

Organizational Learning as a Driver of Service Quality: A Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

Today's global environment is complex, dynamic and highly competitive, and organizations have been forced to focus on providing excellent service quality due to its close relationship with cost, financial performance and customer satisfaction and retention. Recognizing and meeting customer expectations through high levels of service quality help distinguish the company's services from those of its rivals, increase profits leading to increased competitive advantage. A large body of literature indicates that high levels of service quality leads to increased performance, competitiveness, productivity and innovations of firms. To compete successfully, an organization's strategy must be aligned well with the environment. Organizational learning assists organizations to achieve a better fit with the environment. To accomplish this alignment, organizations must be open to learning about how their decisions, systems, structures, processes, policies and practices fit with the environment. This study sought to review existing conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature on organizational learning and service quality with a view to highlighting the knowledge gaps suitable to form basis for future research work. Existing empirical literature on organizational learning is discussed with evidence of results that are not conclusive, different conceptualizations of organizational learning as well as differences in contextual variables. The review of literature also brought out key indicators of service quality as one of the potential outcomes of organizational learning for organizations. Ultimately, the dimensions for organizational learning were modelled as a guide for further research in the field of strategic management.

Keywords: Organizational Learning, Competitive Advantage and Service Quality

1.0 Introduction

Today's global environment is complex, dynamic and highly competitive, and organizations have become much more focused on providing high levels of customer satisfaction by offering excellent service quality (Sharabi & Davidow, 2010). Organizations are aiming to understand customer perceptions of service quality in order to differentiate their offerings in the global market (Babakus, Bienstock & Scotter, 2004; Imrie, 2005). As a result, there is a vast body of service marketing literature that has considered the concept of service quality as the basis of customer satisfaction and

has given it great importance due to its close relation with other concepts such as cost, financial performance and customer retention (Saravanan & Rao, 2007).

Quality service delivery is an attribute that is extrinsically perceived, based on the consumer's experience of the service he/she has encountered (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1991; Kiprono & Kinyua, 2021; Magut & Kinyua, 2022). It has been noted that customers demand for service quality is growing and that organizations are likely to lose if customers' expectations are not met. However, if an organization fulfills customers' demands with regards to the quality of goods and services they offer and is able to go above and beyond customers' expectations, then it is possible to enhance service quality (Romano & Vinelli, 2001). In essence, customer needs are never static and their characteristic state of dynamism have been primary source of complexity when firms are making decision regarding optimal products and services with potential to satisfy the customers (Wambui & Kinyua, 2021). There is a large body of knowledge which suggests that service quality leads to improved competitive advantage. Thus, organizations need to focus on the concept of service quality to enhance customer satisfaction and subsequently develop strategies to improve their competitive advantage.

The concept of organizational learning has gained considerable attention among researchers and practitioners (Cangelosi and Dill, 1965; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Ulrich, 1993) due to its fundamental role in achieving sustained competitive advantage (Sinkula, Baker and Noordeweir, 1997) and a key factor to the success of the business in today's ever changing competitive environments. Although organizational learning has been explained in a variety of approaches, learning has recently been considered from a strategic viewpoint as a way to distinguish between companies' heterogeneity and a factor in creating competitive advantage (Jerez-Gómez, Céspedes-Lorente & Valle- Cabrera, 2005). Thus, organizations that are able to learn have a better chance of spotting and responding to market events and trends (Martinez-Costa & Jimenez-Jimenez, 2009).

According to Dibella, Nevis and Gould (1996), organizational learning involves the accumulation of tacit and explicit knowledge and the sharing and use of this knowledge. Specifically, it involves acquiring and disseminating information on customers' needs and wants, changes in the market and actions by the competitor (Calantone, Cavusgil & Zhao, 2002; Hurley & Hult, 1998; Moorman & Miner, 1998). According to De Geus (1988), the ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only way to sustain competitive advantage. Many researchers have also proposed that organizational learning is a necessity to survive in dynamic environments (Dodgson, 1993; Garvin, 1983; Foil & Lyles, 1985). Popper and Lipshitz (2000) also assert that a dynamic environment requires adaptation and successful adaptation depends on effective learning.

Furthermore, Dodgson (1993) asserts that organizational learning assists organizations to improve their efficiencies in times of change. Learning has also been recognized as a way to improve competitiveness, productivity, and innovativeness in uncertain environments (Garratt, 1990). Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1988) also suggests that organizational learning assists organizations link their resources more closely with customers' needs, improve the corporate image of the organization, improve quality of goods and services and encourage more active experimentations and innovations.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, knowledge has become one of the most valuable intangible assets for firms because of its ability to generate products and services that are challenging to duplicate (Nonaka & Toyama, 2003; Garcia et al., 2007). Scholars have also claimed that new information and skills acquired through learning boosts an organization's capacity for innovation, raising the quality of its goods and services thus achieving a higher level of performance and competitiveness (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Huber, 1991; Kieser & Koch, 2008; Nonaka, 1994). Notably, organizational learning enables organizations to develop capabilities to identify customers' needs and wants and improve their capacity to create unique products and services which are challenging to imitate (Chiles & Choi, 2000; Hackman & Wageman, 1995). Organizational learning also enables organizations to develop new markets and improve to their competitive advantage (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999; Ruiz-Moreno, Gracia-Morales & Lorens-Montes, 2005).

