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## **Learning Organization Development: A Case of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School**

Ratree Taphun

Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School  
Nakhon Nayok, Thailand  
Email: ratritapun@hotmail.com

### **Abstract**

This research examined the development of a military preparatory school under study as a learning organization by the characteristics based on organizational learning. The objectives of the research were (1) to analyze the components of learning organizations (2) to identify the desired and actual conditions of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School as a learning organization. The subjects were 320 in total comprising 29 administrators, 55 supervisors and 236 staff members of the School. The research tool was a questionnaire on a scale of 1 low to 5 high regarding the aspects or characteristics of a learning organization at the levels of organization, group and individual. The results from the participants' responses showed the School in the development process into a learning organization at a moderate level in *Actual Condition* (Mean=3.747, S.D.=0.223) in contrast with *Desired Condition* (Mean=4.254, S.D.=0.253).

**Keywords:** *Learning organization development, learning organization characteristics, desired condition, actual condition, Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School*

### **1. Background and Rationale of the Study**

Santiprabhob (2017) described the present world of uncertainty in three main trends: (1) Globalization—the *growing interdependence* of the world's economies, cultures and populations with flow of information in across-border activities; (2) The leap in the development of technology--known as Big Bang of Technology--according to Moore's law that computer processing improves twice every two years, resulting in more *human dependence on technology* with artificial intelligence (AI); and (3) The big flow of capital, known as *financialization*. In coping with these trends, people need four skills necessary in the modern world for life, study, and work. Building these skills is required of a learning organization to enable employees' rapid and continuous adaptation to new environments and effective mutual learning (Makhasiranon, 2014). Adaptability can be identified as the most important aspect of a learning organization which systematizes, creates, disseminates and consolidates new knowledge for the organization (Dekoulou & Trullas, 2015). In a learning organization, employees' learning does not stand still and they need to acquire new knowledge and update skills for the growth of the organization with flexibility and in dynamics (Saadat & Saadat, 2016). Individuals' knowledge and skills have become a key factor that accounts for success or failure of today's organizations under economic, political and social influences which

constitute a learning environment (Fuller & Unwin, 2010). The knowledge of organizational learning and its environment have been studied by various researchers and academics regarding the concepts and theories of strategic human resource management (Wuthirong, 2016). Research by IBM Corporation in 2012 pointed to human capital as the first factor for sustainable growth of the organization, accounting for 71% of the organization's development factors; and organizations need competent human capital to remain competitive in business operations (Garvin, 1993; Yulk, 2002; Suthmanon, 2017). Dedicated investment in human resources at all levels to learn and value innovation will enable an organization to develop learning as the main component of an organization's culture (Mongkolvanich, 2013), and move toward the world's transitioning phase into the 21st century that is full with new threats and challenges. Maesincee (2018) identified new limitations and new competencies to be developed for Thailand's human capital to catch up with the demands of the 21st century. Production skills specified in the country's strategic plan promotes the use of digital technology by the National Digital Learning Platform (NDLP) system (Dolprasit, 2019). Digital technology helps workers to survive in the modern society effectively with allocated resources for personnel at all levels. This is for them to continue acquiring knowledge and creating innovations to contribute to the growth of their learning organization (Suthmanon, 2017).

