THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION: PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF

Master of Business Administration Thesis

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Business Administration in the University of Malawi and it has not been submitted before any degrees or examination in any other university.

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Certificate of Approval

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read and hereby recommend for acceptance by the University of Malawi a thesis titled *'The University of Malawi as a Learning Organisation: Perceptions of Academic Staff.'*

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Dedication

To Margaret Rose, my mother! You never got to see the end of my work. May your soul rest in peace. Also to Victor my son, you persevered the nights I was never home. To Dickens my husband, thank you for your encouragement. My sister Tiniya, you were always there for me.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

In today's knowledge-based economy, learning is a fundamental aspect for the success of organisations. The process of transformation is therefore a requirement for organisations such as universities which offer teaching and learning services. Learning in a university should go beyond the core business of teaching and learning, but also the facilitation of continuous improvement of members in the organisation. This study examined the concept of a learning organisation in UNIMA to assess its applicability based on the perceptions of its academic staff and the mechanisms put in place to characterise it as a learning organisation.

The study adopted the Watkins and Marsick (1993) model of a learning organisation which advocates that learning must take place at three levels, individual, team and organisational. Data was collected using quantitative methods Dimension of Learning Organisation Questionnaire (DLOQ) instrument. Data was analysed using a SPSS 20.0.

The results of the study indicated that the majority of learning practices of a learning organisation were not being practiced in UNIMA. Only at the individual level learning some practices were taking place. These results led to the conclusion that UNIMA cannot be characterised as a full learning organisation. There were significant differences in academic staff's perception of UNIMA as a learning organisation based on constituent college. However, on a positive note, UNIMA has put in place mechanisms that would characterise it as a learning organisation.

Therefore, based on the results of the study, the following recommendations were made: the organisations should promote learning culture amongst its employees, implement learning-based policies that are still at draft level; share organisation's vision to all members and manage change in the process of transformation.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

COM   College of Medicine

KCN   Kamuzu College of Nursing

UNIMA   University of Malawi

MGDS   Malawi Growth and Development Strategy

MIM   Malawi Institute of Management

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the introduction to the learning organisation and also a brief background of the University of Malawi, which is the organisation under study. Further in this chapter, the problem statement, research objectives, significance of study, study limitations and the organisation of the study are presented.

1.2   Background to Study

Rapidly changing market environments and increasing global interdependency have created the need for flexibility in organisational design and performance (West, 1994). New forms of organisation have been developed to meet such environmental challenges effectively such as total quality, knowledge management, quality circles, job enlargement, conflict resolution (Gustavsson & Harung, 1994; West, 1994) and the learning organisation (Obasi & Motshegwa, 2005).

To remain viable in an environment characterised by uncertainty and change, organisations and individuals alike depend upon the ability to learn (Edmonson & Moingeon 1998) in Torrington, Hall & Taylor (2008). Organisational effectiveness is increasingly dependent on developing an environment which fosters learning and the sharing of information as a foundation to deal with uncertainty (West, 1994).

The interest in learning organisations has been stimulated by the need to be competitive, as learning is considered to be the only way of obtaining and keeping a competitive edge. According to Pinelli, Barclay, Kennedy & Bishop (1997), knowledge has become an important element of competitiveness for an organisation as well as a nation. One way of ensuring competitive advantage is to develop a highly-skilled workforce, equipped with the knowledge and expertise required to stay ahead in the marketplace (author unknown, 2007). Abbasi, Taqipour and Farhadain (2012) assert that in an ever changing world, learning is considered as the only sustainable competitive advantage.

Wick and Leon (1995) cited in Armstrong (1998), suggest that a successful learning organisation should have a leader with a clearly defined vision, rapid sharing of information, inventiveness, a detailed, measurable action plan and the ability to implement the action plan. Yeo's (2005) review of a learning organisation concluded that it is based on a belief that the collective learning of the organisation's members will result in improved organisational performance and competitive advantage (unknown author, 2007). Lau (2011) points out that the establishment of an effective learning organisation is key to long-term business.

Research on learning organisations has indicated that most studies have focused on business and industrial organisations (Patnaik, Beriha, Mahapatra & Singh, 2012) and others have focused on educational institutions, the higher education institutions in particular (Mbassana, 2014). Further, few studies on learning organisation in higher learning institutions have been conducted in the African context (Mbassana, 2014; Ngesu, Wambua, Ndiku, & Mwaka, 2008; Obasi & Motshegwa, 2005).

In this ever changing climate, the organisations that succeed are those that can continuously transform and adapt to new circumstances such as having the characteristics of a learning organisation including universities (Leufven, Vitrakoti, Bergstrom, Ashish, & Malqvist, 2015). The University of Malawi (UNIMA) is among universities in Africa who are facing unprecedented change taking place in the environment, ranging from effects of globalisation to competition. This calls for action to stay afloat amidst these changes.

The University of Malawi was established in 1965 through the directive of the then Head of State and Government and its main purpose was to produce the human resources required by the new nation for the development of the economy (Malawi Institute of Management [MIM] Report, 2004).

UNIMA is comprised of four constituent colleges namely Chancellor College, College of Medicine, Kamuzu College of Nursing and The Polytechnic. The University boasts of 13 faculties and 59 departments across its four colleges. As of August 2016, the University if Malawi had a total of 691 academic staff in its constituent colleges.

In its Strategic Plan (2012 -2017), UNIMA states its vision as follows:

'To be a centre of excellence in higher education for sustainable development of Malawi and the Region'.

The strategic document is said to be a tool for the transformation of the university, considering that it is an organisation that is operating in an ever-changing and dynamic environment, nationally, regionally and globally (UNIMA Strategic Plan, 2012). Within this complex environment, the University is likely to face a number of challenges and therefore, must make some critical strategic choices in the coming few years (UNIMA Strategic Plan, 2012).

In line with the vision of UNIMA, there is need to consider the quality, potential and ability of academic members since they are an essential characteristic that guarantees the successfulness of the educational systems as well as the development of the society (Khosrow & Zaidatol, 2012). Academic members are at the core of educational institutions and play a significant role in the development of higher learning institutions. Further, it is assumed that the academic staff as facilitators of a learning process (Ali, 2012) in UNIMA, they should be able to indicate their perceptions of UNIMA's status regarding the characteristics of a learning organisation.Therefore, this study sought to assess the needs of the academic staff from a view point of their learning new knowledge as an important aspect of managing higher learning institutions.

1.3   Problem Statement

University of Malawi as other African Universities has been at the receiving end of rapid changes brought about by the combined forces of information and communication technology and globalization (Obasi & Motshegwa, 2005). UNIMA's effort to dealing with these forces have led to the development of the strategic plan which should enable the University to adapt to and take advantage of the opportunities present from an expanding demand for higher education, research and consultancies. This corresponds to the Malawi Growth Development Strategy (MGDS) of 2010-2015 which places much emphasis on improving the quality of the practices of all higher learning institutions.

In this regard, UNIMA has embraced the concept of learning culture by taking different actions to improve its quality in research, consultancy, and teaching and learning activities. Among other initiatives include; introduction and enhancement of e-learning modes of teaching and learning, strengthening programs offered during semester

holidays, installation of ICT teaching aids in classrooms, professional training in teaching, training staff in developing their careers, encouragement of seminars, workshops, creating sustainable research funding through university budget for academic staff and equipping libraries with computers (UNIMA Strategic Plan, 2012).

Similarly, UNIMA has also put in place strategies to enhance the learning organisation culture. Some of the strategies are aimed at increasing number of academic staff with PhDs from 25% to 70%, developing staff during the first 3 years of joining, high utilization of knowledge and linking colleges to the university wide area network (Strategic Plan, 2012).