The numerous studies that have been conducted on the construct of organizational learning have been carried out in developed countries (Dorri & Aghamirian, 2014; Lynn, Abel, Valentine & Wright, 1999; Moorman and miner, 1997). There are very few empirical studies in organizational learning that have been carried out in developing countries. The review of literature has also revealed that there is no general consensus on the operationalization and measurement of the organizational learning construct which has made it difficult to compare results across studies. Additionally, the empirical studies on organizational learning that have been carried out have also used different methodologies that have led to different outcomes. Thus, to contribute to the empirical body of knowledge on the construct of organizational learning, future research is therefore needed.

3.0 Conceptual Literature

3.1 Concept of Organizational Learning

Academics and practitioners working to better organizations are currently paying close attention to the idea of organizational learning. It is a dynamic idea with its use in theory highlighting how the organization is always changing. It is also an integrative idea that may integrate many levels of analysis, including individual, group, corporate, etc. (Dodgson, 1993).

Although organizational learning has been explained in a variety of approaches, learning has recently been considered from a strategic viewpoint as a way to distinguish between companies' heterogeneity and a factor in creating competitive advantage (Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005). According to the literature on organizational learning, organizations that are able to learn have a better chance of spotting market events and trends (Martinez-Costa & Jimenez-Jimenez, 2009).

There are numerous definitions of the organizational learning concept. While Fiol and Lyles (1985) defined it as change that results from experience, Huber (1991) viewed it as knowledge acquisition. Other authors (Castaneda, 2015; Castaneda and Rios, 2007; Garvin, Edmondson and Gino, 2008) have defined organizational learning as the integration of knowledge acquisition and organizational change based on action. Specific individual knowledge must be embedded in a variety of institutional forms, such as tools, routines, social networks, transactive memory systems (Argote, 2011), organizational systems, structures, and culture for it to be considered organizational (Cummings & Worley, 2009; Villamizar & Castaneda, 2014).

The creation, retention, and transfer of knowledge are the three sub-processes of organizational learning, according to a study by Argote, Mcevily and Reagan (2003) and expanded upon by Argote (2011). These three sub-processes have been included in the definitions of knowledge management by other writers (Lin, 2015; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Flores, Zheng, Rau and Thomas (2012) after reviewing management journals came up with six organizational learning sub-processes: information acquisition, distribution, interpretation, integration, organizational memory and knowledge institutionalization. Organizational learning was described by Popova-Nowak and Cseh (2015) as a social process in which people engage in activities and discourses that are situated collectively and that both reproduce and expand organizational learning. As a result, organizational learning encompasses a variety of ideas, but its primary activities tend to be knowledge creation and knowledge acquisition.

According to Hurley and Hult (1998); Moorman and Miner (1998), organizational learning refers to the creation and application of knowledge across the entire organization in order to increase competitive advantage. This includes gathering and disseminating information on market changes, competitors' activities, and customers' needs and wants. Most of the literature describe the organizational learning process as the acquisition, interpretation, implementation and storage of new knowledge in order to improve problem solving capacities of the organization (Huber, 1991; Liao, Fei & Liu, 2008).

Organizational learning is seen as a dynamic process based on knowledge which implies moving among the different levels of action, going from the individual, to the group level to the organizational level. Learning by an individual has been stated to form the basis of organizational learning since organizations will learn through its members and because it results from an accumulation of individual learning (Liao et al., 2008; Calantone et al., 2002).

Thus, individual and group learning precede organizational learning, which is a process that spans two stages. Individual learning happens when knowledge is acquired or created, group learning happens when this knowledge is shared and transferred and organizational learning is achieved when this knowledge is integrated and shared across the organization. Yet, organizational learning has a collective aspect that goes beyond individual learning (Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005).

Over the years the concept of organizational learning seems to have been absorbed into knowledge management and although there are several studies that have focused on knowledge management and organizational learning separately, (Bapuji and Crossan, 2004; Brahma and Mishra, 2015; Easterby-Smith, Crossan and Nicolini, 2000; Lee, Rittiner and Szulanski, 2016; Serenko, 2013; Serenko and Dumay, 2015a, 2015b) others such as Pun and Balkissoon (2011) based on a literature search for knowledge management and organizational learning concepts on the ProQuest databases for the period between 1996-2009, concluded that since 2008 the concepts and practices of knowledge management and organizational learning have integrated.

Topics such as knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution and knowledge application were key in their studies and were considered to be critical concepts of learning organizations. Serenko (2013) also considered organizational learning to be part of knowledge management. Fteimi and Lehner (2016), in their study of the keywords used in 755 articles that were published between 2006 and 2013 in the Proceedings of the European Conference on Knowledge Management, included organizational learning as a component of knowledge management.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2000) examined the past, present and future of organizational learning and came to the conclusion that although organizational learning and knowledge management were expressed in different languages, their fundamental ideas and issues were the same. Pun and Balkissoon (2011) discovered that knowledge acquisition, creation, and transfer are at the core of much of the research done in both between 1996 and 2009 when they reviewed knowledge management and organizational learning research from that period. Garvin, Edmondson and Gino (2008) also considered the three processes of knowledge acquisition, creation and transfer in relation to the learning organization.

3.1.1 Perspectives of Organizational Learning

A large body of knowledge has viewed organizational learning from different perspectives. The first perspective is the systems perspective also called systems thinking. It is the fifth and the most important component in Senge's (1990) learning organization model. It requires bringing the organization's members together around a shared identity and acknowledges the connections between the various organizational units.

All employees and departments should clearly understand the organizational goals and how they can contribute to the achievement of these goals (Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005). A systems approach refers to encouraging collaborative efforts and building member relationships based on information sharing, a shared identity, and a common vision.

