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Standing on the Toes of Giants: Social Movement Theory and the Case of the Learning Organisation.

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Abstract

The thesis examines two interrelated topics; the perception of management theory in general, and the efficacy of the learning organisation in particular. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to compare the rhetoric espoused in the learning organisation literature with a survey of senior managers in large, commercial organisations.

The results revealed a positive disposition towards business and management theory in general. The survey also demonstrated that leadership is considered the most important variable in the success of a company. This is facilitated through the attraction and retention of the appropriate staff and creating sufficient space for them to operate. Learning is embedded by anticipating the future, learning from the past and enabling good communication. However, the latter is balanced through change management. This is derived through legitimate authority and a reliance on planning. Finally, a strategy of experimentation is balanced by challenging industry rules. Themes involving politics, corporate alignment and corporate longevity were found to have relatively little convergent validity. The third section of the questionnaire reveals a positive disposition towards the learning organisation.

The contribution of this thesis is in three areas. First, it is the only work to evaluate the anti-guru school. Second is the development of a syncretic model of learning organisation concept using structural equation modelling. Finally, it explains and examines the largely misunderstood concept of management fashions.

Key words: Learning organisation, organisational learning, fads, fashions, bandwagons, management gurus, normative literature, structural equation model, FTSE, AIM, corporate longevity.

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