Employee Perceptions of Vision and Leadership: Effects of Employee Orientation Training

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This empirical study examines employee perceptions of organizational vision and leadership at three different time periods. New employees at a large manufacturing organization were surveyed regarding their perceptions of their organization's vision and leadership before they attended new employee orientation training, immediately after new employee orientation training, and a month after new employee orientation training. A description of the study, as well as findings and conclusions, are presented.

Keywords: Organizational Vision, Leadership, New Employee Orientation

Problem Statement

 "Orientation is the planned introduction of new employees to their jobs, their coworkers, and culture of the organization" (Cook, 1992, p. 133, quoted in Blackwell, 1997). Most organizations offer an employee orientation program coordinated by the human resource department (Blackwell, 1997). New employee orientations serve many purposes and have many meanings from both an organizational and an employee perspective. Researchers have found that successful new employee orientation programs help new employees become familiar with their organizational environment and help them understand their responsibilities (Robinson, 1998). They have also been found to be positively related to job satisfaction (Gates & Hellweg, 1989); employee socialization (Klein, 2000); and have been recommended to aid in employee job enrichment and morale building (Kanouse & Warihay, 1980). Research has also shown that employers benefit from new employee orientations in that they receive well-trained, highly motivated new employees as quickly as possible (Robinson, 1998).

New employee orientation training is often used to teach employees about "big-picture" organizational issues, such as culture, vision, values, mission, structure, ethics, policies, and confidentiality. Hicks, et al (2006) note that the Mayo Clinic's new employee orientation emphasizes the medical center's values, and also educates participants on the clinic's heritage and culture.

How effective is the new employee orientation process in conveying those big-picture organizational issues? Do employees learn from new employee orientations, and is that learning carried back to the workplace? It is difficult to address these questions because of the dearth of research on the topic. Wanous and Reichers (2000) note that "Orientations programs have rarely been the subject of scholarly thinking and research…" (p. 2). They continue by noting that "…the current body of research work (on new employee orientation programs) is too small for meta-analysis…." (p. 2), and as a result, changed the methodology used in their 2000 study to descriptive summary (Wanous & Reichers, 2000). Other researchers have come to similar conclusions. While most organizations use formal orientation training, "…there is surprisingly little in the academic literature examining the impact or most appropriate structure of these programs" (Klein, 2000, p. 3).

The purpose of this research is to examine new employee perceptions of two closely-related organizational constructs: organizational vision and leadership. The relationship between organizational vision and leadership is demonstrated by Landau, et al, (2006), who posit that organizational vision shapes the action of the leadership in that organization. Also important is that all in the organization understand the vision, which ". . . leads all members toward the achievement of attainable results" and signifies ". . . the organization's most fundamental reason for being" (Landau, et al, 2006, p. 146).

This study is unique in its examination of employee perception of organizational vision and leadership over a time period which includes new employee orientation. Employee perceptions were measured both before and after new employee orientation, as well as one month after the conclusion of new employee orientation. While there is extensive research on leadership, the same is not true when examining organizational vision. Larwood et al (1995) posits that while there has been growing interest in the concept of organizational vision, controversy surrounding the

definition of vision in generally agreed-upon terms may have held back statistically based empirical research on the subject. Yet the two constructs are closely linked, and researchers have concluded that vision is an important part of leadership (Larwood et al, 1995). This paper examines the results and findings of this study. Based on the results and findings, conclusions are made and recommendations are presented.

Theoretical Framework

This study set out to examine new employee perceptions regarding their organization's vision and leadership during a time that included new employee orientation training and time spent in the workplace. Surveys were used to gauge these perceptions. As such, this study employed a theoretical framework based in adult learning theory and organizational leadership theory.

