Higher Education Institutions Transformation into Learning Organizations: Lessons from Covid Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the lessons learnt from the Covidpandemic towards transforming higher education institutions (HEIs) into learning organizations (LO). The study's goal was to investigate the possibility of changing HEIs into LO.Ithad collected opinions of different stakeholders towards transforming HEIs into LO. This study had also found out the key lessons which can be learnt from the Covid pandemic. Descriptive survey research was used in this study. The population of the study consisted of all the HEIs in the state of Odisha, India. The researcher had purposefully selected four HEIs from the state of Odisha, India, including all the heads of the institutions and 164 students and 27 teachers. The current study used a self-developed questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as a tool. The study had found some of the effective ways through which we can transform HEIs into LO, such as awareness of learning organization culture among different stakeholders of HEIs, using the collective intelligence of learners during instructional processes, need to develop collective consensus among different stakeholders on dimensions of learning organization and required to implement in the practice of those dimensions etc. It had found that participants were also aware of the impact of transforming HEIs into learning organizations. This study revealed that how through the collective effort of different stakeholders, we can handle the adverse climate towards teaching-learning practices.

KEYWORDS: Higher Education Institutions, Learning Organizations, Pandemic, Teaching-Learning

INTRODUCTION

Human civilization can be viewed as a dynamic living entity that undergoes constant transformation (Schön, 1973, Iandoli and Zollo, 2008). The same holds for organizations, and so does the case for higher education institutions. Higher education institutions (HEIs) were also worst affected in the Covid pandemic. The unpredicted scenario has taught us many things, and collectively we have faced those tough times. Educational institutions could not deal with such adverse circumstances, but with the sharing of knowledge from one door to another, we had tried to minimize the learning loss. The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation in higher education, resulting in significant shifts in just a few short weeks. As most HEIs know, this technological revolution of education necessitates major alterations in teaching-learning techniques, fundamental competencies of teaching-learning practices and evaluation methods (Jensen, 2019).This whole educational journey teaches us how to create a conducive learning climate for everyone, which is closely related to transforming HEIs into learning organizations. "The underlying principles of the learning organization are the remedy that needs to reinforce in the higher education ecosystem (Miller, 2021)".

Learning is the key to success, which some would consider a survival route in today's organizations. The ability of any organization to learn and develop its capacity is a defining characteristic of its success. The learning organization philosophy highlights the importance of learning for organizations and learning-efficient organizational structures and procedures. It

facilitates the holistic growth of every member of the organization. It encourages employees to build a facilitative system through self-development and information sharing to create a welcome atmosphere for individual and group members (Senge, 1990). Its structure supports in identifying learning needs, as well as successful learning and information sharing. The whole world observed how different stakeholders related to higher education had managed teaching-learning practices through various ways and means. We have cop up with the situation through "personal mastery, team learning, sharing vision, mental models and systems thinking", which is also the five dimensions of learning organization theory given by Peter M Senge. Though we were not prepared for such annoying circumstances, the prevailing situation has taught us many new things related to teaching-learning practices. The pandemic teaches us that how through the collective effort of different stakeholders, we can handle the adverse climate towards teaching-learning practices. We need to transform higher education institutions into learning organizations to face any upcoming hurdles with full confidence.

Rationale of the Study

"A learning organization (LO) is an organization that encourages and facilitates learning of all its members to continuously transform itself" and for achieving excellence (Pedlar et al., 1991). At present, higher education institutions (HEIs) need to be transformed into potential learning organizations to compete in today's global demands. Since learning is an essential factor in the educational process, we need to consider collaboratively changing our HEIs into LO. According to Kalsom and Ching (2011), HEIs need to become learning organizations to achieve academic success. A primary purpose of higher education institutions is to support students to attain academic excellence; hence it may be necessary for HEIs to become learning organizations to increase overall organizational performance and innovation. Higher education institutions must become learning organizations so that teachers have access to relevant, timely, and location-specific knowledge to remain competitive in today's rapidly changing educational landscape (Kumar, 2005). To facilitate continual individual, group and organizational growth, "Watkins and Marsick (1996) defined a learning organization as one where learning and work are interwoven in a systematic manner".

