

*Review*

# **Applicability of the learning organisation idea to universities in Kenya**

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The concept of the learning organisation is now gaining more prominence globally, yet there are few organisations that assert to be learning organizations, or identify with organizational learning. On the same breath, the learning organisation concept and practice is voiced more in the developed nations than in the developing ones, more so, Africa. Further, the learning organization appears to be more practical in entrepreneurial organisations than in the educational enterprise. This is evidenced by the dearth of literature still seeking to establish whether the learning organization idea is relevant to universities specifically in Kenya, and also Africa. This article examines the concept of the learning organisation to elucidate the key components in relation to universities in the Kenyan context. The review is pegged on Ortenblad and Koris' typology of the learning organization. Literature review of existing prior works on the components of the learning organization and their relevance to universities, and a reflective discussion based of applicability of key characteristics of a learning organisation in public universities in Kenya is made. The review found the four-point typology limited and a fifth component identified as beneficial toward universities' reflection on their organisational learning status. The learning organisation idea was found relevant for universities in Kenya but needs to be applied thoughtfully and in cognisance of the unique nature of its operations and include the key consumer (university student bodies) perspective in the multi-stakeholder contingency approach. The highly mechanistic learning structure, practices that encourage negative learning, lack of research focusing on internal concerns and emphasis on formal courses at the exclusion of learning at work are obstacles that stand in the way of transformation of universities in Kenya into learning organisations.

**Key words:** Organizational learning, learning organization, universities.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Universities have teaching and learning, research and community service as their core businesses. Ordinarily one would expect that by virtue of these core activities the university would be a learning organization and

embrace organizational learning as the modus operandi. Ortenblad (2013) cites several studies that have examined whether higher education institutions are learning organisations or not and whether they should be

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learning organisations (Abu-Tineh, 2011; Ali, 2012; Bak, 2012; Bui and Baruch, 2010, 2012; Cepic' and Krstovic', 2011; Farrar-Myers and Dunn, 2010; Greenwood, 2009; Khasawneh, 2011; Manlow et al., 2010; Nazari and Pihie, 2012; Nejad et al., 2012; Vatankhah et al., 2011; Veisi, 2010; Voolaid and Venesaar, 2011). Further, there seemed to be agreement on the assumption and expectation that higher education institutions are learning organisations (Ortenblad 2013). Universities in Kenya are examined under the lens of the characteristics of a learning organization with a view of bringing out the relevance of the concept to their operations. This is done with full awareness of the scepticism in sections of literature has so far never found a true learning organization (Waterman, 1994: 65), or that, creating one "is easier said than done" (Pedlar et al., 1991: 2). The question asked here is, can public universities in Kenya become learning organisations through embracing the learning organization principles? The concept of a learning organisation has featured in the organization literature for close to three decades. Propagated by Senge (1990), through his work *The Fifth Discipline*, the concept has been enthusiastically assimilated by management consultants and practitioners in the corporate world, as a means of enabling continual improvement and change. In Kenya, there is scant literature on the learning organisation in relation to higher education. In Africa, few have written about TLO but more in relation to other enterprise than higher education: Waal and Chachage (2011) on university in Tanzania; Steenekamp et al. (2012) on South Africa; Westhuizen and Jean (2002) on South Africa (Nzioka, 2012; Kilonzo, 2014; Mbugua, 2016; Soi, 2013; and Molo, 2010). Their applicability in this paper was therefore minimal.

