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Does Training Matter When it Comes to Building Healthy Learning Organizations? A Case Study of Executives from the Canadian Public Service

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The context: The Canadian Federal Public Service

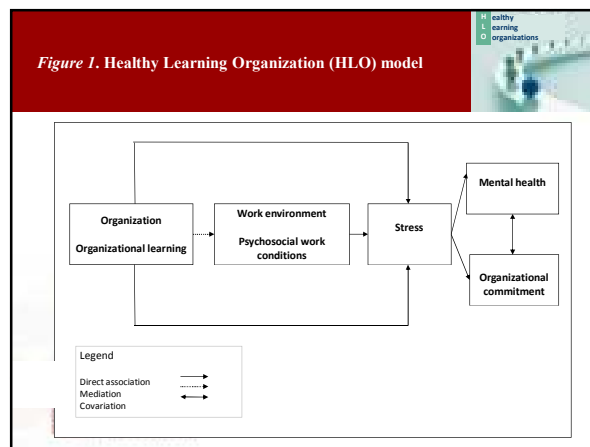
- In 2002, the Canadian federal administration enacted the *Policy for Continuous Learning in the Public Service of Canada* with the declared objective of strengthening its capacity to foster and sustain organizational learning within its ranks through the facilitation of corporate training (Canada, 2002).
- Between 2000 and 2003, global investments for corporate training within this public administration doubled overtime to capture 2.9% of the total salary operating budget (Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, 2004).
- Collaborative research efforts GAP-santé and the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX)

Workers' mental health: Where are we now?

Current limitations:

- Dominant focus on the psychosocial work environment (e.g., JDC, ERI)
- Undertheorization of the specific contribution of organization-level processes (e.g., healthy organizations)
- Undertheorization of the specific contribution of worker-level processes (e.g., rationality)

= Limited understanding of
the ecology of workers' mental health



HLO model: Empirical evidence

- 2002 APEX Survey**
 - Executives from the Canadian federal public service, EX1 to EX 5
 - Cross-sectional survey, self-administered
 - N=1,853
- 2006 Psychometric validation study**
 - APEX members
 - Cross-sectional survey, self-administered
 - N=303 (n=126 with 8-weeks follow-up)
- 2004 Semi-structured interviews**
 - Volunteering respondents of the 2002 APEX Survey
 - N=37

HLO model: Empirical evidence

Organizational Learning

My organization:

- Shares ideas in all formal strategic documents
- Is continually aware of internal processes and external environment
- Anticipates future demands rather than rest on past success
- Knowledge is more important than title
- Welcomes open inquiry and self-analysis
- Supports failures that are the product of risk taking
- Is playful and serious when approaching work endeavours
- Encourages an experimental attitude
- Makes learning as part of its cultural values
- Perceives change as an opportunity, not a threat
- Encourages the norm of reciprocity

Barrette, J., Lemyre, L., Comeil, W. & Beauregard*, N. (2007). Organizational learning among senior public service executives: An empirical investigation of culture, decision latitude and supportive communication. *Canadian Journal of Public Administration*, 50, 3, 333-353.

HLO model: Empirical evidence

Healthy Learning Organizations

Key points:

- **Interorganizational variations** in executives' mental health and OB (2-10%);
- **Organizational learning** is a significant explanatory factor to executives' mental health, **complementary** to other factors associated with the **psychosocial work environment**;
- Organizational learning and psychosocial work environment conditions **covary** in explaining executives' mental health and organizational commitment.

HLO model: Empirical evidence

Healthy Learning Organizations

Figure 2. A typology of Healthy Learning Organizations

High OL Low strain jobs	Moderate OL Active jobs	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Executives' mental health and organizational behaviors Perceived stress Psychological distress Organizational commitment </div>
Moderate OL Passive jobs	Low OL High strain jobs	

Research question

As part of its 2002 *Policy on continuous learning*, the Canadian federal public administration targeted executives training as a key leveraged mechanism fostering organizational learning within its ranks.

Based on the HLO model, what lessons can we learned from such targeted intervention with regard to executives' work reality and health?

Methods

Organization
Selection criteria :
1- ranked as a key actor in the implementation of the Policy;
2- offered training covering executives' work environment and health topics.

Participants
Training instructors (N=3), policy analysts (N=3), executives who had receiving training from the organization (N=3).

Analytical strategy
Case study analysis (Yin, 1994) triangulating participant observations of executives training seminars, semi-structured interviews, and documents was performed. Trustworthiness was assured through memberchecking, prolonged observations, and expert validation.

Results

1) How is organizational learning (OL) conceived ?

"reflecting and learning from past errors" (executives)

"OL builds on a strong commitment from top management and subordinates" (executives, policy analysts)

2) Are OL and executives' health connected together ?

"You can't have one without the other" (executives)

"Significant part of employee well-being is impacted by effective organizational processes and outcomes such as OL" (policy analysts)

Results

3) How is training perceived by executives ?

"Now, I will tell my employees to take risks. I will clarify unspoken things in order to create a safe, equitable and respectful climate" (executives)

Helplessness due to systemic barriers (e.g., lack of time for own skills refreshment, knowing better but not having the means or power to implement long-lasting changes).

4) Is the Policy and its focus on executives' training a facilitator?
"It's a policy among others, executives don't have time." (policy analyst)

"We're half way there in terms of OL: there's no real attempt at the organizational level but individual level only" (instructors)

Conclusion and implications



- **Lesson 1:**
Executives training matters. It is an important dissemination tool, empowering the executives in the successful transaction with their work environment towards improved individual (e.g., reduced stress) and organizational outcomes (e.g., innovation).
- **Lesson 2:**
Such positive effect of training persists to the extent to which the work environment can receive and by modified by executives' newly acquired knowledge.
- **Lesson 3:**
Implementation of evaluation mechanisms pertaining to the *Policy* may increase its legitimacy and benefits.

Conclusion and implications



Lesson 4:

Is your organization **healthy AND learning** ?

Thank you!



Contact information

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