

Lessons Learned and Experiences of Master's Students

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Abstract

Organizations are struggling to increase their performance in the framework of employees they employ. One of the most effective ways is through implementation of Lessons Learned Concept. In itself Lessons Learned is a lesson derived and validated by experience through observation of analysis, activities or operations leading to behavior change actions by employees, managers and the organization. It must be important and valuable and applicable; to describe a problem or issue that top managers will investigate. This process is accomplished based on the facts gathered from various operations and activities of the organization. Through this process we provide expertise on important issues and give recommendations for different changes in the organization, material, management or other aspects of the organization's activity. Lessons Learned provide information that helps managers to prepare their units for fulfilling their task. The paper will provide ways in order to identify the experiences and give recommendations for changes within organization, procedures, technological equipments, etc.

Keywords: Organizations, Lessons Learned, Employees, Managers, Business Companies.

1. Introduction

Jack Welsh stresses that the ability of an organization to learn and return this lesson to the immediate vigorous action is the last competitive advantage (McShane and Von Glione, 2012).

Meanwhile, psychologists define learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior or ability of the individual to manifest certain behavior that occurs as a result of experience. We learn from what we experience during the day, learn from others, and learn from new experiences ... even learn from our mistakes and daily experiences. Every day that goes by is one more opportunity to learn and to put into practice what we understand. In this context, organizations will learn and develop through the concept of Lessons Learned.

This concept aims to create a system through which the selection and analysis of findings, conclusions and lessons learned from the experience of organization as well as other organizations, positive or negative, create the possibility to arrive on concrete conclusions, which have the possibility to implement and to improve individual performance as well as the performance of organisation. After the analysis of this system, archives and knowledge disseminates at all level of organization structures. In the context of the transformation and development of organization, it precises the proper structure for the development and implementation of Lessons Learned, fix the rules of procedures, how the system can function and forms of collection and development.

From the moment that we wake up early in the morning until late at night that we go to sleep, almost everything involves learning, which is so important to our lives. It is difficult to find situations where the learning proces is not included. But what is a lesson? It can be seen as a sentence like "if-then". When we did X then Y happened. If people say that they have identified a "Lesson Learned" from positive or negative experience, then we should be able to find this kind of structure in their reports. Lessons in this form can range from general to more specific. We consider the specific expressions of lessons are preferable.

According to Pedler (1997), Lessons Learned are an important part of Knowledge Management - where new knowledge and lessons are identified through activity and review. They become part of the working practices in the future. Many of the organizations customers are dissatisfied with the Lessons Learned process. Maybe they have a database, but there is no learning experience and nothing is recorded to be implemented by the organization, or worse, there are evidences that are worthless. Maybe we have a very good database, with a lot of excellent Lessons Learned, but nothing seems to be change. This mistake is repeated and repeated again. We note that although lessons learned are documented the same problems occur again. As a result, people see that mistakes are repeated including low

efficiency. So they have the right to ask-if knowledge management and Lessons Learned are so kind and helpful, why we learn the same lessons constantly and without stopping?

The answer, apparently, is related to another observation: organizations in which knowledge management regularly delivers business value, tends to be characterized by "knowing how", which represents the best course of lessons learned.

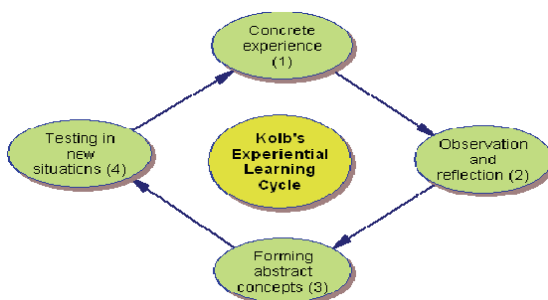
Britton (1995), states that ... a learning organization actively combines experience and knowledge of its members and partners through the development of practices, policies, procedures and systems. In this way they constantly improve the ability of organisation to set and achieve goals, satisfy stakeholders, develop its practice, assess and develop their people and achieve its mission.

As a definition with Lessons Learned (Glossary:OECD Publications, Paris 2002)we understand generalizations based on experience evaluation through projects, programs, or policies that are abstracted by circumstances and implemented in different areas. Lesson learned is useful information of project management, gained through experiences, which organizations must keep to use in the future. It may also be appropriate for other organizations, and can be a valuable technique, a result which we would like to repeat or may have undesirable result, which would like to avoid in the future. Often, the lesson learned is identified as asking, "What worked and what did not work?"