Organizational learning has also been viewed from the cognitive perspective. Researchers embracing purely cognitive perspective conceptualize organizational learning as the development of new insights through the evaluation of presumptions, causal maps, or interpretive schemas (Huber, 1991; Kim, 1993). When viewed from this angle, organizational learning is characterized by changes in cognition and is characterized by human information processing, which includes gathering, organizing, storing, manipulating, rejecting, and implementing knowledge. According to Huber (1991) an organization has learned if any information has been acquired by any of its units and this information has been recognized as useful to the organization. This perspective views learning as the accumulation of fresh knowledge through which individuals form new cognitive structures or worldviews. According to the individual-cognitive perspective, learning occurs in organizations through ongoing modifications in the elemental composition and schematic relationships of the cognitive structures of the important individuals (Hayes & Allinson, 1994).

Several authors apply this viewpoint to organizations. Hedberg (1981), looking at it from this viewpoint, states that "Organizations do not have brains, but they have cognitive processes and memories." Organizations develop their views and ideologies over time, much as people do with their personalities, routines, and beliefs. Another perspective is the contingency perspective of organizational learning which emphasizes how environmental conditions affect organizational learning processes and results in different types of learning. According to Katz and Kahn (1996), organizations interact and understand their environments and adapt to any changes in those environments. The perceptions of the environment greatly influence the organizational learning processes. Gnyawali and Stewart (2003) have suggested that the characteristics of external environment, uncertainty and equivocality, interact with the way an organization learns. In other words, how organizational members perceive the external environment influences organizational learning. According to this perspective, different environmental conditions require different

reactions thus organizations will be required to use different learning processes to generate knowledge.

Organizational learning has also been viewed from the perspective of sociology and organizational theory. This perspective focuses on the social systems and organizational structures where learning takes place (Easterby-Smith, 1997). It concerns itself with the question why organizations don't learn as much as they should. This perspective argues that structural features of the organization make it hard for the organizations to respond to the environment. Another perspective is the strategic perspective. This perspective focuses on competition and learning is judged from whether the organization gains any advantage over others. According to Hamel and Prahalad (1993), being a learning organization is not enough. An organization must be able to learn more faster and more efficiently than the competitors. Fiol and Lyles (1985) assert that this is important in ensuring the organization aligns itself well with the environment.

The cultural perspective is the next perspective of organizational learning. This perspective views culture as a cause and effect of organizational learning (Easterby-Smith, 1997). However, Barth (1989) argues that there are many views of what culture is and cultural meanings may be different for all members as they depend on different experiences and knowledge. Thus, the concept of learning may be different depending on the cultural setting and context. The last perspective is the production management perspective. This perspective concerns itself with the relationship between learning and organizational productivity and efficiency. According to Buzzell and Gale's (1987) work on the learning curve, the costs of producing a product reduce in proportion to the total number of units produced. However, Garvin (1983) argues that while the learning curve is still applicable in different industries for example aerospace and defense, it focuses on one single measure of output and overlooks other factors that are equally important.

3.1.2 Dimensions of Organizational Learning

There is no agreement on a set of distinct qualities that characterize learning organizations because the term has been defined and described in a variety of ways. However, some traits appear in numerous studies, indicating independent confirmation of the significance of these traits as foundational elements for successful learning groups. The most significant advances, however, have come from Pedler *et al.*, (1997) and Watkins & Marsick (1998). The Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) was created by Watkins & Marsick (1998). This instrument is divided into five sections that address learning at the individual, team, and organizational levels as well as monitoring the organization's financial and intellectual success. It tackles seven core dimensions of learning organizations revolving around continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, embedded systems, systems connections, empowerment, leadership, financial performance and knowledge performance (Watkins & Marsick, 1998). The validity of this instrument has been verified and confirmed through scientific testing.

The Pedler *et al.* (1997) instrument (The Learning Company Questionnaire) initially had nine dimensions but was later developed to include eleven dimensions namely learning approach to strategy, participative policy-making, enabling structures, learning climate, self-development opportunities, boundary workers as environmental scanners, inter-company learning, information, formative accounting and control, internal exchange and reward flexibility. These dimensions are in turn grouped into five categories described as strategy, structures, learning opportunities, looking in and looking out (Pedler *et al.*, 1997). This questionnaire emphasizes on the role of the individual in

the context of the whole organization (Moilanen, 2001). According to Jimenez and Valle (2011) and Jimenez and Navarro (2007) organizational learning is based on four indicators: information acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory. Huber (1991) agrees with this and argues that the process of organizational learning includes four phases, the acquisition of information from both the internal and external environment of the organization, its distribution within the company, its interpretation and finally, its storing for future use in organizational memory.

Armstrong and Foley (2003) identified four core dimensions of learning organizations revolving around the learning environment, identification of learning and development needs, meeting learning and development needs and applying learning in the workplace. Griego, Geroy and Wright (2000) merged two diagnostic tools, resulting in a new version that addresses similar dimensions, namely training and education, rewards and recognition, information flow, vision and strategy and individual and team development. Tannenbaum (1997) identified seven dimensions of learning organizations i.e., learning opportunities, tolerance of mistakes, high performance expectations, openness to new ideas, policies and practices support training, awareness of the big picture and satisfaction with development. Sarala and Sarala (1996) proposed seven dimensions of learning organizations focusing on philosophy and values, structure and processes, leading and decision making, organizing the work, training and development and internal and external interactions.