Adult learning theory is important in this study, as the study set out to gauge learning about organizational vision and leadership. Adult learning orientations that form the theoretical basis for this study include cognitivism, and its emphasis on information processing, storage and retrieval, learners' needs, learning styles, and the organization of learning activities to meet those varying needs and styles (Robinson, 1994). Social learning theory, as defined by Bandura and Walters (1963), which focuses on learning from the observation of people in social settings, mentoring, socialization, and guiding, was also used as a basis in the theoretical framework of this study. Elements of constructivism, which include group learning, experience, and reflection (Von Glaserfelt, 1995) were included in the theoretical framework of this study, as well.

From an organizational leadership perspective, Bolman and Deal (1991) identify four frames, or perspectives, on how organizations work. Those frames include the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. They believe leaders are most effective when they see their organizations from all four different perspectives, using the four sets of assumptions that accompany each. The ability to "reframe" or view issues from a variety of perspectives allows the leader to examine issues more clearly and thoroughly. Hersey and Blanchard's (1993) situational leadership framework was also used as a basis for this study. Their framework includes the concepts of task and relationship behaviors, which determine the amount of direction and support a leader supplies. It also takes into account the maturity level of those in the organization.

Research Questions

This study investigates the following research questions:
- How does new employee orientation training affect employee perceptions of organizational vision and leadership?
- What is the effect of time spent back in the workplace when examining employee perception of vision and leadership after the training?

In order to address these questions, the following hypotheses were tested:
1. H_0 There is no significant difference on the perceptions of trainees about organizational vision and leadership between Phase I and II.

   H_1 There is a significant difference on the perceptions of trainees about organizational vision and leadership between Phase I and II.

2. H_0 There is no significant difference on the perceptions of trainees about organizational vision and leadership between Phase II and III.

   H_1 There is a significant difference on the perceptions of trainees about organizational vision and leadership between Phase II and III.

3. H_0 There is no significant difference on the perceptions of trainees about organizational vision and leadership between Phase I and III.

   H_1 There is a significant difference on the perceptions of trainees about organizational vision and leadership between Phase I and III.

Methodology

Using a repeated measures design, this study surveyed trainees at three different time intervals to measure effectiveness of training to help new employees understand and adapt to the organizational vision and learn about its

leadership. Repeated measures design is the most appropriate quantitative method to measure the long term effectiveness of training programs. This method helps us move beyond the reactive measurement techniques where trainees are surveyed in a pre-post environment and help us evaluate the extent of transfer of training on the job after the training is completed. This study is about the ability of training programs to help employees learn about organizational vision and how its leadership supports such vision. The survey method used in this study utilized a survey instrument on organizational vision and leadership adopted from Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (2006). The survey included 19 items on organizational vision and leadership.

Description of the Sample

We used convenience sampling in this study because of the nature of the study that involved measuring the effectiveness of new employee orientation training programs. The organization's new employee orientation training is a program which is organized and scheduled every quarter by the corporate human resource office. The training is held at the corporate office, and new employees from all locations attend. Topics include organizational overviews, product discussions, and presentations on organizational mission, culture, history, values, philosophy, leadership and vision. Presenters are top executives at the organization or subject-matter experts.

Employees attending this training had some degree of tenure on the job, albeit small. Because the new employee orientation is offered once per quarter, and the organization hires employees on a daily basis, most employees attending new employee orientation training will have already been working at their jobs for a period of days, weeks, or even months. Furthermore, new employee orientation training is only offered to permanent employees of the organization. Interns, temporary, or contract employees who are then hired by the organization as permanent employees may have worked for longer periods of time within the organization before attending new employee orientation. The response rate for the survey was 111 of 125 (89%). A majority of respondents were between 30 and 49 years of age. One third of all respondents were between 30 and 39; 27 percent were between 40 and 49. The majority of the trainees (86%) were male, and most (80%) were Caucasian. With regard to the highest level of formal education achieved, 18% had completed high school; 23% held Associate degrees; 47% held Bachelor's degrees, and 11% held Master's degrees. Forty percent of respondents had worked at the company for less than three months, while 22% had worked at the company for more than six months.