Lessons learned can be categorized as something learned from experience, from a bad experience, which serves to avoid repeating the mistake that is made, a knowledge gained from a novelty or a bad experience, which leads to improve the process.

Lessons learned are also accomplished through learning from experience. An albanian expression-says "For as many years that we live we learn" which means that experience gives knowledge, certainty, confidence, makes people more responsible to a situation experienced before. We can not repeat the previous mistakes, but to minimize them as much as possible.

Many authors have treated "The learning from experience", but among them we will cite Kolb. His theory is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through experience. Results of combining knowledge with experience gained transformation ", as the following scheme shows (Armstrong,1999).



The learning experience theory presented by Kolb, shows a circle with four elements:

1. Concrete experience
2. Observation and reflection,
3. Forming abstract concepts,
4. Testing new situations,

The circle begins with an experience within a company.

2. Thoughts and Experiences of Master's students about the concept of Lessons Learned

Master's students addressed a number of questions, whose purpose was not only their level of knowledge, but also measures for the implementation of this concept in practice. We clarify that the majority of students are employed, which creates the opportunity to see in practice and more closely the implementation of Lessons Learned concept.

3. The First Question: Do the Employee Know the Concept of Lessons Learned in the Workplace?

In their responses, students (40% of them) noted that the concept relates to learning from experience and mistakes, and

that theories are not recognized in all organizations. Some of the students (30%) who work in the banking system, state that their organizations have received international banking experience from "mothers" banks. According to them it is easily understandable when you become a new member of the organization. New staff is trained by senior staff with a lot of experience and their ideas are taken into consideration in the design of new bank procedures and most importantly in the case of mistakes, staff and all key leaders, trying to solve problems by avoiding mistakes arising from their wrong actions. In this way they avoid mistakes that may be repeated. We think that this is the strongest points, because feeling pressure free of possible mistakes, all employees will work without stress. Another strong point are open discussion among colleagues and managers, where they all learn from experiences as well as from mistakes of each other.

Meanwhile, some students (20%), that are not employed in a bank, states that the key leaders of them organization accept on the principal that leassons learned is a good tool to develop the organisation but on the other hand there are not serious and concrete efforts to implement this concept in practice.

4. Second Question: Do the Top Managers have Knowledge of Lessons Learned?

Responses consist in the fact that the top managers of banking systems, have indicated that they creates advantages for management through the concept of Lessons Learned, while managers outside the banking system, do not have deep knowledge about the concept of lessons learned or they have superficial knowledge. Above all, they do not have the will to implement it. Thus, some students(10%) that are employed in restaurants, emphasize that these concepts are not recognized, but the managers see their success or survival of their business based on tougher measures, mainly through the application of the system of fines (five thousand ALL for every mistake or a worker who was caught with a mobile phone in hand).

In the banking system, managers themselves adopting procedures, keep as a good measure the introduction of the concept of Lessons Learned. Procedures include what might be called "probable mistake of employees" unless the mistake is not classified as "human mistake" (theft, misuse of job, bribery, etc.). So, through procedures that are clear and favoring resolution of problems the concept of Lessons Learned is implemented.

5. Another question: Are there practical measures to implement this concept, a platform or written document?

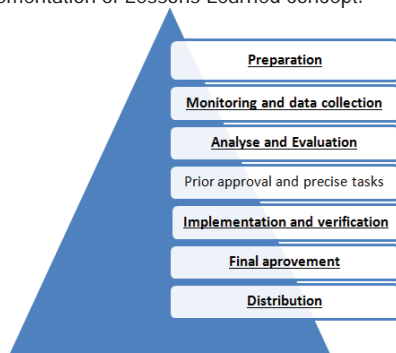
In some organizations where master degree students are employeed, there are separate departments. Their mission is to develop the procedures and policies of organizations, within banking systems. Through them the ideas are going at any corner of organisation with the aim to perfect working process and to ensure high performance.

In their responses, students point out that there have been many cases in which procedures or practices have changed as a result of the experience of employees or the mistakes that occurred during the work process. Practical measures or written documents in case of mistakes within organization, have arisen as a result of experience gained over the years.

Finally, we can say that based on the questionnaire developed there are some conclusions:

- The concept of Lessons learned is not recognized at different levels of organisations.
- The banking system organizations made good steps compared with organisations that belong to other bussiness.
- The spread of the knowledge about the benefits of Lessons Learned concept is more actual than before.