## 2. Research Objectives

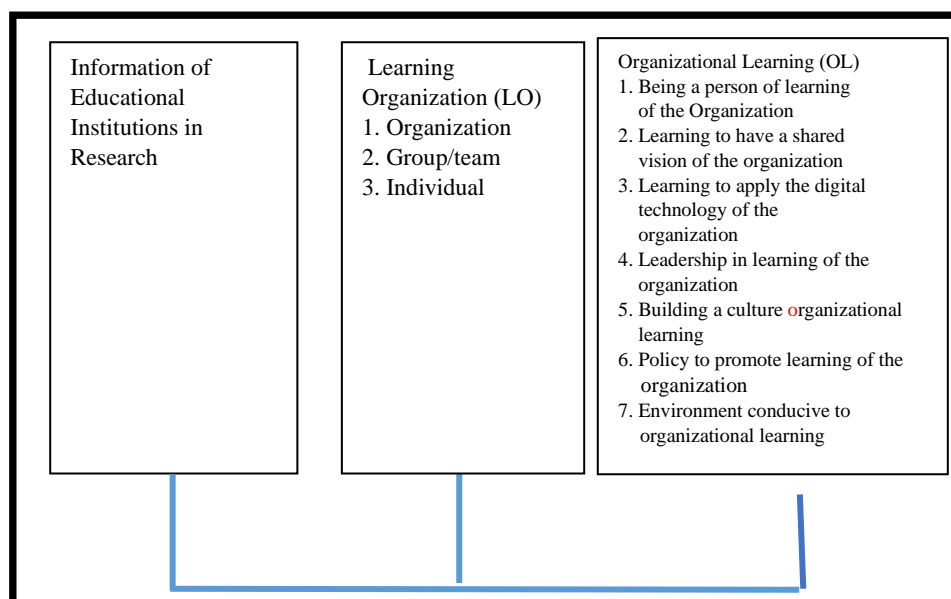
There were two objectives in this research:

- (1) To analyze the components of learning organizations, and
- (2) To identify the desired and actual conditions of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School as a learning organization.

## 3. Research Conceptual Framework

The researcher used three stages in conducting this study: obtaining information from educational institutions, examining the components of the learning organization (LO), and exploring the characteristics of organizational learning (OL), as shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** Research Conceptual Framework



#### 4. Organizations

According to Jones (2001), an organization can serve as a tool that helps individuals coordinate to achieve the needs or goals of individuals in an organization. People in the society use various opportunities to meet their needs by using resources to attain entrepreneurship.

Daft (2010) considered an organization existing in a society to achieve the goals of the organization by making a structured design with coordinated activities. It is connected to the external environment in which people are important elements interacting with each other.

The organization therefore has a structure that contains its process to support different parties to work together for success according to the goals of the organization. Two or more people work together to achieve common goals. The concept of organization is classified in two aspects: (1) a traditional organizational concept on a *non-living organization*, without life or action on its own, and (2) a modern concept on a *living organization*, with the ability to develop and survive on its own. The second concept allows people in the organization to think independently, communicate and exchange information among all parties concerned—all to create a learning organization collaboratively. In addition, support from the human resource unit in the organization can help workers to develop good competencies for its operations to remain successfully competitive with the counterparts (Sukiam & Likitsarun, 2021).

#### 5. Definition of Learning Organization (LO)

Senge (1990) identified the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as an organization that expands the scope of competence to produce the desired effect. When continuously expanding their potential, employees are able to create and work toward the set goals. A variety of new thinking patterns emerge when each one feels inspired and continually learns to work with others for the organization's good performance.

Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell (1991) emphasized that organizations facilitate individual learning to create learning atmosphere and encourage everyone to learn together.

Garvin (1993) of Harvard University explained characteristics of an organization in creating creative skills, seeking, and transferring knowledge to reflect that the operator has new knowledge and understanding of things.

Watkins & Marsick (1993) discussed a people-based organization of excellence by creating excellence in people using learning as a continuous strategic process integrated into operations as well as empowerment to stimulate cooperation in team work. It is important to promote open dialogue and connection in interpersonal dependence in communities within organizations.

Marquardt & Reynolds (1994) asserted that an organization should provide individuals with an atmosphere for group learning. People need an analytical thinking process to help understand that everyone is to help the organization from mistakes and successes, and as a result, everyone is aware of change and can adapt themselves effectively.

Marquardt (1996) added a system approach to the learning organization with five subsystems: (1) learning, (2) organization, (3) people in the organization, (4) knowledge, and (5) technology.

Yukl (2002) pointed out that organizations desiring employees to learn things to improve work, share ideas and work knowledge to adapt themselves to the changing environment. Organizations need to allocate resources to invest in personnel at all levels to value learning and innovation as a corporate culture.

