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The relationship between organizational learning culture and internal service quality in Iran's Ministry of Sports and Youth

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was that the relationship between organizational learning culture and internal service quality from the perspective of sports experts of Ministry of Sports and Youth to review. The research method in this study was Descriptive and correlation method. Sports experts of Ministry of Sports and Youth have established Statistical population of research that they all participated in the study. For this purpose, Yang, et Al's (2004) Organizational Learning Culture questionnaire And Di Xie's Internal Service Quality questionnaire (2005) was used. Reliability of questionnaires after a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha test, respectively ($\alpha=0/84$) and ($\alpha=0/81$) were obtained. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods for data analysis were used. The findings showed that between organizational learning culture and internal service quality in sports experts of Ministry of Sports and Youth, there is significant positive correlation ($r_s=0/533$, $p<0/01$). Also among learning levels, positive relationship between learning in organizational level and internal service quality was significantly ($r_s=0/503$, $p<0/01$). The research findings on the importance of learning and its levels as one of the factors affecting service quality level within the Ministry of Sports and Youth underlined. Thus, leaders and HR managers should use the strategic plans for the development of organizational culture richer in order to provide higher quality services.

Keyword: Organizational Learning Culture, Internal Service Quality, Ministry of Sports and Youth

INTRODUCTION

A crucial key to organizational achievement and employee efficiency is to institutionalize organizational learning culture. Knowledge, competency and new skills are essential to guarantee organizational success in future. Sustainable learning and development are keys to future achievements [1].

In the early 1990s, organizational leaders and managers started to pay considerable attention organizational learning and learning organizations. Learning organizations tend to recreate, rediscover and revitalize themselves continually [2]. Organizational learning may be defined as a dynamic process of creation, acquisition and collection of knowledge so as to develop resources and capacities, which results in more efficient organizational performance. Jones (2001) defines organizational learning as the ability of an organization as a whole to discover and correct

mistakes as well as increasing employee competency through modification of organizational knowledge and values so that organizational efficiency will develop continually. Based on this definition, the characteristics of organizational learning process include changed mindset of employees, changed knowledge and values as well as improved organizational performance [3]. Organizational learning entails different levels such as individual, team and organizational levels [4]. Considering the levels of learning, Jones (2001) contends that while learning occurs at three levels, the first step in learning is to bring about favorable changes in the employee mindset; therefore, special attention should be paid to learning at the individual level [3].

Organizations may also concentrate on increased service quality to gain competitive advantage [5]. Nowadays, service quality is considered as a common concept in business literature and plays a significant role in customer satisfaction, maintenance and loyalty as well as organizational revenue. Besides, there is a link between these factors and service-profit-revenue chain [6]. Research has confirmed the strategic advantages of quality in market share and return of capital as well as decreased cost of production and improved efficiency [5-7-8].

However, it seems necessary to build a sound understanding of service quality before any discussion of service quality. Quality is customer satisfaction or enjoyment, conformity with standard and speeding up in fulfilling customer expectations [9-10]. Lewis and Booms (1983) define service quality as the extent to which the quality offered to customers corresponds to customer expectations sustainably [11]. According to Heskett et al's model (1994), the service-benefit chain links organization's internal service quality, employee satisfaction and loyalty to customer satisfaction and loyalty as well as organizational growth and benefits [12].

Internal service quality is the perceived level of satisfaction an employee experiences with services offered by internal service providers. Besides, internal service quality refers to employees' perception of the quality of service they receive from or offer their colleagues [13]. Barnes and Morris (2000) contend that, in addition to concentrating on external markets and customers, organizations need to focus on themselves as the internal market and their employees as the internal customers. In this regard, attention to intra-organizational service quality may result in both internal and external customer satisfaction, which might guarantee organizational success [14]. Internal service is the most essential element helping to achieve high-quality external service; thus, it seems necessary to be reviewed in most sports environments.

Over the last years, considerable attention has been paid to organizational learning in both developed and developing countries. Researchers typically contend that organizational learning may bring about useful competitive advantage to the employees when they hold a clear attitude towards the importance of service quality. Moreover, identification of employee motives can reinforce the organizational services to develop a learning system. This approach can relate HR management policy to favorable behaviors in employee services [15-16-17]. Certainly, implementation of organizational learning culture can play a crucial role in internal service quality [18]. Ghanbar Pur et al. (2011) reported a significant positive correlation between organizational learning culture and internal service quality in the employees working with select sports federations. Ming (2010) reported a significant correlation between organizational learning culture and internal service quality in Chinese service organizations [19].