Higher education and specifically, universities in Kenya face challenges unique to themselves as well as some that are common to other regions. It is assumed here that since organisational learning has been embraced and applied as a problem solving tool to turn around other organisations (Patterson 1999) it may as well be relevant and applicable to universities owing to the benefits that accrue from its practice. Such benefits include efficiency, effectiveness; organisational learning has been described as 'another means to a business goal', 'a way of managing change', 'a route to improved performance, productivity', but not an end in itself (Evans, 1998). Challenges and change are not strange bed-fellows in organisations and cannot be evaded; they must be acknowledged and plan must be put in place to manage them for the survival and growth of institutions. Dealing with change in an organisation involves knowledge generation and dissemination that universities are expected to be in built in operations and policies for the simple reason that knowledge is dynamic. However, there are environmental dynamics influencing universities that are frequently changing. New knowledge, new ways

of teaching and learning, new crop of students and work force, technological and global transformations that when put together demand well thought out ways of preparing for and managing their demands. In the recent past frequent and numerous transformations in universities in Kenya have taken place. Would embracing the learning organisation idea be the panacea to the current turbulence in universities in Kenya? The learning organization idea is proposed to provide the pathway for universities into excellence and continual improvement. Therefore, finding the applicability of the learning organization idea to universities in Kenya is important. Having worked for other enterprises, it may provide an option for universities in Kenya to move towards achieving their vision of being a "world class" institution, or at least help provide the initial steps to the realization of what is standing in their way to reaching their goals and being better (begin to learn).

## METHODOLOGY

This is a review paper. Literature review of existing available prior works on the components of the learning organization is done. A reflective discussion of these components is made against the backdrop of the public universities context and practice to find their relevance and applicability. A systematic examination of the Ortenblad and Korris (2014)'s typology is made focusing on different stakeholder perspectives, that is an examination based on a multi-stakeholder contingency approach. The Kenyan university education system is highly centralized. Therefore, reference is made to legal and statutory documents that govern and guide university operations. They include the Universities Act 2012, the Universities Act 2016, the University Charter 2013 and University statues. The characteristics of a learning organization that emanate from the typology are discussed for relevance and applicability based on the operations of universities in Kenya that are guided by the identified legal and statutory guidelines. Conclusions and their implications are made.

## The concept of the learning organisation and organisational learning

There are numerous and varied definitions and concepts of organisational learning or what a learning organisation is, and there is no worldwide agreement on the phenomenon (Curado, 2006). Nonetheless, most researchers consider organisational learning as a result of the participation in the interaction and sharing of experiences and knowledge by and among members of the organisation. The definition of the learning organization has been sought by scholars since Peter

Senge (1990: 3), who first described it as an organisation where:

...people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

In this definition Senge recognizes the individual as well as corporate learning as being necessary and an environment that allows for free and new thinking, new ideas, and learning on an endless continuum; an environment that cultivates positive growth. In a similar view Franklin et al. (1998) interpret organisation learning as involving multidimensional interactions between the individual and his/her own learning style, interactions between two or more individuals, and continuous interactions between and among alliances (March and Simon, 1958), teams (Senge, 1990), collectives (Dixon, 1994) or groups (Franklin, 1996a); sometimes with the purpose of achieving boosted competence, contentment and leaning for individuals, and groups and the whole institution. The shared form of knowledge is bigger than the individuals' learning capacities simply summed up (Curado, 2006). This implies that individual learning is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for organisational learning to occur. In agreement with the complex relationship between individual and institutional learning, Evans (1998) states that a learning organisation is one that promotes learning among its workforces, but more importantly, is one that itself learns from that learning, and notes characteristics of such organisations as being that they:

- (i) Lack a highly formalised and clearly evident command and control structure;
- (ii) Value individual and organisational learning as a prime means of delivering the organisational mission;
- (iii) Do not view the workforce as a collection of passive, hired hands;
- (iv) Do not believe that technology will solve future organisational problems;
- (v) Involve all their members through continuous reflection in a process of continual review and improvement;
- (vi) Structure work in such a way that work tasks are used as opportunities for continuous learning

Similarly Ortenblad and Koris (2014), as they discuss the relevance of the learning organization idea to higher educational institutions, develop a typology to define the learning organization and identify four aspects of learning organizations to include: *Learning at work*: an organization in which the employees learn while working (as opposed to learning at formal courses); *Organizational learning*: one with mindfulness of the need

for diverse points of learning, and the management of knowledge in the organizational memory (instead of in the individuals); *Climate for learning*: an organization that enables the learning of its individuals by fashioning an empowering environments that make learning easy and natural, offer space and time for experimenting and reflection, and endure failure; and *Learning structure*: an organization with a malleable, decentralized, informal and organic team-based structure which enables its members to make their own decisions to promptly satisfy the dynamic clients' needs and expectations, which necessitate continual learning, flexibility and allowing for specialization of the workforce, but with abilities to perform the work of others in the organization.

