and internalise intellectual capacity development in organizations. Given the myriad challenges faced by universities globally, as highlighted by Austin and Jones (2024), an overarching philosophy to enhance intellectual capacity across the university is a vehicle of gaining competitive advantage.

14. Study Limitations and Future Research

The study has limitations that provide avenues for future research. Firstly, the study was conducted involving one selected university of technology in the province of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Future research should investigate this phenomenon using mixed methods research involving more than one university. Secondly, a cross-sectional design was employed, hence future research could adopt a longitudinal design.

15. Conclusion

In today's information and knowledge-driven economy, intellectual capital is regarded as a strategic resource for both private and public organizations to remain relevant. Importantly, this includes public universities of technology. Hence, this study explored a learning organization philosophy in the context of enhancing intellectual capacity development in the university. Research studies on Intellectual Capital abound. However, this study focused on the influence of a learning organization in enhancing intellectual development in a selected university. Research methodology used was appropriate to achieve the objectives of this study. Based on the

overall findings of this study, institutionalizing a learning organization would foster intellectual capital development in the context of a university that was selected. Practically, a learning organization creates a conducive environment for continuous learning, collaboration and knowledge sharing in an organization. Hence, Ahmand et al (2023) argue that the Learning Organization has the ability to evolve and adapt to new trends. Consequently, the effective use of intellectual capital leads to organizational effectiveness and competitiveness.

Ethical Requirements: This study was conducted in line with the ethical research guidelines of the institution, and the necessary steps were followed to obtain ethical clearance before quantitative data was collected. Participation in the study was voluntary as participants had to sign a consent form. Participants had the right to withdraw from participating in the study at any point. A letter of information was attached to the questionnaire giving participants more information about the study. Therefore, the researcher adhered to the university's ethical guidelines at every stage of the project.

AI Declaration: Artificial intelligence tools were never used in the process of writing this paper.

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