Phucharoen (2006) emphasized that an organization needs to encourage employees to develop their ability to create good work for the organization with loyalty. All staff, from top to bottom, and where possible should be supported to deal with customers, suppliers, shareholders, and communities effectively.

Panich (2010) clarified that learning can be facilitated in a dynamic process to establish a corporate culture. The emphasis is on improved performance in terms of quality, efficiency in performance, and innovation as organizational characteristics of the desired corporate culture that involves all employees' collective efforts.

Wetsanarat (2021) signified human resource development in a service-based organization's operations in the area of soft skill competencies especially communication and collaboration skills. These skills are needed to facilitate employees' teamwork and information sharing of new knowledge and innovations, as well as enhance the organization's competitiveness in the long run.

Petchroj (2021a, 2021b) asserted that creativity is required in a higher education institute via learning administration in the digital age. It is important that a learning organization in education pay attention to development of shared information infrastructure and communication skills in its personnel. With such development in focus, the organization can manage resources allocated to staff members for their continued learning of new knowledge and skills for effective communication and collaboration so that all parties concerned can move as a team toward the identified goals.

From the literature, the learning organization requires an atmosphere that encourages learning of personnel. Individual groups in the organization are free to learn, create diverse knowledge together, communicate, share knowledge, and help form a corporate culture. The organization needs to enhance its staff's competency and potential to make good progress in attaining the identified goals. Continued learning for innovation can help sustain the organization to cope well with change into the future.

## **6. Organizational Learning (OL)**

Organizational learning is generally known as a positive knowledge transfer through experience within an organization. Improved organizational knowledge and learning depend on personnel experience in the organization for adaptation through technology, activities, coordination, and good communication. The activities aim at enhancing the organization's ability to acquire and develop new knowledge in a process. Learning could be from both mistakes and the success of the organized activities done to make a goal on learning as a corporate culture. (Rassameethammachot, 2015)

When it comes to a process to make systematic adjustments in an education institution as a learning organization, the operators need to increase the capacity or capability of the academic and support staff to work effectively and efficiently in group or team learning as well as individual learning (Taphun, 2020).