Validity and Reliability

The study used a survey that was adopted from a commercially available instrument. For the overall QHRP reliability, Cronbach's coefficient alpha values for the 24 scales ranged from + .751 to + .839. Cronbach's coefficient alpha values for all scales of measure reported high inter-item correlations; as a result, it was considered as substantial evidence that the items are reliably measuring the same underlying constructs.

Data Collection

The trainees were given the surveys three times throughout the study. The survey is included in Appendix A. The first was completed the morning of the first day of new employee orientation training, but prior to the start of the orientation. The second was completed after the second day, or at the end of the training. The third was completed approximately one month after the last day of the training. The first and second surveys were distributed manually to participants by the researchers. Participants were asked to complete and return the survey immediately (respondents were given 15 minutes during the orientation to do so). The third survey was sent via interoffice mail to all participants in the training. Participants were asked to complete the survey and return it within a week of receipt to the researchers via a confidential return envelope. In order to be able to match the three surveys from each respondent, yet keep respondents anonymous, a coding system was used. Participants were asked to mark each survey they completed with a pass code, consisting of their date of birth, and the first letters of their mother's and father's first names. The use of this pass code allowed the researchers to match the first, second, and third surveys by respondent without knowing who the respondent was.

Data Analysis

To test the research hypotheses, the study used several methods of data analysis, including descriptive statistics, paired-samples t-test, independent-samples t-test, and ANOVA. The frequency of responses was conducted to assess the distribution of the participant demographics. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item and scale to assess potential central tendencies. Cronbach's alpha was used to conduct reliability analysis to determine the reliability of all scales adopted in the study. The obtained alpha scores were then compared to the reliability estimates existing in the literature. The level of significance was set at $p < .01$ and .05, respectively.

Results and Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of new employee orientation training to help employees understand and adopt existing organizational vision and learn about the leadership approach the organization fostered. The results of the study indicate that the training program has been effective overall, yielding significant results especially after Phase II. Nevertheless, this trend of increase did not continue until Phase III,

although the results of Phase III are still considered significant. The ANOVA test, however, did not yield any significant results between groups.

When we measured the trainees' perception on organizational vision and leadership at Phases I, II, and III, respectively, we found that the mean differences were significant for all cases except the difference between Phases II and III. The significant difference is that the perceived learning positively increases between Phases I and II and between Phases I and III, while the perceived learning retention between Phases II and III was negative.

From these findings, we concluded that the trainees were experiencing an increase in their learning about the organizational vision and leadership between Phases I and II and between Phases I and III. The trainees, however, indicated a decrease in their perceived learning between Phases II and III. Table 1 shows the trainees' perceptions about organizational vision and leadership throughout the phases of the study. These findings indicate that while the new employee orientation training has been successful to help employee learn and become aware of organizational vision and leadership, the training program itself was not successful in getting employees to integrate what they learned in their daily tasks. The organization in which the study took place emphasizes organizational vision and leadership to a great deal. However, there seems to be problem in the transfer of training phase. A more proactive approach to the new employee training is needed.

Table 1. *Organizational Vision & Leadership Mean Scores and t-Test Results*

Phases	Mean (SD)	N	Mean Difference (SD), p-value		
			2-1	3-2	3-1
Phases I	55.24 (13.63)	58	4.51 (.002), $p < .001$	-4.55 (.026), $p < .05$	-5.24 (.079), $p < .05$
Phase II	59.76 (11.46)	58			
Phase III	56.08 (14.62)	42			

Discussion

New employees increased their learning about organizational vision and leadership when examined before and after employee orientation training (both immediately after and one month after orientation). However, in examining the time period immediately after to one month after orientation, that perceived learning decreased. During this time period, the employee was working in the organization on a daily basis. The learning that took place during employee orientation training did not continue once the employee entered the workplace.

Learning about an organization's vision and leadership is important for both the new employee and for the organization. New employee orientation is a good way for organizations to start teaching new employees about organizational vision and leadership. It ensures that all employees start out on the same page, and receive the same messages from the organization regarding these topics. Organizations should be proactive in teaching prospective and new employees about issues of culture. Organizations should also recognize that employee orientation is a starting point for this type of training.