Similar dimensions have been highlighted in other research, notably a study by Rosengarten (1995), who uncovered several of the same key traits in his meta-analysis of 30 approaches to learning organizations, including team work and team learning, flow of information, education and training of the workforce, learning reward system for employees, experimentation, decentralized hierarchies and participative policy-making. Gardiner and Whiting (1997) also identified eight dimensions of learning organizations which included learning strategy, learning climate, participation in policy making, use of information, empowerment, leadership and structure and links with external environment. A study by Nevis, Dibella and Gould (1995) identified a similar set of ten facilitating factors of learning organizations, including scanning imperative, performance gap, concern for measurement, experimental mind set, climate of openness, continuous education, operation variety, involved leadership and systems perspective. A similar but shortened list of factors was delineated by Lipshitz and Oz (1996), including open information flows, organizational learning culture, and organizational learning mechanisms, encompassing structural factors/reward processes.

The research studies that have been conducted on the topic of learning organizations shows that there is no consensus on a definite set of attributes of learning organizations, nor is there a firm consensus on one best measurement tool. There is, however, clearly a convergence in delineating the most important differentiating dimensions of learning organizations, and these seem to encompass elements of leadership, strategy, participative policy making, structure, learning climate, learning opportunities (including training and development) and rewards for learning. This study will adopt the four indicators of organizational learning according to Jimenez and Valle (2011) and Jimenez and Navarro (2007) which are: information acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory.

3.1.2 Adoption of Organizational Learning in Strategic Management and Outcomes

The concept of organizational learning is gaining currency amongst organizations as they attempt to develop structures and systems which are more adaptable and responsive to change. Organizational

learning has been viewed by many management theorists and practitioners as a fundamental strategic process and the only source of sustainable competitive advantage of the future (DeGeus, 1988; Garratt, 1987). To compete successfully, an organization's strategy must be aligned with that of its environment and at the same time the organization must have the capabilities that fit its strategy. This fit' must be achieved within the organization as well as with the business environment. To accomplish this alignment, organizations must be open to learning about how their decisions, systems, structures processes, policies and practices fit the environment. Thus, to achieve this fit, it is inevitable that organizations become learning organizations (DeGeus, 1988).

According to De Geus (1988), the ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only way to sustain competitive advantage. Many researchers have also proposed that organizational learning is a necessity to survive in dynamic environments (Dodgson, 1993; Garvin, 1993; Foil & Lyles, 1985). Organizational learning has useful outcomes in the field of strategic management. One of the common explanations of the need to learn is the requirement for adaptation and improved efficiency in times of change. learning has been seen as the highest form of adaptation for organizations and a way to increase their rates of survival in changing environments. Learning has also been seen as a purposive quest to gain and sustain competitiveness, increase productivity and innovativeness in uncertain business environments. The greater the uncertainties, the greater the need for learning.

According to Pavitt (1991), organizational strategies are determined in part by attempts to learn in highly uncertain conditions. Arrow (1962) asserts that the efficiency goals of learning are commonly equated with productivity. Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1988) also suggests that organizational learning assists organizations link their resources more closely with customers' needs, improve the corporate image of the organization, improve quality of goods and services and encourage more active experimentations and innovations.

3.2 The Concept of Service Quality

It is challenging to describe and quantify service quality, in contrast to tangible products, which are simple to evaluate objectively in terms of quality. This is due to the fact that the idea of service excellence is complex, diffuse and abstract. Intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability the three distinguishing qualities of a service are substantially to blame for this (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). If service quality is conceived from the perspective of the consumer, it is frequently connected to the idea of customer satisfaction, giving the concept a subjective nature based on perceived quality rather than an objective nature based on technical or mechanical quality. In this regard, service quality is a customer's assessment of a product's total excellence or superiority (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Parasuraman Zeithaml & Berry (1985). Service quality is also referred to as the discrepancy between users' expectations and perceptions of service performance and the actual service provided.

Oldman and Wills (1997) also defined service quality as the understanding of services from the perspective of the client and providing services that live up to their expectations. According to Thapisa and Gamini (1999), service quality can also be seen in terms of a service's or product's suitability for its intended use, subject to the requirements of the client or consumer. Therefore, quality must meet the demands or requirements of the customer. Thus, the user is a crucial factor in the continuous process of determining quality (Thapisa & Gamini, 1999).

Etzel, Bruce & William (2001) stated that service quality is assessed by customers based on a comparison between their real experiences and their expectations toward the service. Customer expectations towards the standard of the service will be influenced by their own requirements, previous experience and public reputation. Hence, customer satisfaction is dependent on the expectations and perceptions of the consumer. When the experience of the customer is better than their expectations, the perception of service quality will be high.

Simultaneously, if the service quality is high, new and existing customers will be attracted and retained or even lured to move from the competitors (Babakus et al., 2004). Therefore, service quality is important in attracting new customers and retaining the existing ones (Li, Shue & Lee, 2006). According to Saravanan and Rao (2007), service quality is a premise of customer satisfaction and is therefore given close attention owing to its close relationship with cost, financial performance and customer retention. Thus, organizations are concentrating on how customers perceive the quality of their goods and services and devising plans and strategies to satisfy their customers.

3.2.1 Measuring Service Quality

Through the literature review, a few measurements instruments of service quality have been identified. One of the main measurement tools identified is the use of SERVQUAL, a standardized instrument used to measure service quality. This tool has been used across industries i.e., it has been used in the consumer retail environment, in banks, accounting firms, hotels, restaurants, real estate, the industrial market, hospitals, travel agencies, higher education, libraries, and other settings in the United States and other countries (Nitecki, 1998; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994, p. 203; White & Abels, 1995).