Di Xie (2005) conducted a study in China Sports Organization and showed a significant positive correlation between organizational learning culture and internal service quality so that the former accounted for 5 per cent of variance of the latter [18]. Egan et al (2004) reported a positive correlation between organizational learning culture and non-fiscal variables such as motives for learning transmission [20]. Hays and Hill (2001) contend that there is a positive correlation between employee motivation and organizational learning with perceived service quality. They concluded that it is necessary to have both motivated employees and organizational learning ability to guarantee the achievement of supreme service quality [16]. Wildes (2000) conducted a study in US restaurant industry and found a positive correlation between restaurant employee motivation for sustained work and internal service quality in the select restaurants [21]. Shank and Chelladuramai (2008) found a significant correlation between service quality and the return of sports tourism to sports events [22].

In terms of demographic characteristics, age and work experience are two variables that influence internal service quality. Mature, experienced employees may be very influential and increase organizational commitment scores, which may improve internal service quality [23]. Research has shown that organizations need employees (internal customers) committed to organizational goals and perspectives, customer-friendly behaviors as well as high-quality service in the organization, which may help them offer excellent external service quality. The emergence of the two

notions of internal marketing and internal service quality has highlighted the role of internal customers (employees) and organizational division satisfaction with other divisions in realizing the quality of external services. Research has shown that there must be a close relationship between external and internal service quality. Recently, considerable attention has been paid to service quality, particularly internal quality, in sports and healthy recreations [18].

Several studies have been conducted on service quality in different aspects of sports industry including sports centers, professional sports, physical fitness programs, spectators, leisure time, healthy recreations and tourism [24]. The studies commonly focus on the role of employees in customer evaluation of internal service quality and its tangible implementation in sports service organizations [25].

As with other organizations, sports organizations follow unified principles in all divisions and aim to offer quality services to their customers. In this regard, such factors as organizational learning may influence the quality of employee internal services, and, consequently, affect external service quality. Iran's Ministry of Sports and Youth is the result of a merge of Physical Education Organization and National Youth Organization. The ministry is the main institution to manage sports activities in the country and has established a broad relationship with both sports and non-sports organizations, both national and foreign. Considering its responsibilities about sports, youth affairs and organizational goals, the ministry requires continuous learning at all work levels and quality services offered to both internal and external customers. Iranian organizations have paid insufficient attention to the science of management and its scientific achievements. There is scarcity of research on the relationship between organizational learning culture and other variables such as organizational performance [20]. Therefore, it seems necessary to conduct a study to provide a more transparent perception of internal service quality and its corresponding factors in sports organizations. The present study may offer the opportunity to both HR management and employees to build an understanding of internal service quality. The present study aims to investigate the relationship between organizational learning culture and internal service quality as perceived by the sports experts working with Iran's Ministry of Sports and Youth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of the research is descriptive and correlational, which is conducted as a field study. The population of the study consisted of all sports experts with the Ministry of Sports and Youth. The sample size was considered equal to the population (N=280). The data was collected using Learning Organization Questionnaire developed by Yang et al (2004) and Internal Service Quality Questionnaire developed by Di Xie (2005). The data was collected in three steps. First, a demographic data sheet was used to collect the data on personal information including age, sex, level of education and work experience. Second, Learning Organization Questionnaire was administered to the participants. The scale consists of 21 items on a 7-point Likert scale and examines learning at individual, team and organizational levels. Third, Internal Service Quality Questionnaire was administered to the participants. The scale comprises 21 items on a 7-point Likert scale. Asadi and colleagues (2009) examined the reliability of Learning Organization Questionnaire and Ghanbar Pur and colleagues (2011) examined Internal Service Quality Questionnaire, which yielded the reliability indices of $\alpha=0.88$ and $\alpha=0.95$, respectively. In the present study, the validity of the questionnaires were approved by a few professors of management. The reliability of the questionnaires was also calculated using Cronbach alpha formula, which yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=0.84$ for Learning Organization Questionnaire and $\alpha=0.81$ for Internal Service Quality Questionnaire. As to the statistical measures, descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and tabulations were used to describe the data. Inferential statistics including Pearson correlation formula was used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

The results showed that the participants were 35 years old on average. 87.9 per cent of the participants had B.S or higher degrees and 80.1 per cent had more than 5 years of work experience. As shown in Table 1, the mean learning scores were 3.263 at the individual, 2.771 at the team and 2.890 at the organizational levels. Maximum organizational learning score was found to be 3.19 out of 7, which shows a moderate organizational learning culture in sports experts working with Iran's Ministry of Sports and Youth.

Table 1. Description of organizational learning culture based on experts' opinions

variable	Statistic			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Learning at the individual level	3.263	0.541	2.80	5.17
Learning at the team level	2.771	0.720	2.0	5.33
Learning at the organizational level	2.890	0.643	2.83	5.18
Total organizational Learning	3.190	0.570	2.43	5.67

As shown in Table 2, the mean scores of internal service quality were 3.450 at the individual, 2.604 at the division and 2.526 at the organizational levels. Maximum internal service quality score was found to be 2.738 out of 7.