The below scheme shows implementation of Lessons Learned concept:



6. Case Studies from Some Bussiness Companies

The "Credit Agricole Albania" bank company has special structure that deals with the design of appropriate procedures in case of mistakes or successes. The structure is called "Help Desk", which helps staff when face resolving operational issues, administrative or technological. This structure is very well organized. It needs only an email, and then is its obligation to respond directly and provide solutions to the problem, by recommending the responsible departments. In cases where a problem /mistakes appear "Help Desk" has data records. Through them it can recommend the right solution as have done before for others departament. So through such procedures everyone can learn from previous experiences.

In some organizations even when there is no special structure, the mission is assigned to other departments, for example the department of Human Resource Management, or particular persons as additional task. Training for the existing and new staff is often organized by this department. Many of the trainings focus their attention by reviewing and changing procedures based on the gained experience.

Other experience is offered by students who work outside the banking system. The written platforms exist to the extent that there are required by managers as a legal obligation. For instance, training of employees to the risks of specific works, "The Book of Training", "Work Book Accidents" and the measures taken for the emerging technical issues. Some students (20%) says that their organizations have no written platforms, which has to be considered by firms as an important strategic direction, they are not well structurally organised and clearly at their strategic mission. In most departments there is the concept of learning from mistakes, as a spontaneous way.

7. The "Blue-Imperial" Selita Company, Water Production, Tirana

The company's Imperial Blue Limited it produces available water, easier and cleaner biologically in Albania. Selita water is filled directly at the source in 6 ° Celsius temperature and undergoes a careful disinfection and cleaning that does not eliminate mineral content and high nutritional value of this water. This is like a perfect gift for population, water with low levels of magnesium, calcium and chloride and with a perfect pH of 7.1. This company spent a lot of money by investing in building a new water plant in the area of Dajti, Qafe Molle, Tirana. The first step was the establishment of the company's objectives, specifically the introduction of the product in the Albanian market, using the good name of this water that has been for years. The main objective was to fulfill the desire of customers.

The second step was to pass the necessary information regarding the objectives of the company to its employees, mainly to marketing managers and distributors. Meanwhile, the company bypassed the monitoring process of its employees, specifically to the managers of distribution line. As a result of consolidated business culture, the company did not evaluate the performance evaluation of employees as well as distribution line managers, based on the plan of their work in fulfilling the objectives of the company. Thus, the company made another mistake, by giving extra money to the distribution line managers without being based on their performance.

The result was disastrous for business. The company had distributed goods and no money collection. Refrigerators of company that should have been given to different businesses in exchange for the right use of water were sold by water distributors to these businesses and the money went to the pockets of the distributors. The initial price negotiated with businesses was increased "unofficially". The company did not have information. Consequently, it had created dissasfication from businesses by abandoning the product. Rolling stock of the company, as cars and vans used for personal purposes performed delays in product shipments to customers and caused dissasfication. Company decided to analyze the problem.

In such circumstances the company decided to collect information regarding client dissasfication. An observation and supervision of company's departments work, was made mostly focused on distribution and marketing departments. During observations, were noted unclear situation and doubtful earnings figures in relation to finance department.

After collecting the necessary information, the company made a detailed analysis of facts and figures, evaluated the total damaged caused, the origin of the damage by rebuilding scheme of activity undertaken up to that point of making an assessment of the individuals that were in charge.

At the end, the final conclusion arrived through analysis developed with Top Managers. The company adopted a new action strategy and defined specific tasks to achieve the goal. The company already had learned a lesson. Followingly, it started to implement the development plan, setting the agenda focused mostly on verification of their work in the near future. The main objective of this strategy was based on lessons learned earlier. The Company for any moment did not have the right to bypass the control and supervision of ongoing work on any process, no matter how

simple it was. The company took care about the distribution of the new strategy as well as guidelines to all employees. In this way, the objective of the company was made part of the individual objectives of each employee at their place of employment.

As noted above, the process of learning through the process of lessons learned is learning the lessons from successes and failures, from possible mistakes. So there is nothing but perfection of daily work. We learn every day how to do more work in less time, how to bear fruits from the mistakes that will serve us in the future.

Albania Pespa & Aluminum Company produces and installs aluminum profiles and has some units' production, where each unit has its machinery production as well as specialized workers. During daily work has happened that one of the workers was hurt. He was given first aid and was immediately sent to hospital by colleagues. Managers, since they had not caught the problem before, were placed immediately to take care of him. They analyzed the situation by focusing on:

How often such accidents occur, -How many accidents per year, -What are the factors that have led to accidents, -How are the conditions of labor, -What should be done to prevent them?