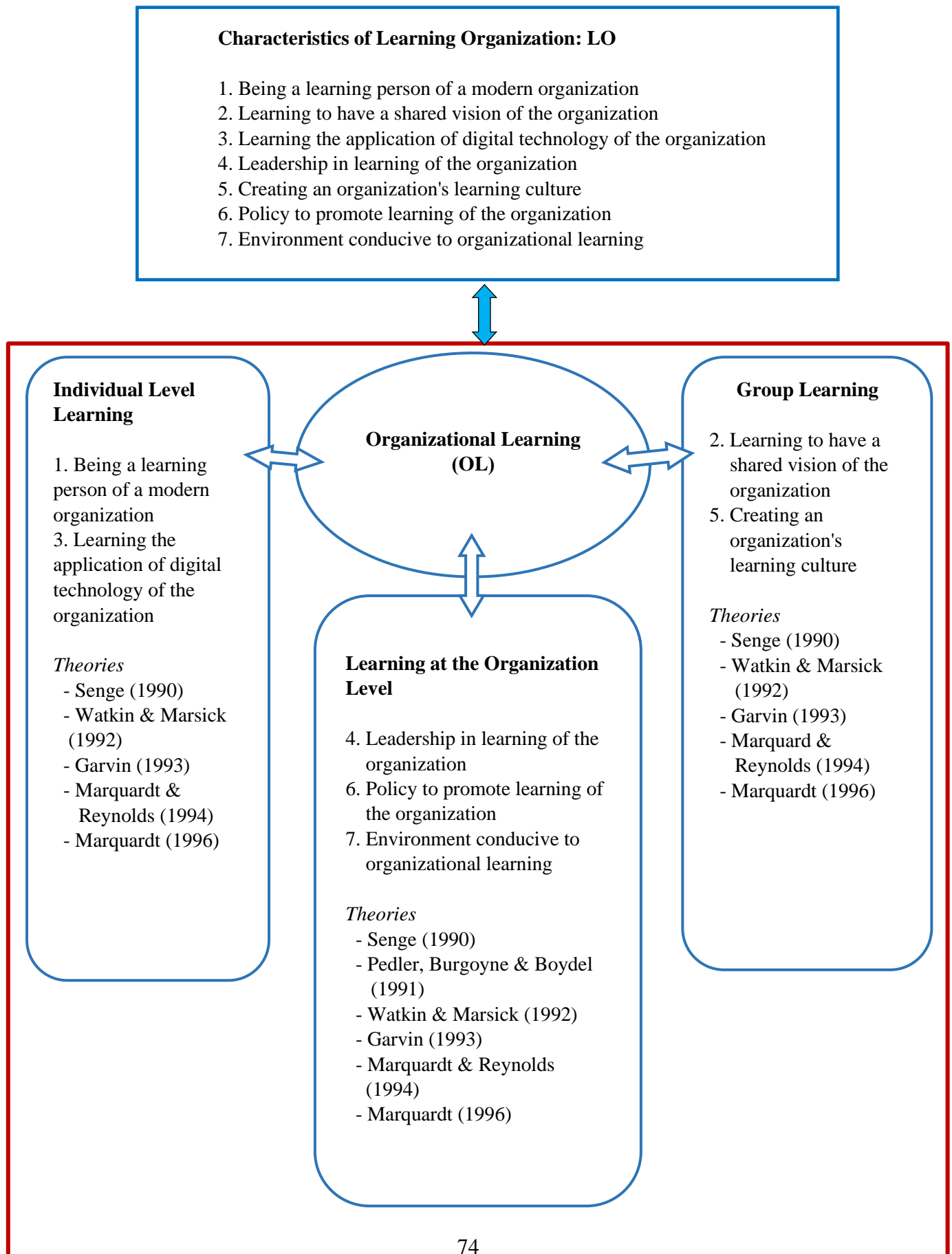
Corporate learning usually involves an organization's process in developing personnel over time to acquire and use gained experience to generate new knowledge transmitted within the organization (Valamis Group <https://www.valamis.com/hub/organizational-learning>, 2021).

Organizational learning as a process therefore focuses on experiential learning and the knowledge gleaned from daily activities. In such a process, employees take on experience and knowledge they collect on their day-to-day activities to deal with various business situations and required tasks (<https://th.strephonsays.com/organizational-learning-and-learning-organization-4310>).

## **7. Summary of Organizational Learning Methods**

From the literature on learning organizations and methods of organizational learning, the researcher summarized the concepts and methods concerned in Figure 2 as shown below.

