

An exploration of organizational learning within USACE
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U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) has made an explicit commitment to become a learning organization and identifies continuous learning as a key organizational competence (USACE, 2003). However, the current status of how the organization actually learns is unknown. This study would provide a baseline measure of organizational learning across several USACE units, illustrate where learning strengths reside, and provide insight into focal areas to optimize continuous learning.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate the nature and extent of organizational learning across various units charged with natural resource and recreation management in the USACE.

Methods

Sample: The target sample will consist of personnel from a random sample of USACE lakes. At each lake, a size stratified random sample of personnel (based on the number of FTE and PTE employees) will be selected and their email addresses will be obtained.

Approach: An online questionnaire will be administered to potential respondents through Zoomerang (an online survey system). A five-tiered email approach will be utilized and includes a pre-notification, an invitation, and three reminders to complete the online questionnaire. Each notice will include an overview of study purpose and ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Instrument: The online questionnaire will include several sections to measure constructs of interest. Each measure is below:

Organizational Learning Mechanisms (OLMs): (48-items)

The OLM scale developed by Ellis and Shpielberg (2003) will be used to measure the process and structure of organizational learning. The scale measures five distinct mechanisms: information gathering, storage and retrieval, information dissemination, formal learning procedures, and training.

Learning Culture: (35-items)

The learning values scale developed by Ellis and colleagues (1999) will be used to measure organizational learning culture. A four factor structure includes items related to issue orientation, accountability, valid information, and transparency.

Organizational Commitment: (3-items)

Three items will be developed to measure the perception of USACE's commitment to organizational learning.

Uncertainty: (3-items)

Environmental uncertainty will be measured with a scale previously used organizational contexts (Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Perman, 2001).

Equivocality: (4-items)

Equivocality, the perceived degree of multiple and conflicting viewpoints, will be measured based on the conceptualization put forth by Gnyawali and Stewart (2003).

Leadership: (36-items)

Leadership style will be measured using Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1990).

In addition to the measures, potential respondents will be asked to indicate which unit they belong to. This information will only be used solely for analysis purposes, thus anonymity will be assured.

Analysis: The data obtained from personnel from various USACE lakes will be aggregated to describe learning at USACE lakes. A series of hierarchical regression analyses (which account for the unit effect) will be conducted to explore relationships among organizational learning constructs.

Outcomes & their utility: The study will provide a baseline about the nature and status of organizational learning in USACE lakes as well as provide focal areas where learning strengths and opportunities exist.

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