The conceptual underpinning of SERVQUAL is the fifth Gap, that is the discrepancy between customers' views of what a service should deliver and how well that service meets idealized expectations. SERVQUAL was created by Parasuraman, et al. (1985) as a universal tool that could be used in any specific service sector with little to no modification. It is the most widely used technique for determining the fifth Gap. One form of the SERVQUAL questionnaire is administered to customers of the service organization under review. It consists of twenty-two pairs of statements about factors that a service provider delivers. The difference between the ranked perception minus the ranked expectation is computed for each pair of statements, and the average of these Gap scores represents the SERVQUAL overall quality score.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1994), the group of twenty-two statements includes five interconnected dimensions that customers value the most when assessing service excellence in the service industry. The first dimension is reliability which is the capacity to deliver the offered service consistently and accurately. Reliability in a broad sense refers to a company's ability to deliver on its promises regarding delivery, service offerings, problem resolution, and pricing. Consumers prefer to do business with companies that fulfill their commitments. Therefore, it plays a significant role in how the consumer perceives the quality of the services. Therefore, service providers must be aware of what customers anticipate in terms of dependability.

The second dimension is responsiveness which is the readiness to assist clients and offer prompt service. This dimension centers on the manner in which customer requests, questions, complaints, and problems are handled. It also emphasizes the workers' reliability, availability, and dedication to their jobs, among other traits. It can be calculated based on how long customers must wait for help,

clarification, etc. The conditions of responsiveness can be improved by constantly observing the service delivery process and employee responses to customer requests. The third dimension of service excellence according to Parasuraman et al. (1994) is assurance. It is characterized as the capacity of a company's workers to inspire confidence and trust through their knowledge, courtesy, and behavior. The empathy dimension is another aspect of service excellence according to Parasuraman et al. (1994). It is described as the considerate, individualized care that customers receive from their service providers.

Through personalized or individualized services, this dimension tries to communicate the idea that each client is special and unique to the business. This dimension focuses on a range of services that meet various customer requirements, such as individualized or personalized services. Here, the service providers must be aware of the requirements, desires, and preferences of the clients.

The fifth dimension of service quality is tangibles which is defined as the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. All of these give customers enough information about the company's level of customer care. Additionally, this aspect improves the firm's reputation. As a result, the tangibility component is crucial for businesses, and they must make significant financial investments to set up physical facilities (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004).

However, numerous studies have revealed possible issues with the application of SERVQUAL (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Asubonteng, McCleary & Swan 1996; Buttle, 1996; Van Dyke, Kappelman & Prybutok 1997). These issues have been connected to the use of so-called "difference scores," the ambiguity of the term "customer expectations," the SERVQUAL scale's consistency over time, and the instrument's dimensionality. Due to these issues, it has been questioned whether SERVQUAL should be used as a general indicator of service quality or if different sector-specific indicators should be created for various service contexts.

Gronroos (1984) proposed that service quality can be measured in two dimensions. Technical (output quality) and functional (process quality). Technical quality refers to what is offered, while functional quality considers how the service is offered. These dimensions were measured according to attitudes and behaviour, appearance and personality, service mindedness, accessibility and approachability of customer contact personnel. According to Gronroos (1984), as far as services are concerned, if technical quality is at least satisfactory, then functional quality is the key determinant of consumer perceptions. Meanwhile, where technical quality is similar and comparable, functional quality is a key differentiator. Gronroos' model has received a lot of attention recently, even though it has not been utilized or tested to the extent of the SERVQUAL model.

Edwardsson, Gustavsson and Riddleal (1989) further elaborated these two types of service quality and came up with four dimensions of quality that have an impact on customers' perceptions, technical quality, integrative quality, functional quality and outcome quality. Technical quality pertains to the personnel's expertise and the support system's design. Integrative quality is concerned with the interdependence of the various components of the service delivery system. Functional quality refers to how the service is provided and outcome quality is concerned with whether the actual service meets customers' requirements and expectations.

According to Rust and Oliver (1994), service quality can be measured using three dimensions, the service product (i.e., technical quality), the service delivery (i.e., functional quality), and the service environment components of service quality. Brady and Cronin (2001) also suggested that service

quality can be measured in terms of the physical environment quality, interaction quality, and outcome quality. Physical environment quality is made up of ambient conditions, design, and social elements; interaction quality is made up of attitude, behavior, and expertise while outcome quality is made up of waiting time, tangibles, and valence.

According to Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982), service quality can be measured using three dimensions. Physical quality, interactive quality and corporate (image) quality. Physical quality relates to the tangible aspects of the service. Interactive quality refers to the interactive nature of services and the two-way communication between the client and the person providing the service. Corporate quality refers to the image associated with a service provider by its current and potential customers. Other researchers have also proposed other methods of measuring service quality for various sectors of the economy, cultures, or nations (Jabnoun & Khalifa, 2005; Glaveli, Petridou & Liassides, 2006; Sigala, 2006a). According to Olorunniwo and Hsu (2006) the dimensions of service quality for retail banking are responsiveness, tangibility, reliability, knowledge and accessibility.

4.0 Literature Review

An extensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature was carried out as guided by the key construct in the conceptual review. This section discusses the theories guiding the constructs of organizational learning and service quality and the relevant empirical literature.

4.1 Theoretical Review

In this section, two theories namely, Experiential Learning Theory and Expectation confirmation theory were reviewed.