**Figure 2:** From a Learning Organization (LO) to Organizational Learning (OL)



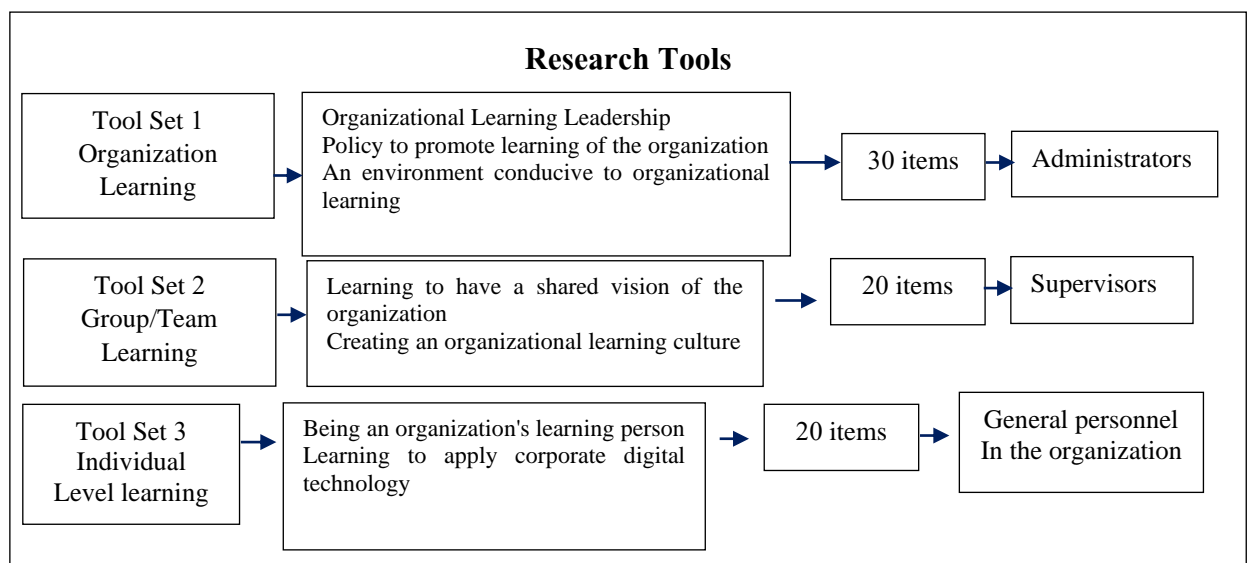
## 8. Research Methods

The researcher used a quantitative research method to collect data in response to the research objectives.

The participants were 320 of 900 personnel of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School in Academic Year 2019, obtained by using the Yamane formula (Cresswell, 2009). The respondents were 29 administrators, 55 supervisors and 236 staff members of the school.

The instrument was a Likert-type scale questionnaire on 1 low to 5 high based on organizational learning concepts in the aspects of levels, as well as desired and actual conditions. The collected data were analyzed by response frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

**Figure 3:** Research Tools



## 8. Results

The results of the research dealt with the participants' perception of the desired and actual conditions of learning organization at three levels--organization, group and individual--in the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School under study.

**Table 1:** Information on Learning Levels and Returned Questionnaire

Set	Learning Level in the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School	Number of Sent Questionnaires	Number of Returned Questionnaires	Percentage
1	Organization	35	29	82.86
2	Group/Team	60	55	91.67
3	Individual	245	236	96.32
Total		340	320	94.12

Table 1 shows the percentage of questionnaires distributed, and overall returned at 94.12%.

As for the desired and actual conditions of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School as a learning organization at 3 levels--organization, group and individual, Table 2 reports the results of the data analysis classified by the levels and conditions.

**Table 2:** Development Levels and Desired and Actual Conditions of Learning Organization at the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School

Set of Questionnaires	Development Levels of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School based on the Concept of Corporate Learning	Desired Condition				Actual Condition			
		$\bar{x}$	(SD)	Meaning		$\bar{x}$	(SD)	Meaning	
1	Organization learning (3 aspects)	4.399	2.082	High		3.894	1.097	Moderate	
2	Group/team learning (2 aspects)	4.382	0.652	High		3.857	0.858	Moderate	
3	Individual learning (2 aspects)	3.953	0.944	Moderate		3.490	0.956	Moderate	
	Total	4.254	0.253	High		3.747	0.223	Moderate	

Table 2 shows the participants' perception toward *the desired condition* of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School as a learning organization at the high level ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.254, SD = 0.253): Organization level ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.399, SD = 2.082) and Group level ( $\bar{x}$  = 4.382, SD = 0.652); however, Individual level was only moderate ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.953, SD = 0.944). *The actual condition* at the levels of organization, group and individual turned out differently, that is, at a moderate level, as shown in the values of mean and standard deviation (overall  $\bar{x}$ = 3.747, SD =0.223).