Despite the establishment and implementation of various initiatives and programs in UNIMA, it is not clear if UNIMA has fully become a learning organisation. This is due to a number of concerns raised by staff as well as the general public. As for the staff members, there have been a lot of concerns over the dissatisfaction of services that UNIMA offers. For instance, limited access to information for staff members through the ICT; limited comprehensive research and publication culture and there is limited staff development in that new recruits take longer period before going for their Masters or PhD studies. On the other hand, practitioners and professionals in the industries have several times queried the quality and type of education that UNIMA offers to the Malawi citizenry. This concern comes amidst review of the UNIMA curriculum that is done periodically. Above all, there seems to be little progress in terms of achieving the goals stated in the UNIMA Strategic Plan (2012).

This study therefore seeks to examine employee's perception whether the UNIMA is a learning organisation. In essence, the study seeks to investigate the extent to which UNIMA is a learning organisation.

1.4   Research Objectives
1.4.1 Main Objective
The main objective of the study is to examine the extent to which the University of Malawi is a learning organisation as it tries to transform itself to meet the challenges of the environment in which it is operating.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the perceptions of academic staff on UNIMA as a learning organisation
2. To examine mechanisms put in place by UNIMA to become a learning organisation

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of academic staff members of UNIMA as a learning organisation?
2. What activities are being undertaken by UNIMA to characterise it as a learning organisation?

1.6 Significance of Study

The university as an institution of higher learning contributes greatly to the development of any nation. The University of Malawi as a public university has been the sole provider of higher education in Malawi. However, increased competition from other public and private universities, decreased government funding, and high rate of advances in ICT requires it to continually learn. The researcher's choice of the research problems was therefore based on the premise that there is need for the University to consider adapting to new ways of managing in order to stay competitive amidst the increasing competitive and other factors that would influence its success or failure.

This study therefore will give insight to policy-makers of importance of continuous learning of members of the organisation in order to deal with environmental challenges, it will provide information on how learning culture can be enhanced in the university and the study will add to the body of knowledge of the learning organisation concept in higher education in Malawi and Africa.

Further, this study should contribute on empirical finding on the learning organisation concept in the institutions of higher learning, particularly in African, where there is a scarcity of such studies.

1.7 Organisation of Chapters

The study is organised in five chapters as follows:

- Chapter One presents the introduction to the study, background of UNIMA, problem statement, objectives of study, significance of study, study limitations and organisation of chapters.
- Chapter Two discusses the literature on the learning organisation concept particularly on learning, organisational learning, learning organisation models, university as a learning organisation and mechanisms for a learning organisation.
- Chapter Three consists of the research methodology used in this study; the research philosophy, design, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations.
- Chapter Four is a presentation of study findings and discussion of findings based on the objectives of the study.
- Chapter Five outlines the conclusions, recommendations and suggest areas for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

'The capacity to learn is an asset which never becomes obsolete' –A Declaration on Learning

2.1   Introduction

Many organisational researchers have come to the conclusion that an organisations learning capability will be the only sustainable competitive advantage in the future (Yang, Watkins & Marsick, 2004). Torrington et al. (2008) agree by stating that the interest in the learning organisation has been stimulated by the need to be competitive, as learning is considered to be the only way of obtaining and maintaining a competitive edge. This chapter presents a theoretical background on the concept of learning and the learning organisation.

First, the learning concept is defined; stating the significance of individual learning, team learning and organisational learning, then a distinction between organisational learning and the learning organisation is discussed. Secondly, the concept of the learning organisation is presented focusing on the definitions of learning organisation and a discussion on theoretical models of the learning organisation. Finally, a discussion on the university as a learning organisation is made, followed by mechanisms used in universities to be characterised as learning organisations.

2.2   Learning Defined

Learning is an important part of the human condition (Mullins, 2007) and a process that is familiar to all. In the organisational context, people are expected to continually develop and update their knowledge, skills and attitudes to deal with and adapt to the ever changing environment in which their organisations are operating.   For today's organisation, learning should be an integral activity if they are to survive in the turbulent environment.

Learning is said to be changed or new behavior resulting from new or reinterpreted knowledge that has been derived from an external or internal experience (Torrington et al., 2008). Argyris (1993) suggests that learning takes place when we take effective action, when we detect and correct error (Armstrong, 2009). Learning therefore suggests

new behavior or action arising out of an experience. Mullins (2007) agrees by asserting that learning means change, but change of a relatively permanent kind.

In the context of an organisation, Armstrong (2009) suggest that the term learning has emphasized the belief that what matters for individuals is that they are given the opportunity to learn. This learning, for individuals, is often for themselves but with guidance and support from the organisation, rather than the individuals just being on the receiving end of training administered by the organisation (Armstrong, 2009). The individual on one hand has a role to own the learning, while on the other hand, the organisation must provide support for the individual to learn. The context in which learning takes place is important for learning to be effective, therefore the extent to which an organisation believes in learning and supports it is also important (Armstrong, 2009).

Learning is a continuous process that not only enhances existing capabilities, but also leads to the development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes that prepare people for enlarged or higher level responsibilities (Armstrong, 2009). With the ever changing environment in which organisations are operating today, learning is seen as the solution to enabling organisations, through the collective learning of individuals, to survive in the future.

2.2.1 Individual Learning

Sloman (2003) suggests that learning lies within the domain of the individual (Armstrong, 2009). At the individual level, it is essential to foster an environment where individuals are encouraged to take risks and experiment, where mistakes are tolerated, but where means exist for those involved to learn from their experiences (Armstrong, 2009). Organisations should concern itself with facilitating the learning of individuals and providing facilities for them to use. However, it should be noted that individuals act as learning agents for the organisation in ways that cannot easily be systematized – they are not only individual learners but also have the capacity to learn collaboratively (Armstrong, 2009).

Individuals learn for themselves and learn from other people, as members of teams, by interaction with their managers, co-workers and people outside the organisation (Armstrong, 2009). Individuals learn in different ways and they differ in their learning capabilities, their style and the way they respond (Armstrong, 2009; Mullins, 2007).

According to Kim (1993) organisations generally learn through individuals members and therefore it is important to understand the theories that underpin the learning of individuals.

Learning theories enable the understanding of how learning takes place in individuals and provide an insight to managing learning at work. Four theories of learning are briefly discussed in this study; behavioral theories, cognitive theories, social learning theory and experiential learning theories.

Behavioral theories concentrates on changes in behavior (Torrington et al., 2008) and focuses on actions that could be observed, measured and controlled (Mullins, 2007). The thoughts of the individual learner are not considered part of the learning process in this perspective. Individuals are expected to behave in the way in which they are being taught without their objective thinking in the learning. This theory therefore becomes manipulative, simplistic and limited (Mullins, 2007; Torrington et al., 2008) in terms of the expected change in behavior to an extent that the changes may only be temporary.

Cognitive theories of learning are concerned with what the learner thinks, and stresses the need of learner motivation and individual needs (Torrington et al., 2008) in the learning process. Armstrong (2009) argues that cognitive learning involves gaining knowledge and understanding by absorbing information in the form of principles, concepts and facts, and then internalizing it. The theory further suggests that the process of learning is more complex and requires an understanding of a number of individual factors (Mullins, 2007). This theory therefore suggests that individuals learn when they are given the opportunity to use their mind to think things through before they act. This theory therefore posits that observable behaviours are not adequate to determine the learning of an individual, but through thought processes an individual's learning can be determined.

The social learning theory suggests that individuals learn from watching others through observation and direct experience (Kondalkar, 2007; Robbins & Coulter, 2012). Social learning is achieved when individuals interact, and is practiced by observing cultural and social practices in the organisational context (Kondalkar, 2007). The existence of role models in an organisation is likely to enhance learning in individuals, where they observe and gain experience through the actions of their models. Torrington et al. (2008) further asserts that learning is a social activity and it is based on our needs as humans to fit with

others. Organisations therefore must foster an environment in which people can fit and thereby learn from others through observation and experience.