Table 2. Description of internal service quality based on experts' opinions

Statistic variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Internal service quality at the division levels	2.604	0.721	2	5.75
Internal service quality at the organizational levels	2.526	0.763	2.40	5.38
Total internal service quality	2.738	0.669	2	5.33

Spearman correlation formula was run to examine the relationship between organizational learning culture and its subscales with internal service quality and its subscales. Table 3 illustrates the results of Spearman correlation test.

Table 3. Relationship between organizational learning culture and its subscales with internal service quality and its subscales

	Organizational Learning levels			
	Individual	Team	Organizational	Total
Internal service quality at the individual levels	r=0.225 p=0.001	r=-0.230 p=0.000	r=-0.152 p=0.020	r=0.251 p=0.000
Internal service quality at the division levels	r=0.142 p=0.031	r=-0.069 p=0.296	r=0.235 p=0.000	r=0.255 p=0.000
Internal service quality at the organizational levels	r=-0.081 p=0.220	r=0.440 p=0.000	r=0.734 p=0.000	r=0.655 p=0.000
Total internal service quality	r=0.143 p=0.030	r=0.349 p=0.000	r=0.503 p=0.000	r=0.533 p=0.000

The value of Spearman Coefficient was positive in all subscales of organizational learning culture and internal service quality. This shows a direct relationship between these two variables so that an increase in one variable brings about an increase in the other. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between organizational learning culture and internal service quality in the sports experts working with the Ministry of Sports and Youth so that the more the learning culture is nurtured in the organization, the more the internal service quality will promote.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Organizations tend to follow approaches through which they may gain competitive advantage over their rivals. One of these approaches is to promote organizational learning culture and concentrate on internal service quality. Since organizational learning culture and internal service quality are two important elements of efficiency in dynamic and changing organizations, including sports organizations, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between learning culture and internal service quality in the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

The results showed a significant correlation between organizational learning culture and internal service quality. This is consistent with the findings of Ghanbar Pur et al (2011), Di Xie (2005) and Egan et al (2004). Considering the levels of learning, there was a more significant correlation between organizational learning and internal service quality comparing with other levels. This is consistent with the findings of Di Xie (2005). Rapid changes in organizational environments, particularly sports organizations, require the management and employees with good learning ability. Learning is a process that begins from the employees, expands between work teams and eventually covers the whole organization. A good learning environment can encourage the employees to learn and stay in the

organization for long periods [18]. Thus, a learning culture, consistent with organizational characteristics, not only helps the employees receive high levels of internal service but also keeps them as good employees in the organization. Besides, organizational learning culture is associated with other fiscal and non-fiscal outcomes both in and out of the organization. Thus, an efficient learning program should be able to satisfy employee needs adequately.

Since the learning culture begins with employees and proceeds to cover all organizational processes, it may exert a positive influence on internal service quality as well. The basis of high-quality services in the organization is competent employees who wish to learn. Quality service offered by the efficient employee may increase their satisfaction and encourage them to stay in the organization longer. Thus, it is imperative of managers at the Ministry of Sports and Youth to provide a better context for developing more enriched organizational culture to offer higher quality services. Maintenance of trained employees, particularly at the managerial level, is a big challenge to many organizations. Such employees may help promote learning culture in the organizations. HR management in sports organizations, particularly in the Ministry of Sports and Youth, should be aware of the rules and regulations including setting learning goals consistent with organizational goals, improved trust in the organization and transparent relations among employees to maintain the employees who play an important role in creating organizational learning culture. Therefore, HR management at the Ministry of Sports and Youth should promote learning culture among the employees, provide learning opportunities for the employees, identify barriers to learning in the organization and seek to remove them, and control organizational environment and learning.

Scholars contend that internal service quality is an important aspect of service quality strategy, which reduces costs and increases profits in the long run. Providing quality service for the employees significantly affects the interaction between these employees and external customers. Internal customers constitute a cycle that may ultimately affect external customer satisfaction and result in organizational success or failure. Organizational learning culture and internal service quality, which affect other variables influencing the quality of services offered to external customers, depend on the support provided by organizational leaders, particularly HR management. Considering the role of sports in both physical and mental development of individuals and in economic development as an industry, it seems necessary to promote learning culture and service quality in sports organizations. Therefore, HR management at the Ministry of Sports and Youth should develop organizational learning culture and internal service quality through designing and implementing strategic programs consistent with organizational goals. The present findings suggest that increased internal service quality and improved learning culture in sports organizations may help offer better quality services to customers and increase their satisfaction so that the organization can reap benefits from this advantage. It is notable to mention that internal service quality differs among sports organizations consistent with the type and activity they perform. This may limit the generalizability of the present findings to other organizations. It is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other sports organizations consistent with their type and size of activities.

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