Argyris and Schon (1978) as well recognise the complex interplay between the individual, group and organizational learning, and emphasize the important role of the individuals who need to be seen as agents for organizational learning. Organisational learning is the principal process by which management innovation occurs, (Stata, 1989:64, Patterson, 1999: 9) and "the rate at which individuals and organisations learn is the only sustainable competitive advantage, especially in knowledge intensive industries" such as universities. Knowledge-creating organisations such as universities have continuous innovation as their exclusive and core business (Nonaka, 1991: 96), and environments in which "the only certainty is uncertainty", knowledge is the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage (Patterson, 1999). This description places universities in an advantageous position to benefit the most from the learning organisation idea.

The preceding definitions aptly describe the core functions and activities of the university as a whole and of individuals and groups therein. Universities engage in teaching and learning, research and development (learning and utilising research output), and other capacity building activities for the overall good of the entire university and the individual. In this perspective, personal growth, and that of faculty and staff is an expected and fundamental aspect of work as practitioners in the university. Universities are organisations that are devoted to the learning enterprise and that create knowledge, but can public universities in Kenya score well under the six characteristics listed by Evans (1998); can they become learning organizations?

Senge (1990, 1994) summarizes the vital blending of individual, organisational and total environment, for transforming institutions into learning organisations, into five disciplines: *personal mastery*, *mental models*, *building shared vision*, *team learning*, and the crucial "*fifth discipline*", systems thinking. Senge (1990: 69) equates the learning organization to systems thinking which is "the foundation of how learning organisations think about their world". The term "learning organisation" has been defined variously, nevertheless, the substantial features

are: that it learns through creating, acquiring and transferring new ideas and knowledge, and alters its behaviour to reflect these (Garvin, 1998); and that learning is transformational – (Capper et al., 1994). Grinsven and Visser (2011), and Murray (2002) refer to the two factors as empowerment and knowledge conversion.

The questions that seek answers here are whether universities apply new knowledge to improve their performance, whether they change to new ways of functioning, whether they acclimatize to new environments, developments and pressures in the settings in which they operate, and whether they do these focusing on both the individual as well as in a holistic manner through their structures and processes. Universities in Kenya are examined under the lens of Ortenblad and Koris (2014)'s typology of learning organisations.

### **Universities in Kenya and the typology of the learning organisation**

It is generally an agreeable fact that in recent years the university environments worldwide have faced unparalleled challenges and continuous transformations. White and Weathersby (2005), in providing their view point on whether universities can become true learning organizations, found that the underlying values that serve as the foundations of the learning organizations are actually respected in universities. However, “as academics we work in institutions that rarely practice even the simplest tenets found in the theories of learning organizations” (White and Weathersby, 2005 p 292). This is because the culture and environment of universities is shrouded in competitive ratings and rankings, acceptances and rejections, and authoritarian and hierarchical structures –sections, departments, faculties, schools, colleges, campuses, that determine the character and ways of doing business.

In Kenya, the university education landscape is quite uneven in terms of organization, management, ownership or sponsorship. There are public sponsored, private and religious based universities. To add to the diversity, is the central role played by professional and other regulatory bodies in the programmes, processes and management of universities. However, the unifying factor comes in form of common accreditation and registration that are done by government bodies based on more or less common criteria. With this diverse administrative and organisational background individual universities seek their own niches and competitive advantage.