Experiential learning theory takes place when people learn from their experiences by reflecting on it so that it can be understood and applied (Armstrong, 2009). Further, it is suggested that learning through experience can be enhanced by encouraging learners to reflect on and make better use of what they learn through their work and from other people. However, this will only be enhanced if the climate in the organisation is supportive.

From the discussion of theories of learning, it can be concluded that if learning must take place in an organisation, there must be understand of how learning takes place in the subject that enables organisations to learn, that is the individual. The collective learning of individuals will enhance the learning activities of the organisation as a whole. Therefore, to become a learning organisation, it requires the learning of the members of the organisation as individuals, their involvement in learning and the need to support their individual learning.

2.2.2   Organisational Learning

The collaborative learning of individuals in an organisation is known as organisational learning. All organisations learn, consciously or not, which is a fundamental requirement for their existence. Organisational learning is concerned with how learning takes place in organisations (Armstrong, 2009) and it focuses on collective learning. It is a process which answers the question of 'how', that is how is learning developed in an organisation (Yeo, 2005).

Organisation learning is said to be concerned with the development of new knowledge or insights that have the potential to influence behavior (Mabey & Salaman in Armstrong, 2009). It is considered to depend on the collective cognitive processes of individuals and is more than just the sum of individual learning in the organisation (Yeo, 2005; Torrington et al., 2008).

Organisational learning takes place within the wide institutional context of inter-organisational relationships (Armstrong, 2009) and refers broadly to an organisations

acquisition of understanding, know-how, techniques and practices of any kind and by any means (Argyris and Schon cited in Armstrong, 2009).

Watson (1994) cited by Yeo (2005) posits that organisation learning requires individual competences and organisational culture to work hand in hand, involving the necessary level of commitment, trust and understanding to ensure possible productive cooperation. Further, organisation learning can be regarded as being reflected in the observable extent to which changes are manifested in individual expression of attitude, improved knowledge and use of specific skills to meet organisational needs (Yeo, 2005)

2.2.3   Organisation Learning and the Learning Organisation

Armstrong (2009) explain that literature on organisational learning focuses on the 'observation and analysis of the processes of individual and collective learning in organisations', whereas the learning organisation literature is concerned with 'using specific diagnostic and evaluative tools which can help to identify, promote and evaluate the quality of the learning processes inside organisations'.

Armstrong (2009) distinguishes the two concepts by asserting that organisational learning is about how people learn in organisations and the learning organisation concept is about what organisations should do to facilitate the learning of their members. Accordingly therefore, organisational learning as a concept looks at the systems, process and policies by which learning takes place in the organisation while on the other hand; learning organisations tend to focus on what learning must be undertaken in the organisation. Organisational learning is therefore an important ingredient in a learning organisation.

Therefore, for learning organisations to exist, individuals in the organisation must be able to learn, be given opportunities to learn and the organisation must support this learning by having enabling systems, policies and procedures by which learning must take place in the organisation through the collective learning of its individual members.

2.3   Defining a Learning Organisation

Learning organisations are organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (Armstrong, 2009).

Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2008) state that a learning organisation embraces a culture of lifelong learning, enabling all employees to continually acquire and share knowledge. Further, it is asserted that a learning organisation is where people continually expand their capacity to achieve the results they desire and therefore it requires that the organisation be in a constant state of learning through monitoring the environment, assimilating information, making decisions, and flexibly restructuring to compete in that environment (Noe et al., 2008).

Cummings and Worley (2009) define a learning organisation as one which is skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring and retaining knowledge, and at purposefully modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights.

Ngesu et al. (2008) state that most conceptualizations of the learning organisation seem to work on the assumption that 'learning is valuable, continuous, and most effective when shared and that every experience is an opportunity to learn'.

Based on these definitions, a learning organisation is one that enhances continuous learning of its members, offers opportunities for members to improve and achieve what they desire as individuals in the organisation and for the organisation as a whole. Further, a learning organisation requires a climate conducive to learning, a culture of learning that will support the learning of individual members.

In summary, Kerka (1995) cited in Ngesu et al. (2008) assert that the common characteristics of a learning organisation includes that it provides continuous learning opportunities, use learning to reach its goals, link individual performance with organisational performance, foster inquiry and dialogue making it safe for people to share openly and take risks, embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal, and is continuously aware of and interact with its environment.

2.4   Models of Learning Organisation

This section presents a discussion on various models that have been developed to conceptualize the learning organisation concept. Literature on learning organisation indicates that there are various ways of conceptualizing the construct that has generated different models and various characteristics. The models under discussion in this section include Senge's Model, Pearn Kandola's model and Watkins and Marsick model.

2.4.1 Senge's Model

Senge advocated a model of the learning organisation from his book The Fifth Discipline and laid the foundation for research interest in this concept. Ali (2012) state that Senge's model is based on systems thinking and defined the learning organisation as an organisation that has the capacity for learning and the ability to adapt to change and create alternative future for the organisation. According to this model, a learning organisation must focus on collective problem-solving within it, using team learning and a 'soft systems' approach whereby all the possible causes of a problem are considered in order to define more clearly those which can be dealt with and those which are insoluble (Armstrong, 2006).

Senge conceptualized a learning organisation on five frameworks which he called disciplines (Ali, 2012) namely personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking.

Personal mastery is the spiritual foundation of a learning organisation (Senge, 1990). It is the discipline of continually clarifying and de-opening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience and of seeing reality objectively (Senge, 1990). Personal mastery suggest that an organisation's commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of its members (Senge, 1990). As one master this discipline, one can see the connection in the organisation between individual learning and organisation learning to achieve success (Abbasi et al., 2012).

The mental models discipline assert that mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action (Senge, 1990). It involves learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. It involves the ability to carry on 'learningful' conversation that balance advocacy and inquiry, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to influence of others (Abbasi et al. (2012; Senge 1990).

The third discipline of building a shared vision involves having the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create (Senge, 1990). When there is a genuine vision, people excel and learn because they want to. The shared vision enables to bind

people together around a common identity and sense of identity. The problem has been translating individual vision (of leaders) into a shared vision.

Team learning is the fourth discipline according to Senge (1990). It starts with 'dialogue' which is the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine 'thinking together'. Team learning is vital because teams, not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations (Senge, 1990).

Systems' thinking is the conceptual cornerstone of Senge's approach. Senge (1990) states that systems thinking is a body of knowledge and tools to make the full pattern clearer, and it is the discipline that integrates the others, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice (Silins, Zarins, & Mulford, 2002). The systems thinking discipline focuses on wholes rather than parts, goes beyond events to their underlying structure and leads to experiencing the interconnectedness and inter-relationship of things (Silins et al., 2002).

Becoming a learning organisation provides a promising mechanism of adapting to required changes, remaining competitive and fostering continuous improvement (Ali, 2012). Senge's model argues that a learning organisation has the capacity to enhance organisation effectiveness because through the learning organisation process, an organisation develops its capacity to proactively respond to external changes and a competitive environment.

However, Senge's model has been found to merely provide theoretical concepts rather than a measure for learning organisation (Ali, 2012). It is a model that does not provide guidance or a framework for action (Mbassana, 2014).

2.4.2 Pearn Kandola Model

This model of a learning organisation avoids a prescriptive definition of a learning organisation. Instead a working approach was developed that can be adapted or used as a springboard by organisations (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994). The key components of a learning organisation as proposed in this model are shared vision, enabling structure, supportive culture, empowering management, motivated workforce and enhanced learning (Armstrong, 1998). The six-factor model facilitates organisational self-analysis and enables organisations to identify their learning inhibitors and enhancers and helps them pinpoint those areas where action is required.