**Table 3:** Seven Aspects Classified by Development Levels, Desired and Actual Conditions of Learning Organization at the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School

Development Levels of The Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School based on the concept of corporate learning	Desired Condition				Actual Condition			
	$\bar{x}$	SD	Meaning		$\bar{x}$	SD	Meaning	
Organizational learning (3 aspects) N=29	4.399	2.082	High		3.894	1.097	Moderate	
Organizational Learning Leadership	4.376	0.762	High		4.038	0.770	High	
Policy to promote learning of the organization	4.466	0.677	High		3.866	0.800	Moderate	
An environment conducive to organizational learning	4.355	0.678	High		3.779	0.736	Moderate	
Total	4.399	2.082	High		3.894	1.097	Moderate	
Group/Team learning (2 sides) N=55	4.382	0.652	High		3.857	0.858	Moderate	
Learning to have a shared vision of the organization	4.256	0.696	High		3.660	0.926	Moderate	
Creating an organizational learning culture	4.507	0.607	High		4.055	0.790	High	
Total	4.382	0.652	High		3.857	0.858	Moderate	
Individual learning (2 aspects) N=236	3.953	0.944	Moderate		3.490	0.956	moderate	
Being an organization's learning person	3.938	0.901	Moderate		3.483	0.913	moderate	
Learning to apply corporate digital technology	3.968	0.987	Moderate		3.497	1.000	moderate	
Total	3.953	0.944	Moderate		3.490	0.956	moderate	

Table 3 contains seven aspects under three levels as perceived by the participants (N=320):

- At the organization level, there were 29 responses to three aspects: (1) Organizational Learning Leadership, (2) Policy to promote learning of the organization, (3) An environment conducive to organizational learning.
- At the group level, there were 55 responses to two aspects: (1) Learning to have a shared vision of the organization, (2) Creating an organizational learning culture.
- At the individual level, there were 236 responses to (1) Being an organization's learning person, (2) Learning to apply corporate digital technology.

It can be seen that the results shown in Table 3 are similar to Table 2, that is, the participants perceived the five aspects of the desired condition for the learning organization at a high level, but two aspects at the individual level at the moderate level ( $\bar{x}=4.399$ ,  $SD=2.082$ ;  $\bar{x}=4.382$ ,  $SD=0.652$ ; and  $\bar{x}=3.953$ ,  $SD=0.944$ , respectively).

When considering the seven aspects of the actual condition for the learning organization, the participants perceived them at the moderate level ( $\bar{x}=3.894$ ,  $SD=1.097$ ;  $\bar{x}=3.857$ ,  $SD=0.858$ ;  $\bar{x}=3.490$ ,  $SD=0.956$ , respectively).

From the results at the individual level, it can be seen that the executives and the management team of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School need to pay attention to human resource development and take a prompt action on the learning organization development to actualize the desired condition as valued by the participants or the personnel of the School.

## 9. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the School under study needs to consider the implementation of seven aspects of a learning organization without delay: (1) Organizational Learning Leadership, (2) Policy to promote learning of the organization, (3) An environment conducive to organizational learning, (4) Learning to have a shared vision of the organization, (5) Creating an organizational learning culture, (6) Being an organization's learning person, and (7) Learning to apply corporate digital technology.

The five aspects at the organization and group levels were perceived by the participants as highly desired, but moderate in actualization. The School's administration needs to set up a policy in support of their development and implementation. Both top-down and bottom-up channels of communication should help facilitate desired learning behaviors and corporate culture in acquiring and sharing knowledge via digital technology across all borders within the organization. Leadership from the management can lead the workforce toward the shared vision on the goal of becoming a full-fledged learning organization as part of the education trend in the twenty-first century and beyond (Makhasiranon, 2014; Saadat & Saadat, 2016).

As seen in the results shown in Table 3, the individual level aspect on “Learning to apply corporate digital technology” (Desired condition:  $\bar{x}$ = 3.968, SD=0.987; Actual condition:  $\bar{x}$ =3.497, SD=1.000) should deserve an immediate action for the reason that digital technology serves a major tool for acquiring and sharing knowledge or information needed for the learning administration of the school (Wuthirong, 2016; Petchroj, 2021a, 2021b).

It should be noted that group or team learning can ease up the process of becoming a learning organization in that group leaders and team members with similar interest can create activities of their preference in support of innovation in the organization. In order to create a learning culture, it is important that staff members can start their shared learning in interest groups so that they can support and collaborate with each other to attain the identified goals of the organization. As known, collective efforts can also help reduce pressure at work and support the staff to overcome obstacles in their work to make good contribution to success of the organization as desired by the management (Garvin, 1993; Suthmanon, 2017).