4.1.1 Experiential Learning Theory

The experiential learning theory (ELT) was formulated by Kolb's (1984). This theory defines learning as a process where knowledge is created through transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). According to Kolb (1984), learning is a lifelong, holistic process rather than a collection of outcomes. The basic premise of the experiential learning theory is that learning happens when experience is grasped and transformed. This theory conceptualizes learning as a process consisting of four basic stages where learners are free to start at any stage (Kolb, 1984), a view that is also shared by (Barrows, 1986; Savin-Baden, 2003).

The experiential learning theory defines two modes of grasping experience; concrete experience and abstract conceptualization and two modes of experience transformation; reflective observation and active experimentation. The learner moves through the cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting in a repeating progression that is particular to each learning circumstance during the learning process. Specifically, Concrete experience refers to the feeling aspect of having a new experience or reinterpreting an existing one, which occurs in real-life events or as a result of problems or scenarios that are faced by individuals.

Abstract conceptualism is the thinking component of learning, when individuals draw conclusions and absorb knowledge from their experiences. Reflective observation includes the watching component and develops from learners' appraisal of experiences in comparison to their understanding, which is typically a natural process that could occur through dialogue (Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009). The last stage is the active experimentation stage where the learner demonstrates

abilities to make changes and influence others based on the findings drawn. The experiential learning theory suggests that after having an experience, a person reflects on it, and it is through this reflective process that the experience is converted into knowledge, which then affects the person's subsequent actions (Bélanger, 2011).

4.1.2 Expectation Confirmation Theory

The Expectation Confirmation Theory is one of the most widely used theory in the field of marketing to study post-purchase behaviour, including consumer satisfaction, repurchase intentions and complaining behaviors (Swan & Trawick, 1981; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Spreng, Mackenzie & Olshavsky, 1996). This theory seeks to explain and predict consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention and conceptualize the consumption process (Oh, 1999). It was originally developed by Oliver (1980) who conceptualized that consumers' post-purchase satisfaction is jointly determined by pre-purchase expectation and expectancy confirmation or disconfirmation. According to Oliver (1980, 1999) and Bhattacharjee (2001), the prominent mechanism underpinning the expectation confirmation theory is achieved following a chronological sequence. First, prior to making a purchase, buyers first create initial expectations about a certain service or good, which may be interpreted as the extent of their expectations for the target as well as the extent of their views regarding the suitability of the service provider (Coye, 2004).

During the consumption phase, perceptions of the entire performance are gradually formed. Customers then evaluate the perceived performance of the service in relation to their earlier expectations in order to determine the degree to which these expectations are met. The following step involves determining the satisfaction with the service through customers' prepurchase expectations and the confirmation of the discrepancy between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase evaluations about the service (Kristensen, Martensen & Gronholdt, 1999).

According to Bhattacharjee (2001), expectation not only reflects customers' perceptions of the characteristics of the service but also provides the foundation for evaluating the service. It simply refers to a person's forecast of potential future consumption behavior for a specific service or commodity (Jomnonkwao, Ratanavaraha, Khampirat, Meeyai & Watthanaklang, 2015) which positively affects his/her perception level of service quality during the consumption (Somyot, 2008). Confirmation is established based on how customers evaluate the delivery of the service in comparison to their initial expectations (Oliver, 1980). A higher expectation in this regard will result in a negative confirmation. Additionally, expectation is frequently seen as a crucial factor in directly creating satisfaction. Customers' high expectations are likely to increase their satisfaction (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

Confirmation is defined as the extent to which one's actual experience matches their initial expectation (Oghuma et al., 2016). When the experience is beyond the expectations confirmation occurs and causes customer satisfaction (Thong, Hong & Tam, 2006); Venkatesh, Thong, Chan, Hu & Brown, 2011; Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Gao, 2015) provided additional empirical support for this association by stating that if customers' actual experiences with a given service or product surpass their expectations for performance (i.e., confirmation), the price advantage would be viewed favorably (i.e., as having a positive perceived value) because their perceived benefits outweigh their perceived sacrifices (Lin, Wu, Hsu, & Chou, 2012).

4.2 Empirical Literature Review

Tseng and Wu (2014) carried out a study to explore the impact of customer knowledge and customer relationship management (CRM) on service quality. The study focused on how organizations acquire customer knowledge which enables them to initiate and maintain customer relationships and improve on service quality. The study employed 117 managers or owners of top manufacturers listed in the 2009 Common Wealth Magazine. The results of the study indicated that customer knowledge has a positive and significant influence on service quality.

Tseng (2012) conducted a study to examine the effect of external knowledge and knowledge chain on service quality. The study focused on three dimensions of external knowledge customer knowledge, supplier knowledge and competitor knowledge.. The unit of analysis was large Taiwanese corporations compiled by the China Credit Information Service (2009). The study employed 90 respondents. The results of the study indicated that external knowledge significantly influences the level of service quality. The study also showed that knowledge from customers and competitors have a greater significance on service quality than knowledge from suppliers.

Yang (2006) conducted a study to examine the relationship between knowledge management and the quality of new products. The focus of the study was on knowledge acquisition and knowledge dissemination. Knowledge acquisition was operationalized using the cost of acquiring the knowledge, degree of interaction with customers and the level of customer satisfaction while knowledge dissemination was operationalized using the availability of knowledge dissemination facilities i.e., an explicit knowledge transfer system, and the participation of employees in knowledge dissemination. The participation of employees in knowledge dissemination was measured by the opportunity for tacit knowledge dissemination. The empirical setting of the study consisted of 225 firms from Hong Kong. The findings of the study indicated a significant relationship between the cost and level of knowledge acquisition and new product quality. When the cost and level of knowledge acquisition increases to a certain level, quality goes up sharply. The study also showed that the availability of knowledge dissemination facilities is positively related to new product quality.