### **Learning at work**

Learning at work as opposed to learning through undertaking formal courses is fundamental in the learning

organisation idea (Ortenblad and Koris, 2014). The idea here is to structure work in such a way that work roles and responsibilities are used as opportunities for continuous learning (Evans, 1998). The job descriptions, tasks and processes of job performance are deliberately arranged and set up in such a way that they consist of and offer opportunities for learning. For learning at work to occur, the individuals perform their daily jobs and when faced with challenging or problematic situations, they are expected to enquire into them and find working solutions on behalf of the organisation (read here university) (Argyris and Schon, 1996). By this the value of individual learning is enhanced and evident as a contributor to achievement of the mission of the university (Evans, 1998). Universities are organisations in which formal courses are taught and in a formally structured manner. To qualify to work in the university, one is expected to meet certain formally acquired qualifications. Though some positions require some level of experience, it would be naïve to deny that learning on the job is inevitable for a majority. There is always an initial experience and further even for the best and highest academically qualified. In addition, the work environment is extremely dynamic for universities and new challenges are faced and new ways of doing business are needed. Universities in Kenya, having experienced exponential growth from seven public universities in 2012 to thirty one currently, have seen these institutions recruit young and freshly qualified academicians and administrators with no prior experience in a university environment. This justifies the application of a blend of formal as well as learning at work strategies to ensure quality, efficiency and effectiveness. It is common to see university management, professional groups calling for and conducting workshops, seminars and other short courses to build capacity in a new competence when there is a system wide concern. Examples for academics would be on research grant proposal writing, graduate student research supervision, innovative instructional technologies and much more. Administrative staff could be offered induction in application of new policy and operations as well as technology. However, individuals also encounter unique situations that require individual learning on the job which can be cascaded and escalated to others if need be. Here is where universities need a great deal of flexibility and an enabling environment to drive and manage individual learning. Without these, the normal requirement to conform to existing formal and highly structured parameters of executing their tasks serves to frustrate learning.

### **Organisational learning**

A learning organization ought to be one in which organizational learning actually takes place. It is one that

is capable of creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, while modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and new perspectives (Garvin, 1998). A learning organization is capable of doing these through: systematic problem solving; experimentation; learning from past experiences; learning from the others and transferring knowledge (Curado, 2006). A majority of universities in Kenya are still on the developmental phase working along the pathway to getting established with a strong niche for themselves. Though each was established with a clear mandate and purpose, the environment presents innumerable challenges that threaten their execution of the mission as well as their very existence. Research is one of the most potent tools for creating knowledge. Though research is one of the core obligations of universities, a bulk of it is done for academic purposes and focus on national or global concerns with little or no concern for internal functions. This resonates with the observation that higher education institutions seem to single-loop learn rather than double-loop learn, and that even the willingness to single-loop learn is mostly restricted (Ortenblad and Koris 2014, Duke, 1992). That is, they learn within the current mind-set and hardly interrogate the current status and current perceptions in order to learn and acquire a new mind-set. Universities hold their traditions dear, so the search for solutions to problems encountered is fettered to those traditions. This makes universities learning organizations only to an insignificant extent.

Universities in Kenya rarely engage in research about themselves with the aim of learning and modifying their own behavior. The management of this kind of research should be built in the system in order to facilitate transferring knowledge and consequently change behavior. How else can one explain the existence of undesirable, ineffective, inefficient or non-functional phenomena for prolonged years yet concerns are always raised? According to White and Weathersby (2005p 294-295), the reason why dysfunctional practices are so resilient is that universities are historically old, large, and universally common institutions just like the military and the church. They have historically been inflexibly hierarchical, resistant to change, and structurally stable and commonly led by conventionalists who fancy to influence through positional power. The practice of protecting some zones from new ideas and change is not new in public universities just as much as any new idea only gets accommodated when it comes from those higher in the hierarchy. However, at micro levels there is some learning taking place through programme and course reviews after specified durations, appraisals of individuals and processes but with minimum feedback and feed-forward. It should be noted that learning can be negative or positive and not necessarily contributive to the organization because the individual can learn things that are negative to the particular organization but