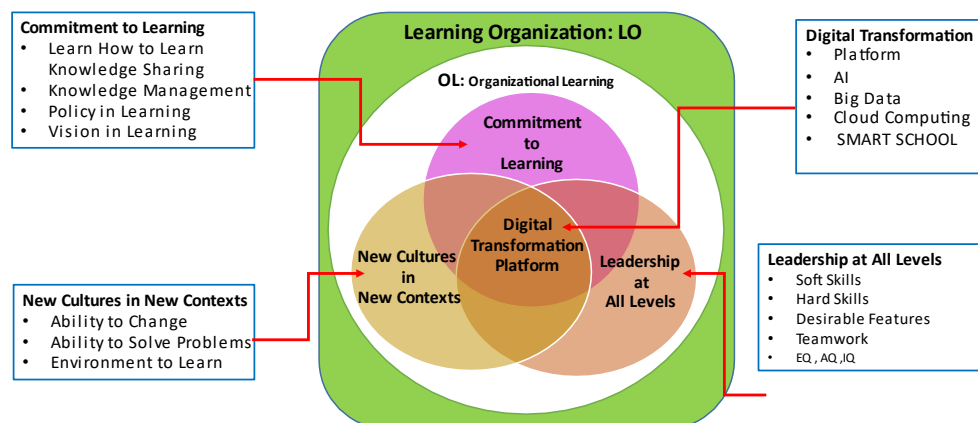
## 10. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the researcher would like to recommend the following for the development of a learning organization:

- (1) Commitment to learning
- (2) New culture in new contexts
- (3) Digital transformation
- (4) Leadership at all levels

These four dimensions with details are shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4:** Four Dimensions of Learning Organization



Source : Taphun, R., Captain. (2020). Strategy for Development of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School Based on the Concept of Organizational Learning. A Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Studies Program, Rangsit University, Thailand, p.215.

For an educational institution, the researcher would recommend the use of group and team for the staff to work collaboratively on given tasks by duties or job descriptions. They can help link and coordinate the four dimensions of the learning organization.

- Commitment to Learning

Everyone must have a commitment to learning, seeking knowledge continually, and developing the organization to move toward success. Such commitment can be observed from both personal and organizational behaviors in the ability to learn that how to learn.

- New Cultures in New Contexts

There is a form of a new culture in a new context created by diverse people working together to learn new things and adapt to change, especially when faced with problems. In the changing environment, people's learning has changed to fit in a new context.

- Digital Transformation

One of the most dramatic changes in the organization is its adaptation to the digital age. The organization needs digital technology to communicate within and between organizations, and thus brings in artificial intelligence (AI) to support or even replace humans. Big Data management with cloud technology helps organizations move quickly in real time--for both educational institutions and business organizations for high productivity. Smart schools and smart organizations need digital systems to drive learning.

- Leadership at All Levels

Leadership in learning can lead the organization to progress in developing soft skills or personal skills that enable a person to get along well with others, such as politeness, modesty and socialization. Hard skills mean content, knowledge gained from education combined with other desirable features and the group of three important types of intelligence: Emotion Quotient (EQ) refers to the ability to assess and control one's own emotions; Intelligence Quotient (IQ) refers to the level of intelligence in thinking, reasoning, calculating, and connecting stored information via the innate brain; and Adversity Quotient (AQ) means intelligence in problem solving with flexibility. All these enable a person to adapt well in coping with and overcome obstacles and difficulties on one's own.

These four dimensions of learning organization can serve as a guideline for employees to cope with new cultures in new contexts of the digital age. Organizations certainly need commitment from their personnel to help make a learning culture within by changing the paradigm on how to work and learn in the digital age.

## 11. The Author

Ratree Thaphun, Ed.D., is the Director of Science Division, Education Division of the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand. Her current academic work and research focus on learning administration, curriculum design and instruction, human resource development in learning organizations, and current issues in digital transformation for communication and knowledge management.

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