Nguyen and Malik (2022) carried out a study to examines the influence of knowledge sharing on employee service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. The study employed 350 frontline employees and customers. The findings of the study revealed that the increase of knowledge sharing behaviours significantly influenced customer perceptions of employees' service quality. Furthermore, employee service quality positively affected customer satisfaction. An indirect impact of knowledge sharing on customer satisfaction via employee service quality was found. From the findings of the study, employees who are engaged in knowledge sharing usually have a better understanding on how to serve customers and customers are therefore more likely to perceive high quality service. Thus, if employees can share their knowledge, experiences and skills to understand the needs and wants of their clients better they can improve service quality.

Arsawan, Koval, Rajiani, Rustiarini and Suryantini (2020) conducted a study to examine the role of knowledge sharing in shaping innovation culture to improve business performance and build sustainable competitive advantage. Knowledge sharing was measured using four dimensions including socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. Innovation culture was measured using five dimensions, namely, organizational culture, product, process, management and objectives innovation. Business performance was measured using four dimensions, namely, product

quality, customer satisfaction, financial performance and new product development. Sustainable competitive advantage was measured using seven dimensions, namely, innovation practices, service delivery systems, growth and performance and market share. The empirical setting of the study was 59 export SMEs in Bali province, Indonesia. The study employed 295 respondents which included managers from the low, middle and top levels. The findings of the study revealed that knowledge sharing had a significant effect on innovation culture, business performance and competitive advantage.

Than, Nguyen, Tran and Le (2019) carried out a study to investigate the influence of knowledge sharing (KS) and innovation on competitive advantage in Vietnamese firms. The empirical setting of the study was firms from the manufacturing and service sectors in Vietnamese. The respondents were 225 directors/managers, head of departments, team leaders, and employees at departments of administration. The findings of the study indicated that knowledge sharing directly influences competitive advantage and indirectly affects firm's competitive advantage via the mediating role of innovation capability.

Aghamirian, Dorri and Aghamirian (2015) conducted a study on customer knowledge management application in gaining competitive advantage in electronic commerce. The unit of analysis was experts and elites of Mellat Bank market development organization were chosen and 210 experts who were working in Iranian insurance companies. The results of the study indicated that the application of customers knowledge contributes to a gain in competitive advantage for the organizations in E-commerce. The study also showed that applying customers knowledge enhances the quality of products and ensures that the organization produces products and services in accordance with customer wishes and opinions thus increasing customer satisfaction, loyalty and competitive advantage.

Moorman and Miner (1997) carried out a study on the effects of Organizational Memory on new product development performance and creativity. The focus of the study was on interpretation of incoming information and the performance of new product action routines. The empirical setting of the study consisted of firms in the 1992 Advertising Age list of top 200 advertisers that had new product development projects in the USA. The findings of the study showed that higher organizational memory levels enhance the short-term financial performance of new products whereas greater memory dispersion increases both the performance and creativity of new products. Under some conditions of high environmental turbulence, high organizational memory dispersion has no effect on financial performance.

Gatuyu and Kinyua (2020) conducted a study on role of knowledge acquisition on firm performance in the context of small and medium enterprises in Meru County in Kenya. The researchers employed descriptive survey research design for this study for evaluating the causal link between the research variables. Simple linear regression approach generated the coefficients of the estimated model and demonstrated that knowledge acquisition is a driver of performance. Camisón and Villar-López (2011) conducted a study to analyze the role of organizational memory and learning capabilities as antecedents to non-technical innovation, comprising organizational and marketing innovation, and to examine their effect on sustained competitive advantage. The study used a survey questionnaire to collect data from 159 industrial companies in Spain. The findings showed that both the organizational memory and learning capabilities contribute to organizational

innovation and marketing innovation. The study also showed that both types of innovations promote the achievement of sustained competitive advantage.

Lin (2015) conducted a study to examine the influence of knowledge management orientation (KMO) dimensions (organizational memory, knowledge sharing, knowledge absorption and knowledge receptivity) on balanced scorecard outcomes (learning and growth, internal process, customer satisfaction and financial performance). The unit of analysis was managers in large Taiwanese firms. The respondents were 244 managers in charge of knowledge management projects in their companies. The study findings indicated that organizational memory is indirectly related to customer satisfaction, financial performance through learning and growth.

4.3 Proposed Theoretical Model

The theoretical model is useful in bringing out the relationship between the independent variable, and the dependent variable. For this independent study, a theoretical model is proposed to show the relationship between organizational learning and service quality. This is demonstrated in Figure 5.1 below.