Various characteristics of institutional performance, such as reputation, student quality, research outcomes, and social responsibility, are advocated for higher education institutions (Chen, Wang, & Yang, 2009). It is only organizations who have been able to successfully defend their advantages that will be able to compete in the future. The disciplines of business and industry are the primary focus of theoretical models of learning organizations, but these models can be applied to any organization. Global higher education is one of the sectors experiencing a rapid digital revolution due to the COVID impact, which disturbed the new normal (Dwivedi et al., 2020). As a consequence of Covid's disruption, online education has seen an increase in momentum. There has been a "quick pedagogical movement from traditional to online class sessions, personal to virtual instruction, and seminars to webinars in the contemporary environment (Mishra et al., 2020)". Covid pandemic lessons need to be learned, and HEIs should be transformed into LOs in this context. This article examines the organizational structure of HEIs to see if there are ways to improve the learning organization in higher education. To succeed in today's global marketplace, higher education institutions (HEIs) need to convert themselves into successful learning organizations (Ortenblad&Koris, 2014).

Research Questions

1. What are the possibilities of transforming higher education institutions (HEIs) into learning organizations (LO)?
2. What are the opinions of different stakeholders towards transforming HEIs into LO?
3. What are the key lessons which can be learnt from the Covid pandemic towards transforming HEIs into LO?

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the possibilities of transforming higher education institutions (HEIs) into learning organizations (LO).
2. To study the opinions of different stakeholders towards transforming HEIs into LO.
3. To find out the key lessons learnt from the Covid pandemic towards transforming HEIs into LO.

Methodology

The study was descriptive survey research. The population of the study consisted of all the HEIs in the state of Odisha, India. The researcher had purposefully selected four HEIs from the state of Odisha, India, including all the heads of the institutions and 164 students and 27 teachers. A self-developed questionnaire and semi-structured interview as a tool were used for the present study.The questionnaire consisted of only open-ended items. The semi-structured interviews were purposely scheduled, and interviews were carried out face-to-face and telephonically and lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. "As the characteristics of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to answer the

questions in their own way using their own words (Matthews & Ross, 2010)". Analyses of the collected data were conducted utilizing the qualitative analysis techniques.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to all indicators, higher education institutions are facing an even more indefinite future than was expected earlier. Following that, during and after the Covid pandemic, new quality assurance and standards problems are likely to develop. Continuous learning activities, which include the learning organisation's principles, may help improve the planning and management of academic quality and standards in higher education. More effective teaching-learning practices and better instruction will result from the development of new educational approaches. It's a significant achievement because it demonstrates that higher education institutions are serious about their claimed commitment to ongoing advancement. The preservation of academic quality and standards helps everyone, including higher education institutions themselves. The commitment to quality assurance will result in a deliberate assessment of strengths and weaknesses and the classification of areas that require further improvement to achieve success. In learning organizations, the amount of data gathered and the variety of sources matter because knowledge is continuously learned, maintained, and conveyed deliberately during the Covid pandemic and other times. As per the present study's findings, there are numerous potential to transform higher education institutions into learning organizations.

Possibilities of Transforming HEIs into LO

The data found from this study reflect that the Covid pandemic has taught us many lessons on possibilities to transform higher education institutions into learning organizations. This covid pandemic has created many opportunities for educational professionals to learn from each other's and share their learning experiences beyond the wall of classrooms. During the initial phase of the pandemic, the way higher education institutions had initiated to reduce the learning loss of the children and the kind of innovative practices adopted throughout online classes by the teachers reflect that we were very much concerned about the learning process. If we compare the initiatives to the learning organization principles, we can easily say that there are possibilities to transform HEIs into LO. Since, in the learning organization model basically, we are focusing on five principles such as "personal mastery, shared vision, team learning, mental models and systems thinking", we can assume that during pandemic we had tried to

follow these principles for making teaching-learning practices at least virtually, which reflects our commitment towards educational processes. The new inventions in terms of teaching-learning practices during covid time can be continued further and we can follow those dimensions of LO principles in higher education sector.