According to Kandola & Fullerton (1998), the shared vision component of a learning organisation expresses the extent to which there is a vision already in place in the organisation. The existence of the shared vision includes the organisations ability/capacity to identify, respond to and benefit from future opportunities (Armstrong, 1998). Part of the vision recognizes the importance of learning at individual, group and system levels to enable the organisation to transform itself continuously in order not only to survive but also to thrive in increasingly unpredictable world (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998)

The model suggests that a learning organisation should have an enabling structure which facilitates learning (Armstrong, 1998). This learning will take place between different levels, functions and subsystems (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994). Further, the enabling structure will also enable the recognition of the need for rapid adaptation and change (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994).

A supportive culture is one which encourages challenges to the status quo and the questioning of assumptions and established ways of doing things (Armstrong, 1998). It includes issues of the provision of opportunities for testing, experimentation and for continuous development. Exploration and debate are valued commodities and mistakes are treated positively (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994).

According to the Kandola & Fullerton(1994) model, the component of empowering management suggest that, managers in a learning organisation genuinely believe that devolved decision-making and better team-working result in improved performance by those much closer to the work actually done and/or the customer (Armstrong, 1998; Kandola & Fullerton, 1994). Managers see their role as a facilitating and coaching rather that controlling and monitoring one (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994).

This component of a learning organisation is about the extent to which the workforce as a whole is motivated to learn continuously, is confident to take on new learning and seize the opportunities for learning from experience, and is fully committed to self-development (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994; Armstrong, 1998).

The final component, enhanced learning, proposes the extent to which processes and policies in a learning organisation exist to enhance, encourage and sustain learning amongst all employees (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994; Armstrong, 1998).

2.4.3 Watkins and Marsick Model

The model suggests that leasrning in organisations takes place at three main levels: individual, team and organisational (Ali, 2012), and that learning transforms the organisation (Mbassana, 2014). Accordingly, the model further suggest that these three levels are interrelated and learning organisation only occurs when all the three levels of learning take place in an organisation (Ali, 2012). Based on the theoretical background of this study, this model is relevant since it addresses issues of learning in an organisation at all levels. Further, the organisation under study is currently operating in a highly turbulent environment which requires an organisation to establish structures that act wisely in response to the environmental changes (Ali, 2012; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

A learning organisation according to Watkins and Marsick (1993) is defined as one that learns continuously and proactively uses learning in a way that is integrated with its work. This model of a learning organisation conceptualizes the construct in an integrated approach in terms of people and structure in understanding the characteristics of the learning organisation (Ali, 2012).

Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1997), identified seven core dimensions of the learning organisation as they happen at the individual, group, and organisational levels. These dimensions are (1) creating continuous learning opportunities; (2) promoting inquiry and dialogue; (3) encouraging collaboration and team learning; (4) creating systems to capture and share learning; (5) empowering people towards a collective vision;(6) connecting the organisation to its environment; (7) and providing strategic leadership for learning (Ali, 2012; Marsick, 1997; Mbassana, 2014).
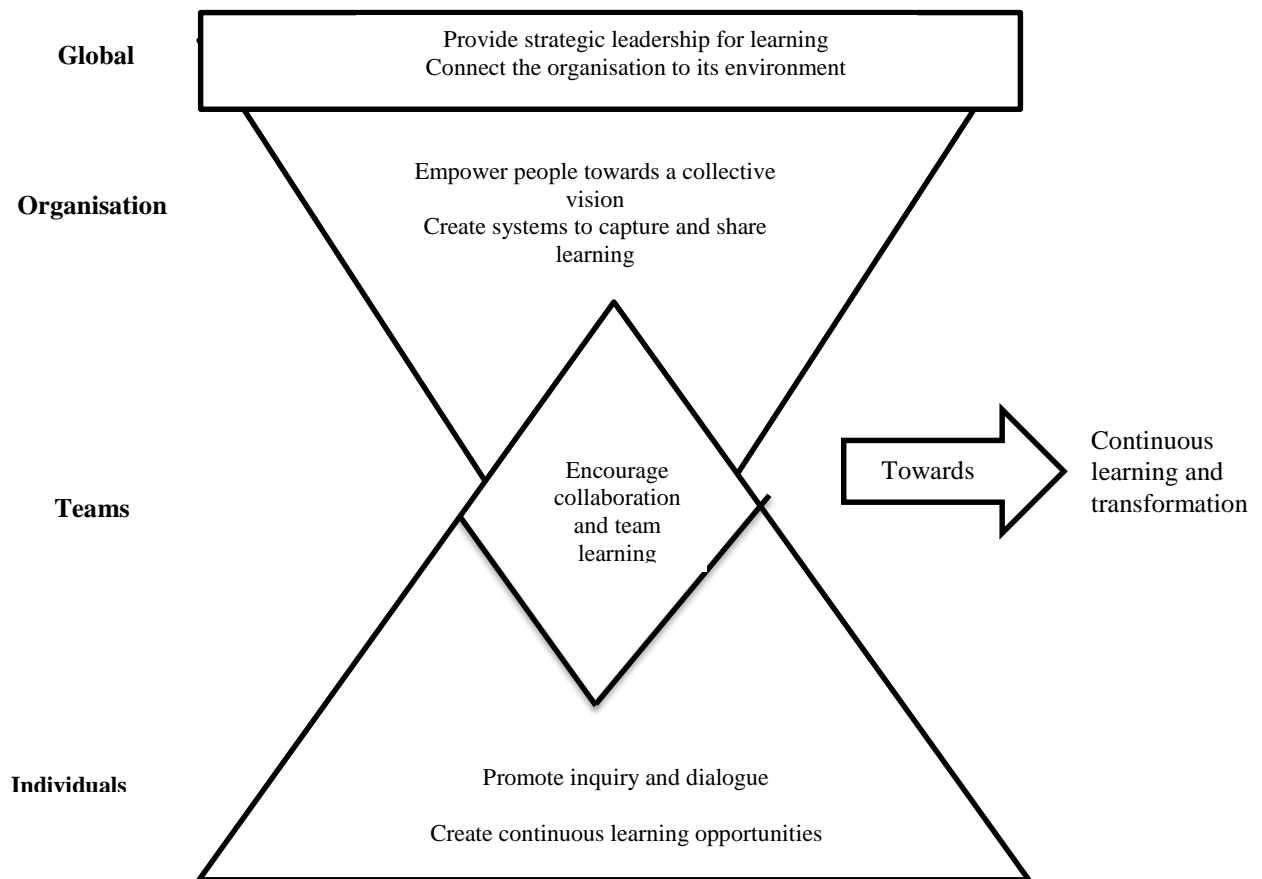
Figure 1: Learning Organisation Dimensions

Source: Marsick and Watkins (1999, p.11)

2.4.3.1 Creating Continuous Learning Opportunities

To be innovative and act effectively in managing the organisations, managers need to provide continuous learning opportunities for all organisation members (Khosrow & Zaidatol, 2012).

Creating continuous learning opportunities entails the creation of vast opportunities for learning by an organisation to all individuals while they are carrying out their jobs (Ali, 2012). This involves the extent of developing learning in organisations by learning how to learn new knowledge, values and skills, and creating continuous learning opportunities through experiments for personal and career development on the job (Khosrow & Zaidatol, 2012).

Mbassana (2014) asserts that continuous learning implies that learning becomes an everyday part of the job and is built into routine tasks; where employees are expected to

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teach, as well as learn from their coworkers. Further, learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job; opportunities are provided for ongoing educations and growth (Leufven et al., 2015; Sharifirad, 2011).

Individuals are expected to learn frequently and to share their learning in ways that enable the larger system to learn. This involves more than one level of learning (individuals, teams, organisation as a whole) but it may not always include everyone and may not always involve all possible levels (Marsick, n.d.).

Continuous learning also requires that work should be structured to allow experimentation and learning from mistakes–within reasonable limits of safety and risk (Marsick, n.d.). Organisation should provide opportunities for individual to discuss mistakes in their work and learn from them and also be able to identify skills they need for execution of future tasks. Organisations must provide opportunities for employees to help each other learn.