beneficial to the individual, or learn to improve themselves and not the organization (Field, 1997). There is practice commonly referred to as benchmarking where universities or their members decide to change their way of doing business to embrace what another university perceived to be 'doing better' are doing without knowledge of the need, purpose and relevance for the change. Most universities in Kenya started as constituent colleges of older universities. Normally the staff are seconded from the 'mother' university to mentor the process of establishing it into a fully-fledged university. During this period of mentorship a number of programmes, courses, structures and policies are those of the mentor institution. The senate (the highest decision making body) is that of the mentoring institution. Normally, the vice chancellor is an ex-officio member of the council of the college. The danger here is that practices and cultures tend to be replicated because 'that is the way things are done' or "that has worked for us for long". Innovative strategies may get shunned and no one would like to take risks of failure. This therefore provides a setting for the slow appreciation of the learning organization idea. Learning from past and others' experience may be helpful but only if there was need as well as systematic problem solving process.

### **Climate for learning**

An organization creates a climate for learning when it facilitates the learning of its individuals by creating a positive atmosphere that makes learning easy and natural, offers space and time for experimenting and reflection, and tolerates failure (Ortenblad and Koris, 2014: 175). A learning organisation should not view the staff as a group of passive, employed aides who only do what is prescribed for them to do. The involvement of individuals in an organisation's decision making and creating room for and encouraging active contribution to organisational matters is the way towards enhancing organisational learning. To some extent this is true of universities in Kenya. There is substantial involvement of members in decision making through representation at key organisational points and through policies that provide for inclusiveness as well as procedures and processes involving all levels of stakeholders on matters contributing to achievement of the universities' mission. However, depending on individual institutional leadership the degree of active involvement of individuals varies. Cases of authoritarian, high-handed and undemocratic leadership affect the management of the human resource and interpersonal relations creating tensions which lead to labour unions collision with management. Frequent occurrence of industrial action by unions in universities may be a pointer to an organisation that has set itself up not to learn. Requirements for strict adherence to policy,

guidelines and other procedures that govern university operations, coupled with regular check on compliance which is normally followed by sanctions to some extent reduce the room for flexibility, creativity, individual freedoms and confidence to try out new ways of executing roles and responsibilities for improved efficiency and effectiveness. Organisational learning occurs through learning of individuals and this learning is harnessed for the organisational good. It is therefore necessary that an environment is created that is conducive for and facilitates development of organisational knowledge in the individuals in form of experiences, skills and personal capabilities. More important is the environment that ensures that this individual knowledge is ploughed back into the organisation in the form of documents, records, rules, regulations to guide organisational improvement (Weick and Roberts, 1993). Creating this environment for interaction between individual and institutional knowledge in such a way that it promotes organisational learning is the responsibility of management (Adler et al., 1999). This is knowledge management.

### **Learning structure**

Curado (2006) examines the structures of mechanistic and organic designs in organisational learning and identifies their features and traits. The mechanistic organisational learning design presents a highly formalised structure with low integration and high centralisation. This displays extensive use of procedures, high degree of task specialisation, strict performance control, little use of liaison processes and structures and little delegation of decision making authority. Conversely, the organic design, which is the preferred one for organisational learning to take place, is characterised by low formalisation, high integration and low centralisation. In an organically designed organisation there is little use of written procedures, low degree of task specialisation, relaxed performance control, extensive use of liaison processes and structures and extensive delegation of decision making authority.

Universities in Kenya operate under highly formalised and very clearly visible structures, protocols and command lines. There is heavy emphasis on documented procedures, growing specialization and compartmentalisation of work environments with little talking between departments. The recently introduced performance contracting and performance monitoring and evaluation processes do not give room for flexibility and experimentation. According to Evans (1998) this kind of environment curtails organisational learning. Academic staff do research, teach and engage in service to community. It is expected that new developments from research and innovation are ploughed back to the