Referring to Kolb's circle, after such accidents we have the possibility to reflect regarding this situation, on this bad experience. After analyzing the situation, it concluded that such accidents do not occur often, not so serious, although the injured have been growing in recent years. Managers analyzed the factors that led to the injured and came to the conclusion that the event can be avoided, if workers were trained regarding the use of machinery. The security rules were put in technical and production departments showing workers how careful should they be during work process. Working conditions are now good and the machines are placed in appropriate space to allow movement during the working process. To prevent the situation we have to have a detailed plan in order to find a good solution.

After that the company was able to analyze and draw conclusions about what happened. Due to the fact that the worker was injured too much and the event took large size, the company covered all expenses for one year as well as paying the pension for one year. From the analysis was concluded that three factors have led to accidents that should be eliminated:

Training line managers. Every line managers in every unit production after the accident was decided to be sent to a training center, to be trained about the dangers of working with machinery, work on site work, how to give first aid to an injured person. Each worker should be trained early regarding how to use the machinery and take care about himself at the workplace, to test their capacity and finally accepted on the basis of testing.

Establishment of technical safety regulations. In each unit production, in front of any dangerous machinery, should be placed safety rules in order to draw attention to the technical workers at any time during labor. Technical safety rules constitute a serious advantage as we show moments of control by the state or other institutions that care for the progress of companies.

The third factor is the employees self care. Even the managers need to be responsible on how many units should they produce per day. They set a certain number of products produced per day, because workers since they need to manage to produce within a deadline, hurry and this can lead to injury. Workers should also pay much attention during the use of machinery.

In the following company, a lawyer designed and prepared technical safety regulations, which were placed in each production unit. After that no one was injured in the unit production.

As you can see, experience is a very good teacher for all, in this case through a negative experience. If an accident does not occur, the company can ignore the training of workers and the establishment of rules of technical safety in environments production. The lesson consisted of: a new-employee should be trained before starting the work.

8. Conclusions

Lessons learned concept, as discussed in this paper, still applies as a new concept. It aims is to build the system, which through the selection and analysis of findings, conclusions and lessons learned from the experience comes to concrete conclusions, which have opportunities to implement in business companies. This system after the analysis is recorded and knowledge is distributed within the organization structures.

Through this knowledge and distribution within the organization, is accomplished a great support to run business operations and increased efficiency.

By using the lessons learned concept, it will create the right access not only to identify the prevalence of experience within organizations, but also getting Lessons Learned by other organizations.

Through this process, it becomes possible to create a system to identify and integrate critical issues organizations,

focused on their transformation and development, by defining the responsible structures in charge of development and implementation of lessons learned, by sanctioning the procedural rules of operation, through the function system and forms of collection and development.

Various organizations in order to enhance their performance are increasingly turning attention to the lessons learned. This is considered as a powerful tool through which competition can afford today.

Lessons Learned process is in the implementation phase of its development, formally organized. Draft regulation has emerged as a necessity for managing this process. Through this, it will be institutionalized the ways of organizing the operation of lessons learned, will be sanctioned tasks and responsibilities of each position. But still there are no plans to share lessons learned with other organizations.

9. Recommendations

Lessons learned analysis can not be done by a single structure. Consequently, the relevant structures at different levels of management, is recommended to include the identification, collection and reporting of experiences that are valuable as a Lessons Learned.

In order to increase the performance of the organization, it is imperative that the lessons learned need to be the responsibility of all structures and business companies.

Lessons Learned planning must be done according to a special annual program, in which to predict measures, activities and tasks for all levels of management and structures.

In order to increase the staff in a higher degree of knowledge in this area, it will be useful to create the possibility of attending key activities within and outside the organization. In this context, the Personnel Department, in cooperation with other structures must take into consideration the implementation of various activities.

A great help for Lessons Learned process, will also be getting experience from other countries and exchange of information. This can be accomplished by providing access to input and receive information in their Database system through agreements as well as the proper structure in charge of lessons learned need to have the necessary contacts in order to ensure the right of access.

It is very important to instruct the personnel which will prepare reports after realising the product as well as the personnel involved in the implementation of product with materials that are prepared in advanced like a pocket book (Handbook). This process must be helped by using questionnaires, direct interviews with participants, which can serve as material to be analyzed and the lessons identified.

Businesses companies should learn from previous experiences positive or negative, by employing a general manager, capable and competent.

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