If a person is to engage in continuous learning, the organisation then needs to provide appropriate incentives and rewards, link the new learning to work, and support efforts to use the learning to make changes elsewhere in the organisation (Marsick & Watkins 1999). Resources must be provided for by the organisation to enable employees learn and encourage them to see problems as an opportunity to learn.

However, Garvin (1993) cited in Mbassana (2014) argues that most organisations have failed in this dimension of continuous learning because they did not recognize that continuous improvement depend on continuous learning. It has also been argued that management generally only supports the learning that was seen to bring benefit to the organisation and be directly relevant to the individual's current role or potential future role in the organisation (Dymock & McCarthy, 2006).

2.4.3.2 Promoting Inquiry and Dialogue
In a learning organisation, strategies are developed to enhance the sharing of information through inquiry and dialogue. According to Ali (2012) the organisation designs strategies that promote the culture of questioning and raising views, receiving feedback and conducting experimentations. Through enquiry, people explore ideas, questions and

potential actions (Mbassana 2014), where members are provided with the opportunity to inquire and question on problems related their jobs in order to find a solution.

In a learning organisation, people gain productive reasoning skills to express their views and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others (Dymock & McCarthy, 2006). The members of the organisation are taught to listen to the views of others, present their own viewpoint convincingly and provide honest feedback to others. An organisational culture of inquiry, feedback and innovation is established (Jamali, Sidani & Zouein, 2009).

Inquiry requires members of the organisation to engage in higher-levels of cognition, i.e. the ability of the individual to hold on to their beliefs and assumptions while being open to new ideas and beliefs (Piercy, 2007). As individuals, members have their own ideas and assumptions which could bring discrepancy in the assumed shared meaning with other members of the organisation. Organisations therefore must develop strategies that enable members to question theirs and others assumptions. Organisations must provide the opportunity for the members of the organisation to develop shared meaning through inquiry and dialogue and in the process, gain new insight as they discuss their differences.

Further, Piercy (2007) assert that inquiry and dialogue should enable the group to engage in creative or generative thinking, for instance through problem solving processes. These processes help members to create a synergy that enable them to discover new solutions that they were unable to uncover individually.

Therefore, it is important for organisation leadership to establish and maintain an organisational climate that assures safety that allows members to speak freely without fear of accusation or retribution (Piercy, 2007). Members must be given the opportunity to learn from others and understand how others view a particular problem. Lewin (1997) cited in Piercy, (2006) asserts that through inquiry and dialogue, an organisation achieves a 'group mind', that is shared values, beliefs and assumptions become the frame of reference for the shared vision of the organisation that will guide its actions.

2.4.3.3 Encouraging Collaboration and Team Learning

The third dimension of a learning organisation suggest on the need for organisations to encourage collaboration and team learning. Team learning focuses on the learning ability

of the group (Ngesu et al., 2008). This can be achieved through designing work to use groups to access different modes of thinking and these groups are expected to learn and work together (Mbassana, 2014). It deals with encouraging collaboration, learning and working together and a team working culture in organisations, where ideas can be challenged (Ali, 2012; Mbassana, 2014).

Team learning serves as an important catalyst providing individuals within organisations opportunities to interact in an environment of self-managed learning (Piercy, 2007). This environment enables individuals to exchange ideas and experiment through generative learning to address organisational issues or problems while working towards innovative solutions (Piercy, 2007).

Virtually all important decisions occur in groups and that teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning units to such an extent that unless a team can learn, the organisation cannot learn (Ngesu et al., 2008).With team learning, the learning ability of the group becomes greater than the learning ability of any individual in the group. (Ngesu et al., 2008). Watkins and Marsick (1997) stated that collaborative atmosphere of learning in organisations foster and develop job related skills. The collaborative efforts cause each member of the organisation to share knowledge and experience with each other (Khosrow & Zaidatol, 2012).

Organisations therefore must necessitate the implementation of strategies to improve team learning. These strategies may include requiring team members to overcome their own embedded defensive postures (Piercy, 2007) that is, individuals develop own defensive behaviours based on their beliefs and assumptions throughout life. These beliefs and assumptions may be different to what others hold and individuals may be unwilling to participate in a group, in defense of their own belief, which may be counterproductive to team learning as well as organisational learning. Team learning strategies therefore must deal with helping members overcome these defensive behaviours.

Overcoming fear of conflict can also improve team learning in an organisation (Piercy, 2007). Members should be encouraged to be open, share their ideas with others and also be willing to accept ideas and beliefs of others for their own learning as well as the learning of the team and the organisation as a whole. Piercy (2007), however, adds to say

that collaboration and team learning need to be facilitated by the establishment of systems that will enable the capturing and sharing of learning in the organisation.

2.4.3.4 Creating Systems to Capture and Share Knowledge

Establishing systems to capture and share learning is another dimension of a learning organisation. Value is placed on creating, capturing, and moving knowledge rapidly and fluidly so that people who need it can access and use it quickly (Marsick, n.d).

These embedded systems (Ali, 2012) are vibrant systems built to capture and share learning in the organisation. According to Watkins and Marsick (1993) both high and low technology systems for sharing learning are created and integrated in the work, access to the learning is provided and systems maintained.

According to Piercy (2007), individuals and teams in the organisation engage interactively each day learning and gaining knowledge. This is done through formal, informal and incidental learning. Therefore, it is essential for the organisation to develop ways to capture and ensure the new learning is embedded into the organisations memory.

The systems for capturing and embedding learning in an organisation should consider how knowledge flows in the organisation across all levels; at individual, team and organisational levels (Piercy, 2007). Knowledge flows from individual or teams to other individuals and teams within the organisation, and as it flows it becomes embedded into the organisations memory. Later on this embedded knowledge flows back to individuals and teams within the organisation.

It is therefore important for the organisation to establish systems that will ensure the capturing of knowledge in the organisation, and assuring the future retrieval and distribution of this information from the organisations memory (Piercy, 2007).

2.4.3.5 Empowering People towards a Collective Vision

Learning in organisations with the purpose of making employees to feel empowerment has shown to be a significant factor in organisational successfulness, adaptation to changes and helping organisations to survive longer that their counterparts (Khosrow & Zaidatol, 2012).

Watkins amd Marsick (1993) further argue that people in the organisation are involved in setting, owning and implementing the collective vision of the organisation and are involved and held accountable for different decisions in the organisation.

This dimension of empowerment enhances the distribution of responsibility close to decision making in order to motivate people to learn what they are accountable for (Mbassana, 2014). In a learning organisation, leadership must release or empower individuals by breaking away from bureaucratic management paradigm to engage organisational objectives within an environment in which everyone assumes responsibility for success (Piercy, 2007).

Organisations therefore can foster empowerment in its members by providing them with opportunities to take control of the situation, encouraging a habit of learning and development, help members set and achieve goals and provide resources and reward achievements (Piercy, 2007).

2.4.3.6 Systems Connection: Connecting the Organisation to its Environment

A learning organisation is also characterised by the connection to its community and the environment. In this dimension, the organisation shows that it is capable to scan and connect with its internal and external environment (Ali, 2012). The organisation acknowledges its dependence on its environment, and people are helped to see the impact of their work on the entire enterprise (Mbassana, 2014). Further, there is a link with the community through continuous interaction.

Organisations must recognize and understand its relationship with its internal and external environments. Externally, social and cultural issues such as related to members family and health; environmental (ecological) issues locally and globally; the markets in which it is serving, i.e., the need to develop new products, verge into new markets. All these require constant monitoring and adaptation and the need to develop and learn new skills.