curriculum and teaching processes as well inform up-to-date engagement with community speedily. The truth is that modification of programmes structures and content in a response to new learnings and new demands cannot happen before a series of procedural approvals at several levels internally and external to the university. For instance, programme changes have to be vetted and approved at departmental, school, committee of deans, university senate and national regulatory level. Alongside this, the professional bodies' approvals are necessary for accreditation. Accreditations and other quality assurance measures are important, but in this case the lengthy, highly formalised procedures work against the concept of efficiency, timely interventions and organisational learning. It is also expected that individual and organisational learning are a major means of delivering the institutional missions at universities. It is true that individual learning does not automatically translate to organisational learning (Ikehara, 1999). And organisational learning cannot happen without learning of individuals in it. The reason for this is that the purpose, prompt and process of individual learning vary and may not be connected to organisational needs. Further, mechanisms to enable transformation of individual learning to organisational learning are not in place. It is the task of the learning organization to ensure the transformation of individual learning to organizational learning occurs (Wang and Ahmed, 2003). This is evident in cases of individual members and individual units learning new ways to solve issues that affect them as well as all other members and units, however, by and large, the learning is not shared. This takes various forms such as mechanisms of handling large classes, part time staff management, research management, and technology to manage data and records of different types and much more.

### **The new and emergent trajectory**

Ortenblad and Koris (2014) look at the university using a multi-stakeholder approach that typically includes perspectives of the employee, the employer and community. This is characteristic of organizations that have an entrepreneurial focus. However, in the universities set up there are various stakeholders and interest groups beyond these. Key stakeholders include the students who are direct consumers of the programmes and services offered. The administrative viewpoint chiefly undertakes to ensure effectiveness of the specific universities. In doing so, more focus is placed on:

- (i) Accreditation; academic program assessment; administrative planning and evaluation;
- (ii) Institutional research and reporting; and strategic planning analysis etc.

- (iii) Management of resources
- (iv) Effective teaching and learning
- (v) Research outputs
- (vi) Quality assurance
- (vii) Ranking
- (viii) Internationalization, and

The employee perspective undertaken to ensure the well-being of the employees concerns itself more with:

- (i) Working environment
- (ii) Terms of service
- (iii) Career progression
- (iv) Staff welfare

Societal perspective is mainly concerned with ensuring that education and research is of relevance and beneficial to citizens and organizations within the society, and therefore, concentrates on:

- (i) Relevance of the education
- (ii) Relevance of research, whether it is of help to the society, provides impetus to the government agenda
- (iii) Impact of the university to the immediate community

This paper considers a major stakeholder in universities in Kenya whose perspective is coming up strongly in the recent past, the consumer of higher education and the students. The twenty-first century university student has taken a key and central role in shaping organisational learning trajectory of any university. The Universities Act 2012 (number 42 of 2012) of the Republic of Kenya, popularly known as the Charter gives unique inclusion of The Students' Associations and The Alumni Associations as members of the governance of the university. The functions of these bodies are clearly spelt out in the Universities Act 2012, the Charter and operationalised in the resultant statutes of each university. This paper introduces the student perspective. The students in higher education institutions are increasingly getting involved in management matters and have formed governance bodies that work very closely with university management structures. In Kenya, university student governing bodies conduct elections and have structured representation in all levels of management, including membership to the university senate (Republic of Kenya, 2012 part 3:18r, 3:21, 3:22). The functions of the students' associations in the Charter include:

- (i) oversee and plan, in consultation with senate (*where they are members*), students' activities for promotion of academic, spiritual, moral, harmonious communal life and social well-being,
- (ii) draw attention of appropriate authorities ...to special needs, and
- (iii) undertake other functions as provided in its governance instruments approved by the university

council" (Republic of Kenya, 2012 part 3:22).

The University Act 2016, an amendment of the previous act elaborately spell out how every students' council should be elected, terms of office and with clear guidelines pegged on the constitution of Kenya 2010 ( Republic of Kenya, 2016: 8-9). The students governing councils and alumni associations are recognised by law and have chapter and national leadership. They play a key role in influencing, monitoring and promoting their welfare, learning environment, modes of teaching and learning, general academics, quality assurance, institutional culture and generally ensuring their rights are met. Most major decisions that are made and that affect the student body are arrived at through a consultative approach with the student bodies. This makes them key stakeholders in the organisation and that for comprehensive organisational learning to take place, their perspective needs to be considered. The importance of this stakeholder is reflected in the seriousness with which the statutory bodies and university managements support and facilitate the conduct of student elections into the governing councils and cannot be over-emphasised. A comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach towards applicability of the learning organisation idea in higher education institutions therefore needs such an expanded view. The students represent a large constituency of the organisation that contribute towards the formation of the culture of the institution. For organisational learning to take root as the culture of the universities the students cannot be left out.