Stakeholders Opinions towards Transforming HEIs into LO

The researcher collected opinions of different stakeholders through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews on transforming HEIs into LO. The present study had diverse experiences from the various stakeholders to transform higher education institutions into learning organizations. As per the respondents, this covid pandemic has given us many lessons to transform the HEIs into LO. We had come across many pedagogical innovations in education; we had learnt how to cope with adverse learning situations and how we can continue with these kinds of innovative teaching-learning practices. As per the study, stakeholders were aware of transforming higher education institutions into learning organizations. They believed that when institutions become learning organizations, the culture of the institutions will be more conducive to learning, which will allow us to improve the learning experiences of everyone. The majority of participants revealed that an institution should evolve into a learning organization to fulfil its primary purpose of guiding students in the right direction. By doing so, we can accomplish all of our intended outcomes.

By creating a learning organization, it is possible to attain educational equity. They firmly believed that by transforming into learning organizations, we will be able to better serve the educational needs of all of our students. It was the opinion of stakeholders that the system of collaboration between students, instructors, administrators and community members constitutes a learning organization. By exposing them to a variety of learning circumstances and tools, it facilitates the professional growth of the organization's staffs. To support HEIs in learning organizations, educators discussed focusing on various aspects of learning organizations, including individual development, group learning, information exchange, etc. They are providing learners with the opportunity to choose their own tasks, implement multiple teaching and learning methodologies, and employ a wide variety of learning resources while working with students and other members of the teaching team.

Key Lessons Learnt from the Covid Pandemic towards Transforming HEIs into LO

Covid pandemic brought about several unforeseen situations. HEIs that were previously in the paradigm of the learning organization quickly redesigned educational services in response to the new paradigm. Learning management systems (LMS) have been increasingly popular in academic institutions worldwide since the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, higher education institutions leverage social media platforms to give learners ongoing, high-quality education support. We've already seen the quick adoption of digital technology in HEIs in the past, and we expect this trend to continue. The assurance of quality and standards is expected to face new issues following this. In their capacity as learning organizations, higher education institutions recognize that they may enhance academic quality and standards by implementing lifelong learning and improvement activities. Higher education institutions are encouraged to reaffirm the basics of the educational ecosystem's learning organization culture. As a result of the commitment to excellence, quality assurance, strengths and opportunities are recognized and treated while weaknesses are monitored. Increasing educational standards and quality is good for everyone, not only higher education institutions (HEIs).

After the pandemic, HEIs are focusing on creating application-based knowledge for varied learners and fitting individual demands. Next, HEIs need to cultivate a global perspective through continuous research and development and cultivate society's capacity to respond in the face of a world that is no longer defined by national borders or geographical boundaries. HEIs can cope with the COVID-19 pandemic by engaging in professional development initiatives. The foundational ideas of the learning organization need to be reaffirmed throughout the education environment (Miller, 2021). HEIs are responsible for ensuring that their students graduate with a well-rounded education that combines theoretical knowledge with practical experience to keep up with the constantly shifting demands of the labour market. Adult learners have increased over the past decade, requiring higher education institutions (HEIs) to adapt to the changing labour market, acquire hands-on skills, and become more competitive in the economy. To achieve sustainable development, higher education institutions (HEIs) quickly focus on developing the curriculum and processes for human capital growth. Higher education institutions (HEIs) must keep in mind that they must accomplish social goals and match society's expectations. "Specifically, higher education institutions (HEIs) are urged to rethink their educational policies in light of the current global economy (Ashour et al., 2021)".

Higher education institutions must foster a culture of lifelong learning in society and increase educational opportunities, which will go a long way toward mitigating the effects of economic restructuring. As a knowledge provider, HEIs must employ innovative techniques that gradually modify their institutional culture. Higher education institutions must rethink their strategies to involve all students in the teaching-learning process within the constraints of available operating and development resources. Higher education institutions (HEIs) must start making money to keep up with the changing educational landscape. Academic standards aren't set in stone; they're fluid and subject to change. In order to accomplish the educational objective of HEIs, educators with specialized knowledge work together in teams to share best practises and first-hand knowledge. Students' ability to study is enhanced due to the increased efficiency provided by knowledge management platforms. Academic self-determination and institutional autonomy are critical to ensuring the quality of higher education, and must be protected. There seems to be no doubt that the Covid pandemic provided us with an opportunity to re-evaluate educational functions, and we feel that higher education institutes continue to play a critical role in ensuring that academic standards are met.

