Learning Organisation Paradigm and Climate Adaptation

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I. Introduction

Saleem Janjua writes “Adaptation to climate change is increasingly becoming a policy priority for government and private sector organizations across the globe, partly driven by a rationale that successful adaptation will reduce the consequences of climatic impacts that are unavoidable. However, grasping such an opportunity through policy intervention is a major challenge, particularly in the urban sector in developing countries.”

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II. Policy Forum by Saleem Janjua

Learning Organisation Paradigm and Climate Adaptation

Adaptation to climate change is increasingly becoming a policy priority for government and private sector organizations across the globe, partly driven by a rationale that successful adaptation will reduce the consequences of climatic impacts that are unavoidable (Doria et al., 2009; Adger et al., 2005). As noted by Ayers and Huq (2008), organizational change which enables climate adaptation learning is considered crucial to a process of improving climate resilience in the developing world. However, grasping such an opportunity through policy intervention is a major challenge, particularly in the urban sector in developing countries.

Senge et al. (1999, p. 5) set out some general aspirations that drive organizational change: "they are trying to respond quickly to external changes and think more imaginatively about the future…they want better relationships, with less game-playing and more trust and openness…they want to unleash employees natural talents and enthusiasm….they hope to move genuinely closer to their customers….through all of this they are striving to shape their destiny, and thereby achieve long-term success". Despite the presence of these aspirations, a large number of change initiatives (both in developed and developing world) have had limited success due to a variety of institutional barriers. Although these barriers differ according to local context, two general themes can be distilled from such studies. Firstly, there is often a failure to create enabling conditions that actively support and encourage change through organizational learning, and secondly a failure to implement an effectual change process. Under such a scenario, the applicability of a 'learning organization' concept appears to be the most appropriate in any change process.

Limerick et al. (2003) claim that an environment that supports change for learning is grounded in an organizational vision that represents a future desirable state for the organization and that has the capacity to energize employee communication, participation and commitment. Further, much has been written about the important role leaders have in formulating a vision for the organizational learning that is realistic, credible, attractive and consistent with the core values of the organization. It is not only the responsibility of leaders to formulate such a vision, but it is also crucial that they stick with it if they wish to gain the commitment of their employees to change the process.

The quintessence of the learning organization paradigm is seemingly straightforward, and rotates around developing a positive tendency to learn, adapt and change. In the developed-world context there have been a large number of studies that have either made efforts to explore the dynamics of learning organizations or else the extent to which organizations could develop an internal environment that promotes and encourages learning for different purposes. However, such studies are much more limited for developing countries. This could be due to the increasing number of definitions and characterizations of learning organizations and the importance given by different policy-makers/authors to different features of the learning organization.

Responding to this policy gap, every possible effort should be made to reflect on the application of the learning organization paradigm to the climate change adaptation agenda in the context of urban sector. We need to examine the theoretical underpinnings of the organizational learning paradigm, as well as highlighting some of the key characteristics often attributed to a learning organization. These conceptual characteristics should be further examined to consider how such an approach may help to encourage change for adaptation activity in urban sector both in developed and developing countries.

III. References

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