

The Role of Inter-organizational Learning and Self-organizing Systems in Building a Sustainable Network Culture

Michael Huelsmann, University of Bremen, Germany
Jessica Lohmann, University of Bremen, Germany
Christine Wycisk, University of Bremen, Germany

Abstract: The topic of (intra-)organizational learning has long been researched. However, much remains unknown about inter-organizational learning. By learning from and with other organizations, each element of the network aims to benefit compared to acting alone. But are there any differences between intra-organizational and inter-organizational learning processes that make an additional study of inter-organizational learning necessary? In how far does inter-organizational learning contribute to identifying new challenges for management? And how is it possible to cope with these challenges? To answer these questions, a theoretical framework of inter-organizational learning in networks is developed using the social systems approach. The objective is to highlight challenges of inter-organizational learning reflecting cultural and organizational boundaries in networks. In this context, the concept of self-organizing systems is presented as an approach to overcome boundaries and to contribute to a collaborative network culture by facilitating, enhancing, and implementing inter-organizational learning processes. Finally, inter-organizational learning is proposed as a mechanism of self-organization itself. At this point, it is also discussed in how far self-organization is able to create boundaries.

Keywords: Inter-organizational learning, Self-organization, Co-operation, Network culture, Social systems approach, Learning processes

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