Major Findings

The major findings of the study were as follows:

➢ The study found that there are considerable possibilities to transform higher education institutions into learning organizations.

➢ The respondents of this study were sensitive towards transforming their institutions into learning organizations. As per the respondent, the covid pandemic has taught us how we can collectively face any hurdles and education can be continued.

➢ This study found that the opportunities created in the higher education sector due to the covid pandemic have long-lasting lessons for all of us on how to go with our teaching-learning practices in adverse situations. The kind of online teaching-learning practices we have observed these days add to the learning organization philosophy; we can still go with these kinds of practices in the future.

➢ The present study had found that pandemic has given us lessons to consistently work on different dimensions of "learning organization theory such

as personal mastery, sharing vision, team learning, mental models and systems thinking".

➢ Most of the participants revealed that they were intentionally or unintentionally practising those dimensions of learning organization theory during this pandemic.

➢ This study had also found that different institutions had also promoted and created learning organization cultures in their institutions through webinars, online workshops/FDPs, discussion forums, online classes via Zoom, Google Meet, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, etc. These initiatives of learning have been a profound effect on the minds of learners and promoted education beyond the boundaries.

➢ The present study had found that the Covid pandemic has taught us many innovative teaching-learning practices in the higher education sector that we can use further to transform institutions into learning organizations.

Discussion of Results

Increasing the learn ability of higher education students is one technique for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education learning. Covid pandemic has presented learning organizations at higher education institutions with an unexpected chance to deploy contextual e-learning methodologies on a worldwide scale (Graul, 2020). Adopting a learning orientation is becoming increasingly crucial for higher education institutions, as it may contribute to institutional accomplishment. However, because learning does not emerge naturally within institutions, higher education institutions must ensure that resources are provided, and attempts are made to inculcate learning within institutions. As a result, it is critical that higher education institutions, like other organizations, become learning organizations in order to achieve organizational goals.

The effects of learning organizations on organizational performance and innovativeness have been demonstrated in numerous studies; however, there have been no studies that specifically focus on the effects of learning organizations on organizational performance and innovativeness in HEIs. Many HEIs have adopted "Learning Organizations models in order to encourage progress and advancement in response to economic and technological changes (Duke, 1992; Patterson, 1999)". With professional commitment and development activities, HEIs can resist the demands of the Covid pandemic. The cure that has to be reinforced in the education ecosystem is the basic principles of the learning organization (Miller, 2021). Meanwhile, HEIs are aware of the

need to always be prepared to meet learners' expectations for "new-fangled" information to progress gradually in today's civilized culture (Rusok, Samy, &Bhaumik, 2021).

Conclusion

On a global scale, the Covid pandemic has abruptly and significantly changed how people work, live, and interact with one another. The ability of today's higher education institutions to accept change, improve processes, and remain competitive is critical to their existence. To transform into a learning organization, need a learning structure and an atmosphere that encourages learning. A quick response to the current global COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that higher educational institutions may thrive by providing varied educational opportunities. Indeed, learning organizations can shape their futures by identifying opportunities via learning networks. Furthermore, a successful learning organization requires institutional members to collaborate to establish a framework that adapts to changing societal demands.

The ability of HEIs to quickly learn and use what they've learned is the ultimate competitive edge. HEIs who take this message carefully should have grown stronger and lived more consistently. To aid career development, HEIs may construct learning platforms that integrate experiences, knowledge, discussions, mentors, problem-solving decisions etc. Finally, establishing a Learning Organization has been shown to help employees at higher education institutions by allowing them to achieve a better work-life balance. This can be viewed as an added benefit for HEIs aspiring to be LOs. It is clear from this study that HEIs must be transformed into learning organizations to achieve their potential. Learning organizations are still relevant, and this study tries to prove that the dimensions connected with them are still appropriate.

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