Organisations therefore must connect with their environments in order increase their knowledge. Zellner and Fornald (2002) cited in Piercy identify three avenues through which an organisation can achieve learning through the environment: firstly, by recruiting new members into the organisation. This would enhance the introduction of new knowledge and ideas in the organisation. Secondly, by enhancing informal networks that

members of the organisation have with those who may be able to provide expertise, information and knowledge; and thirdly through the establishment of formal networks between linked organisation in order to achieve common objectives.

2.4.3.7 Strategic Leadership for Learning

The last dimension of a learning organisation is where leaders of an organisation are expected to model, champion and support learning. The organisation requires strategic leadership for learning to meet changes (Ali, 2012) and for business results (Sharifirad, 2011).

Leaders in a learning organisation are required to establish organisation learning as an essential component and priority of the organisations strategic action (Piercy, 2007). Leaders must take learning at the strategic level and ensure that it becomes part of the strategic vision of the organisation. Secondly, leaders in a learning organisation must institutionalize subsystems that encourage interaction among members of the organisation to encourage interactive learning (Piercy, 2007), for instance encouraging team working.

Leaders are also expected to promote the development of a culture that values learning and knowledge sharing and create an environment within which individuals feel safety, support and commitment from the organisation (Piercy, 2007). Resources and support must be provided by the organisation in support of learning of its members.

This study has adopted the Watkins & Marsick model of learning organisation as it helps to identify the learning activities in an organisation and it addresses the learning at all organisational levels. The model also captures most of the characteristics that describe a learning organisation and enables achieve the objective of this research through the diagnostic tool (the Dimension of Learning Organisation Questionnaire) which has the potential of gauging the perceptions of members of an organisation based on these seven dimensions at a particular time.

2.5   Mechanisms to Characterise a University as a Learning Organisation

The survival of today's universities depends on how they accept changes, how they improve their practices and how they can increase their competitiveness (Ali, 2012). Within the tertiary education context there is, prima facie, fertile ground for the

development of a learning organisation, since a university is both explicitly and implicitly built on notions relating to the importance of learning at an individual level (Ngesu et al., 2008). The idea of learning as the basis for and driver of development is well recognized within universities.

Universities are learning organisations (Nakpodia, 2009) and they are organisations devoted to the promotion of learning (Gailbraith, 1999). It is further suggested that the extent to which universities as institutions display characteristics of a learning organisation can be seen through the culture of their management, the structure of their goal-setting policies and administrative characteristics that have become associated with the term learning organisation.

According to Obasi and Motshegwa (2005) for a university to be recognised as a learning organisation it will focus its efforts on aspects such as vision, mission and core values that promote learning, having vibrant information and technology (ICT) infrastructure, the existence of vibrant libraries, staff training policy. Further, the introduction of prizes to members of staff for academic excellence, enhancing partnership programs in order to enhanced knowledge through collaborative initiatives, existence of an administrative system that provide effective communication channels amongst staff and students and finally, staff dedication in teaching (Obasi & Motshegwa, 2005) are important aspects for a university to be labelled as a learning organisation.

David (2011) asserts that a vision statement answers the question "What do we want to become?" while a mission statement is an enduring statement of purpose that distinguish one business from other similar firms. Universities like business organisations are expected to have vision and mission statements of their own, in order to develop commitment through a 'shared picture of the future' (Ngesu et al., 2008).

To become a learning organisation, therefore, there must be a vision of what might be possible, which can only happen as a result of learning at the whole organisational level (Ngesu et al., 2008). Developing a vision for the organisation together with members of the organisation, enables them to understand, share and contribute to the vision to become a reality. Universities must develop a vision toward which they must evolve in order to respond to the various pressures facing them (Obasi & Motshegwa, 2005), where

members are involved and empowered to create a single image of the organisation (Ngesu et al., 2008).

In the knowledge based economy, the existence of an effective Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure is a fundamental requirement for being a successful learning organisation (Obasi & Motshegwa, 2005). A university as a centre of learning, requires the availability of modern ICT equipment, support departments, uninterrupted internet connectivity and computer laboratories to enhance the learning of its members.

The heart of a university is in the availability of information for teaching and learning. The existence of a Library in a university is of ultimate importance to achieve its vision. According to Obasi & Motshegwa (2005), a university that aims to become a learning organisation, will have a robust library with a collection of volumes of books, pamphlets, periodicals, journals and electronic databases that can be accessed by members. These mechanisms can enhance the learning of members in the organisation as well as the learning of the organisation as a whole.

Armstrong (2009) defines training as involving the application of formal processes to impart knowledge and help people to acquire the skills necessary for them to perform their jobs satisfactorily. The existence of a training policy in an organisation is of fundamental importance to characterise it as a learning organisation. According to Obasi & Motshegwa (2005), a university as a learning organisation needs to have a training policy that enhances training activities such as: support for attendance of conferences (both local and international), in-house training and workshops for academic staff and e-learning workshops and seminars. As an institution of higher learning, training policy will enhance the quality of staff and enable the achievement of the vision of the university.

For universities to become learning organisations, there is need to come up with mechanisms or processes that enable the generation, facilitation and sharing of knowledge within and amongst members of the organisation.

2.6   Chapter Summary

The literature review has looked at various aspects of the concept of the learning organisation. A learning organisation can only be understood through demonstrating the basis of learning at the individual level, team level and organisational level.

Learning organisation models have agreed on aspects of continuous learning, sharing of knowledge, supporting learning, and developing system to connect with the environment as key to creating a learning organisation. This study adopted the learning organisation model as proposed by Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1997). The review emphasized that since universities are devoted to learning, they therefore must become learning organisations to cope with changes taking place in the environment. The universities must develop new forms of managing to survive in the highly turbulent environment in areas of ICT, Library services, existence of training policy and other mechanisms. The next chapter is the research methodology of the study.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses the study's research design. First, the research philosophy adopted for this study is discussed, followed by research approach, research strategy, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations and study time horizon. This chapter aims to show how the research questions of the study will be addressed.

3.2   Research Philosophy

The research philosophy is meant to guide the researcher to decide what should be studied and how results should be interpreted (Greener, 2008). It relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). This study adopted the interpretive philosophy in which organisations are only understood through perceptions of people about the organisation (Greener, 2008). Further, Saunders et al. (2012) posit that the interpretive philosophy helps researcher to make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the aim was to interpret, through the perceptions of people working there; if the studied institution is a learning organisation.

3.3   Research Approach

Determining a research approach enables the researcher to take a more informed decision about the research design which is more than simply the methods by which data are collected and analysed (Gombachika, 2009). This study adopted the deductive approach to research, which involves the examination of an argument and the evaluations of the resultant conclusions (Gombachika, 2009). Further, such a deductive approach sort of enables the research to work from the 'whole to part'.

This study looked at the broad concept of learning organisation and narrows on the possibility of an institution like UNIMA being described as a learning organisation based on selected criteria. The study was not necessarily intended to contribute to theory building, but use a pre-developed model and data generation instrument, hence the deductive approach.

3.4   Research Method

This study adopted the survey approach which is usually associated with a deductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2012), since involves the use of pre-developed model and questionnaire. The deductive approach does not intend to build on theory but to test the applicability of the model in an institutional setting (Saunders et al., 2012). This study adopted the Watkins and Marsick model and also the Dimensions of Learning Organisation Questionnaire to apply to UNIMA. Based on the research questions, the study used a questionnaire (Appendix A) to collect data.

The use of questionnaires in a survey is a popular method as they allow the collection of standardized data from a sizable population in a highly economical way, allowing easy comparison (Saunders et al., 2012). The questionnaire in this study enabled the researcher to examine the perceptions of academic members of staff of UNIMA as a learning organisation.

However, the survey method may have errors due to non-response, i.e. the chosen survey individuals are often a random sample, such that the people who choose to respond on the survey may be different from those who do not respond, thus biasing the estimates (Gombachika, 2009).

3.5   Data Collection and Analysis

This section discusses the population and sample of study, data collection methods used and how the data collected were analysed.