## CONCLUSION

Public universities in Kenya currently face numerous challenges in almost all functions. The ever-reducing funding, declining research output against the demand for research driven decision making, teaching and service to community, the increasing demand for higher education hence the rising student numbers against inadequacy of accommodation, tuition facilities, and qualified lecturers, a fast evolving crop of students against slow adaptation to corresponding new ways of learning by the lecturers, advancement in technology that manages and facilitates operations against set-ups and skills not designed for the future, fast evolving job market requirements against traditional and inflexible programmes and courses which cause a mismatch with job market requirements. Like any other organisation, universities face challenges, and these challenges are dynamic requiring swift identification, consideration and changes. This paper adopted the definition of a learning organisation to be one where: people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually

learning how to learn together (Senge, 1990, p. 3). The literature paper examined public universities in Kenya under the four characteristics of learning organisations developed by Ortenblad and Koris (2014), learning at work, organisational learning, climate for learning and learning structure. What stands out is that,

- (i) The universities operate in highly formalised environments with institutionalised hierarchies, lines of command and controls.
- (ii) The link between individual and organisational learning is blurred implying that any translation of individual learning to organisational learning may be inadvertent.
- (iii) Individual learning is motivated more by personal goals and less on organisational learning goals.
- (iv) There is more formal learning than learning at work (which happens through seminars, workshops and other short courses)
- (v) The universities have potential to benefit from principles of organisational learning however, the management culture, structure and environment that are anti-learning pose inhibitions toward becoming learning organisations
- (vi) Universities in Kenya having recognised the role of the students as stakeholders in management of university affairs, have the potential of becoming learning organisations by including the student perspective into organisational learning strategies and processes.

The result of this status is that organisational learning may be at its minimum. Therefore, it is important for universities to find ways through which more flexibility can be exercised to allow for ingenious, novel, creative yet effective and efficient ways of doing things can flourish. Individual institutions and their governing bodies need to consider creating platforms and frameworks that facilitate the alignment and translation of a considerable percentage of individual learning to organisational learning; investing organisational knowledge into individuals in the form of experience, skills and personal competences, and also into the organisation in form of documents, annals, rubrics, guidelines and values (Weick and Roberts 1993). A healthy equilibrium and blend of formal learning and learning at work can be the initial steps towards becoming a learning organisation. Learning, therefore, should not only be associated with formalised and planned events or activities such as programmes of education, training or development. Such programmes should rather be seen as deliberate interventions in the naturally occurring learning processes of individuals (Stewart and McGoldrick, 1996).

To make the universities learning organisations the process of problem solving needs to be engaged in with open and futuristic mind sets, develop mechanisms of enquiring about themselves as part of work and looping

in lessons learnt. They should learn to create knowledge about their past and present to be able to drive the institution to a desired positive future (Curado, 2006). A participative and decentralised decision-making environment is beneficial in facilitating organisational learning. An environment that facilitates and supports the learning organisation idea and putting in place appropriate and friendly learning structures are largely the responsibilities of leadership and management. Therefore, deliberate adoption of the learning organisation idea, its inclusion in the university culture and purposeful enabling of its tenets to thrive are essential in leading the university into becoming a learning organisation.

A practical implication of results of this review is that transformational leadership is key in adoption of structures and environments supportive of organisational learning. Striking a healthy balance between individual and organisational learning and formulating synergetic translation from one to the other in universities is pivotal. The social implication is that a key consumer perspective, in this case, the student governing bodies be included in the multi stakeholder approach to examining the organisational learning status of universities, especially in Kenya.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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