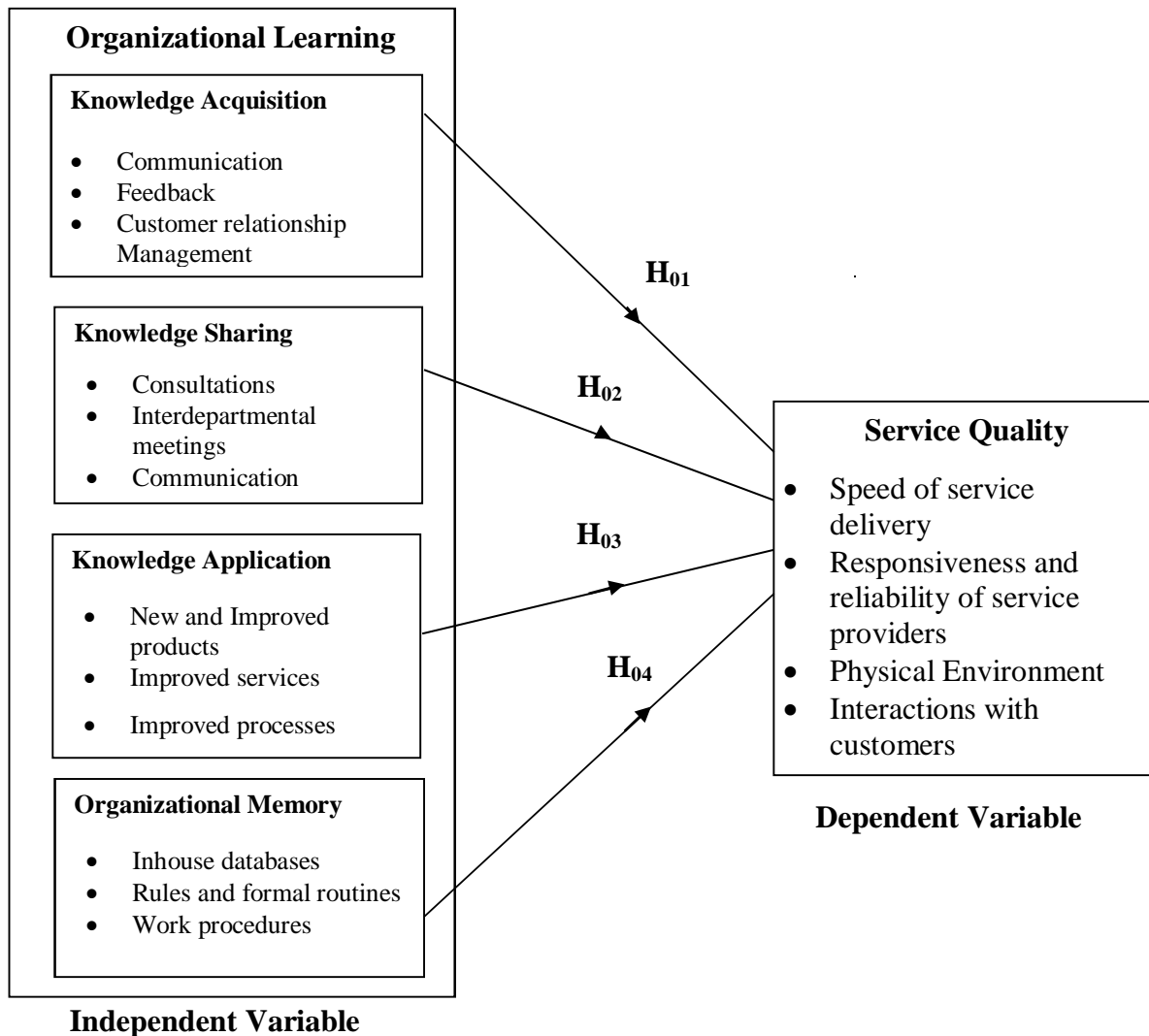


Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Model
Source: Author (2023)

The proposed theoretical model shows organizational learning as the independent variable and service quality as the dependent variable. Organizational learning is measured by knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowledge application and organizational memory. Knowledge acquisition is a very important dimension under organizational learning. Information that is acquired is a very strategic resource that assists organizations acquire important knowledge about the external environment. More specifically, it helps organizations acquire knowledge about customers' needs and preferences, supplier knowledge and information about the competitors for benchmarking and transfer of best practices.

Knowledge sharing is an important organizational learning construct because it enhances competitive advantage. Knowledge sharing also enables employees to share knowledge helping them improve their performance and even serve customers better. It also helps employees deliver

timely services to customers. The application of knowledge is also a very important construct of organizational learning as it enhances the quality of products and ensures that the organization produces goods and services in accordance with customers' wishes and opinions thus increasing customer satisfaction, loyalty and competitive advantage. Stored organizational information is a critical resource which enables organizations to achieve superior performance.

Service quality as the dependent variable is determined by the speed of service delivery, the responsiveness and reliability of the service providers, the physical environment and the number of interactions with customers. An organization that provides services in a speedy and faster way, has substantial interactions with customers, has a good physical environment and the service providers are responsive and reliable achieves high levels of service quality and customer satisfaction.

5.0 Conclusion

The relationship between organizational learning and service quality is assessed in this independent study. The main goal of this study was to suggest the most appropriate theoretical model that illustrates the relationship between organizational learning and service quality. Through reviewing of theoretical literature and empirical literature, this independent study assessed the characteristics of organizational learning including its parameters and understands how they affect service quality. The guiding principles and theories in this study were based on experiential learning theory and expectation confirmation theory.

In the study, an appropriate theoretical model is proposed and it helps in illustrating the relationship between independent variable and dependent variables comprising of organizational learning and service quality. Review extant literature revealed knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowledge application and organizational memory as fundamental dimensions of organizational learning that have potential to impact on organizational outcomes. Similarly, the review of literature identified speed of service delivery, responsiveness and reliability of service providers, physical environment, interactions with customers as suitable indicators for measuring service quality. The propositions of the study besides enriching the empirical and theoretical literature on organizational learning and service quality, also serve to guide scholars in the field of strategic management on prospective studies with potential to impact organizational outcomes.

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