3.5.1   Population and Sample

The target population of this study were all academic members of staff from the University of Malawi's four constituent colleges; Chancellor College, College of Medicine, Kamuzu College of Nursing (KCN) and the Polytechnic. The numbers of academic members of staff from each of the constituent colleges was obtained from the University Registrar's office. A total of 691 academic staff members were employed at the time the study.

In determining the sample for the study, the Kerjcie & Morgan's (1970) graph/table were used, and a total of 247 academic members of staff was selected as sample. The assumed

confidence level for the determining the sample is 0.5. Further, using the sample size calculator from Creative Survey System (n.d.) the sample size of 247 was confirmed.

The sample design for the study used was probability sampling, which is based on the concept of random selection (Kothari, 2004). Using the probability sampling ensures that every item of the population (universe) has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample (Dawson, 2002; Kothari, 2004). For this study, the stratified random sampling method was used to identify respondents to the questionnaire.

Stratified sampling is used if a population from which a sample is to be drawn does not constitute a homogenous group, in order to obtain a representative sample (Kothari, 2004). The academic members of staff in this study were drawn from the four constituent colleges of UNIMA, representing a diverse range of academic focus from each of the colleges. Further, Kothari (2004) posits that in stratified sampling, the population is divided into several sub-populations, from which the items are selected to constitute a sample.

In this study, the population was divided into two sub-sets, first, where respondents were sampled based on college and at faculty level where selection of respondents was done at random. This stratification was meant to give each relevant category of academic staff a chance to be represented (Chikhwenda, 2005) as equal allocation of the population is required in this research.

However, the stratified sampling method may make it difficult for the researcher to decide relevant criterion for stratification. For instance, in this study, the researcher considered the possibility of sub-sets of the population based on their individual academic specialization, qualification and type of employment contract.

The first sub-set of the population of academic members of staff was based on the constituent colleges as depicted in Table 3.1. From a population of 691 academic staff of UNIMA, Chancellor College has a population of 260, College of Medicine 142, KCN 79 and Polytechnic 210. Further, the percentage representation of the population for each college was calculated for purposes of determining a sample representative of the said population for each constituent college. Finally, from the total population sample of 247,

each college's sample was determined using their percent rate of population i.e. 93, 51, 27 and 74 respectively.

Table 3.1: Respondent Sample Size at College Level

COLLEGE	COLLEGE POPULATION	% OF POPULATION	SAMPLE AT COLLEGE LEVEL
Chancellor College	260	38	94
College of Medicine	142	21	52
KCN	79	11	27
Polytechnic	210	30	74
TOTAL	**691**	**100**	**247**

The second sub-set of the sample was based on faculties within the colleges (Table 3.2). A total of 13 faculties were represented across the UNIMA colleges. Random sampling was used at this level.

Table 3.2: Respondent Sample Size at Faculty Level

COLLEGE/FACULTY		POPULATION/ SAMPLE FRAME	% FACULTY POPULATION	FACULTY SAMPLE
Chancellor College faculties	Education	31	12	11
	Humanities	75	29	27
	Law	19	7	7
	Science	78	30	28
	Social science	57	22	21
College of Medicine		142	100	52
KCN		79	100	27
Polytechnic Faculty	Applied Sciences	64	31	23
	Built Environment	32	15	11
	Commerce	28	13	10
	Education and Media Studies	40	19	14
	Engineering	46	22	16
	TOTAL	**691**		**247**

3.5.2   Data Collection Methods

In this study, both primary and secondary data were collected. According to Kothari (2004), primary data are those which are collected afresh and thus happen to be original in character. The use of questionnaire in this study enabled the researcher to answer the objective of the study of examining the perceptions of academic staff of their institution as a learning organisation. Questionnaires are important in collection of primary data because they are low cost, free from interview bias and provide adequate time to respondent to give out well thought responses (Kothari, 2004).

However, to minimize problems of low rate of return and slowness of response associated with the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted to analyse the usability of the questionnaire for this study.

The questionnaire was distributed to academic members of staff through institutional internal mail through faculty heads to respondents at institutions within the locality of the

study, i.e., Polytechnic, College of Medicine (COM) and Kamuzu College of Nursing (KCN), Blantyre Campus and Chancellor College, Zomba. Other questionnaires to other respondents were sent through emails obtained from the relevant institutions at the request of the respondents.

3.5.2.1 Primary Data Collection Instrument

The Dimensions of Learning Organisation Questionnaire (DLOQ) developed by Watkins and Marsick (1997) is the instrument that was been used to measure the characteristics of a learning organisation (Ali, 2012). The use of the DLOQ in this study enabled the researcher to examine academic staff perceptions of UNIMA as having characteristics of a learning organisation based on Watkins and Marsick's (1993) seven dimension of a learning organisation.

The DLOQ includes 43 items that describe practices (Khosrow & Zaidatol, 2012) at individual level (13 items), team level (6 items) and organisational level (24 items) to create a learning organisation. Each statement was measured on a Likert Scale of 1 – 6 ranging from '1' for 'almost never' to '6' for almost always.

The DLOQ has been compared with other instruments in terms of depth, scope and reliability (Ali, 2012; Leufven et al., 2015), and has been found to meet the three criteria of comprehensiveness, depth and validity. Further it also integrates important attributes of the learning organisation.

3.5.2.2 Secondary Data Collection Methods

Kothari (2004) defines secondary data as those which have already been collected by someone else. In this study, secondary data was collected from the organisations documents including UNIMA's Strategic Plan (2012 -2017) and policy documents. Secondary data provided information on employee statistics that enable to determine sample size. Further, respondent contacts were also obtained through College Registrar's office and Faculty Deans for those requesting questionnaire through email.

3.5.3   Data Analysis

Out of the 247 questionnaires distributed, 110 questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a 44.5% response rate. The response rate of the study can be said to be below average. However, the possible reason for such response rate has been

explained in the limitations section below (section 3.6). Data was analysed using the SPSS statistical package version 20.0. Data analysis methods include descriptive statistics, cross tabulations and chi-square test of significance.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In the study, firstly, access to collect data from respondents was obtained from the University Registrar's office, highlighting that confidentiality of the organisation as well as respondent will be maintained. This study observed the following ethical principles: integrity and objectivity of researcher, privacy and informed consent of those taking part, ensuring confidentiality of data and maintenance of anonymity of those taking part.

3.7 Limitations of Study

The main limitation of the study was the inconsistency of academic calendar of the Constituent Colleges. For instance, at KCN and Polytechnic, academic staff were in the process of administering examinations and it was a challenge to find respondents that were willing to give time to the questionnaire. College of Medicine and Chancellor College were on semester break.

Further, bureaucratic/hierarchical systems posed a challenge to collect data. For instance, in the case of COM, some of its departments are located within the Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital. This required the researcher to obtain approval to collect data from the Hospital Administration despite the research not being related to activities of the hospital. Further, it was difficult to distinguish between academic and medical staff within these hospital departments. This led to a very low response rate at this college.

Another limitation is that the study only focused on academic staff, rather than all categories of staff of the university. This may not provide a full picture of employee perceptions in the university since views of only one category of staff were sought.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research design of the study. The study adopted the interpretive philosophy which goes together with a deductive research approach. The research method used for data collection was quantitative, using a questionnaire as a primary data collection tool to a sample of 247. Stratified sampling was used and respondents were selected using random selection. Data analysis methods used included

descriptive statistics and cross tabulations. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study were also discussed in this chapter. The next chapter presents the results and discussion of the study findings.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.1   Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the results of this study. First, a description of the characteristics of respondents will be presented, followed by findings on the perceptions of academic staff, differences in perceptions and the mechanisms put in place by UNIMA.