For new employees, understandings about organizational vision and leadership change over time. New employee orientation training is an important venue for addressing these organizational issues. What is learned in orientation, however, does not all stay with the new employee once that employee is on the job. One of the major reasons for this is related to what is the ideal versus reality. Landau, et al, (2006) note that there can be gaps between an organization's vision and its actual operating conditions. It is very possible that new employees did not find the organizational vision and leadership within their respective departments and units as described in the training program. It is not uncommon that new employees find themselves in such situations where they receive training, return their workplace, and are told that things do not work that way (Azevedo & Akdere, 2005).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Organizations should continue to address organizational vision and leadership in new employee orientation training. The results of this study show significant differences in the understanding of these topics before and after new employee orientation. New employee orientation training is an important venue for addressing organizational vision

and leadership. However, it should be noted that the value of teaching these topics to new employees may be limited if what is being taught is not practiced across the organization.

Learning about an organization's vision and leadership does not end after orientation training. Organizations should continue to teach employees about these topics on an ongoing basis. Both upper level management and Human Resource professionals in the organization should work together to bring about change and ensure that organizational vision and leadership is understood at all levels within the organization. This study showed that new employees decreased in their perceived learning about organizational vision and leadership in the month that immediately followed orientation. New employees learn a lot about organizational vision and leadership in new employee orientation. Organizations should build on that learning by continuously teaching employees about organizational vision and leadership. This could be done through ongoing training of both a formal and informal nature that specifically addresses these topics, or by weaving them through existing training and development initiatives within the organization.

Implications for HRD

The results of this study suggest that new employee orientation is a powerful tool that can be used to teach employees about organizational vision and leadership. Employees in this study indicated that they learned a great deal about these topics in orientation training. What is learned in new employee orientation, however, did not stay with employees once on the job. HRD practitioners can ensure that there is ongoing training on issues of this nature to reinforce initial training.

This study also highlights the importance of a clear and consistent message that is shared by all employees at all levels of the organization. Organizational vision and leadership cannot be topics that are subscribed to only by upper management. They cannot be topics that are presented in new employee orientation, and then forgotten once the employee is on the job. In order for training to be effective, and in order for issues of vision and leadership to become implemented in the workplace, consistent messages on these topics must be embraced by, and lived by, all employees in the organization. HRD practitioners, who are often involved in the training and development of employees at all levels of the organization, can work to make sure that there is consistency between what is taught in orientation and what is reality in the workplace.

As noted above, there is little research on employee orientation training, which has shown to be important in introducing new employees to organizations. This study also adds to the body of knowledge on employee orientation training, and also on organizational vision and leadership.

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Appendix*: Questionnaire Items and Factor Loadings*

Scale and Item	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
Vision					
Our leadership staff sets the direction of our organization	.30				
Our organization has a vision which has been the focus of our energies	.52				
All employees support the vision of this organization	.66				
Our leadership staff has a clear set of priorities	.64				
Visibility					
Our leadership staff is visible in the organization		.66			
Our leadership staff knows the names of employees		.58			
Our leadership staff displays a sense of caring when walking around the facility.		.59			
Change					
Our leadership staff encourages learning and growth			.72		
Our leadership staff encourages employees to take on new initiatives			.80		
Our leadership staff is willing to take risks			.65		
Our leadership staff ensures that employees adhere to the organizational standards			.54		
Understanding Quality					
Our leadership staff encourages employees to participate in the improvement efforts				.75	
Our leadership staff successfully manages organizational changes to improve the quality of our products and services				.72	
Our leadership staff is the driving force behind quality improvement efforts				.73	
Our leadership staff allocates adequate resources (people, time, dollars, equipment) to improve quality				.70	
Communication					
Our leadership staff listens to employees					.75
Our leadership staff places a priority on communication with employees					.81
Our leadership staff is approachable					.61
Our leadership staff is honest					.62