4.2   Characteristics of Respondents

Out of the 247 questionnaires administered, a total of 110 fully completed questionnaires were collected from the respondents, representing 44.5% response rate. Figures 2 to 6 presents the characteristics of respondents in the study.
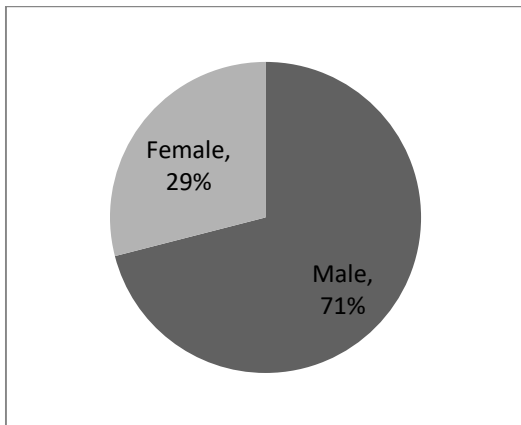
Figure 2: Gender of Respondents
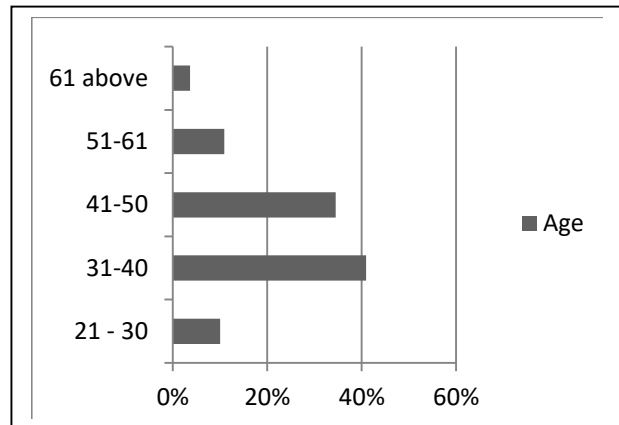
Figure 3: Age of Respondents

According to Figure 2, there were more males (n=78; 71%) and females represented 29% (n=32) of the respondents. Regarding the age of respondents, 50% were between the ages of 21 and 40 years, 35% between 41 and 50 years, while the remaining 15% were aged 51 years and above (Figure 3).
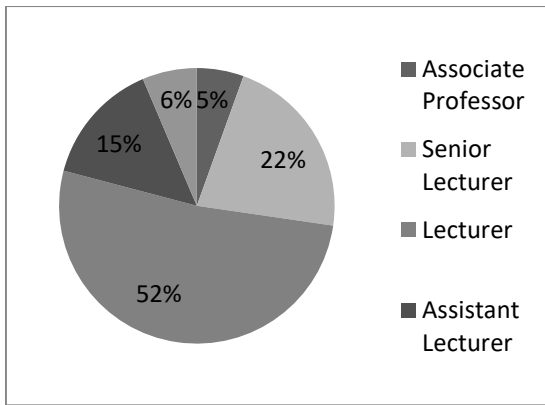
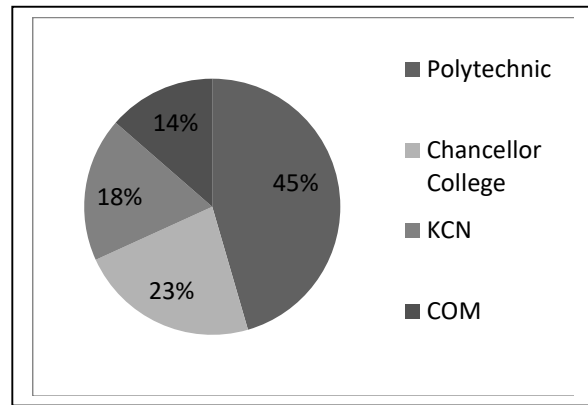**Figure 4: Academic Position of Respondents**

Figure 5: Constituent College

In terms of academic position, figure 4 indicates that there were more lecturers (n =57; 51.8%), with the remaining respondents being Associate Professors (n=6; 5.5%), Senior Lecturers (n=24; 21.8%), Assistant Lecturers (n=16; 14.5%) and Staff Associates (n=7; 6.4%). Further, figure 5 shows that a large number of respondents were from Polytechnic (n=50; 45.5%), followed by Chancellor College 22.7% (n=25), KCN 18.2% (n=20) with College of Medicine having the lowest number of respondents (n=15; 13.6%).
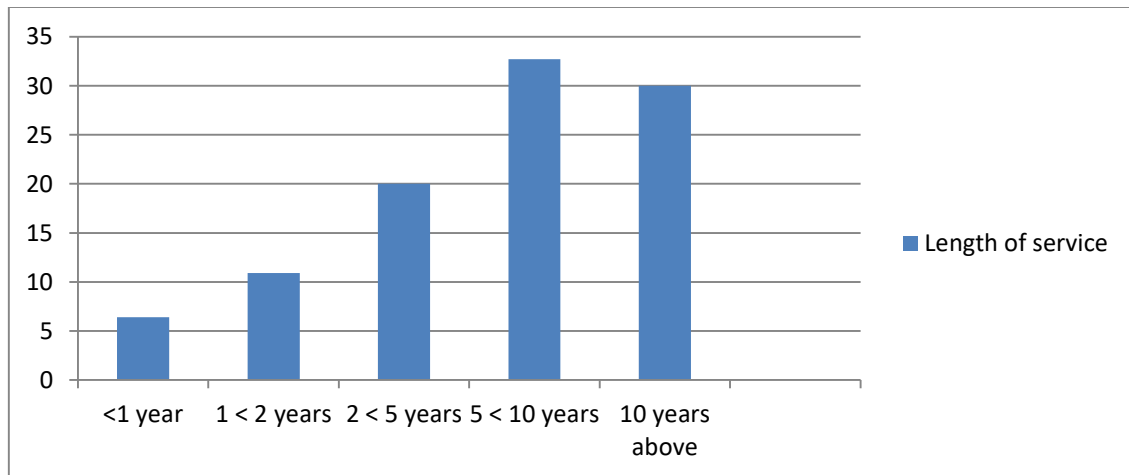
Figure 6: Length of Service

Regarding length of service, 62.7% (n =69) had worked for UNIMA for 5 to more than 10 years, while 39.9% (n=34) had worked for 1 year to less than 5 years and the remaining 6.4% (n =8) had worked for less than one year in UNIMA (Figure 6).

4.3   Academic Staff Perceptions of UNIMA as a Learning Organisation

This section presents and discusses the study findings on the perceptions of academic staff of UNIMA under each of the seven dimensions that characterise a learning

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organisation. As the Watkins & Marsick (1993) model suggests, learning in a learning organisation takes place at three levels (individual, team and organisational). Therefore the discussion will present each dimension under the relevant level of learning.

4.3.1   Academic Staff Perceptions at the Individual Level Learning in UNIMA

The study attempted to examine the perceptions of academic staff regarding individual learning practices in UNIMA. Continuous Learning and Inquiry and Dialogue are the two dimensions under individual learning.

4.3.1.1   Continuous Learning

Table 4.2 presents the results of the study on the perceptions of the respondents regarding practices related to continuous learning. The results show that academic staff perceive that only three aspects of continuous learning are practiced in UNIMA.

Table 4.1 Continuous Learning

Learning Aspect	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost Never	Mean	SD
In my organisation, people identify skills they need for future work tasks	57%	29%	14%	4.39	1.408
In my organisation, people are given time to support learning	57%	29%	14%	4.35	1.405
In my organisation, people are rewarded for learning	50%	34%	16%	4.29	1.523
In my organisation, people help each other learn	46%	38%	16%	4.09	1.411
In my organisation, people openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them	37%	50%	13%	4.04	1.361
In my organisation, people can get money and other resources to support their learning	35%	39%	26%	3.90	1.568
In my organisation, people view problems in their work as an opportunity to learn	26%	52%	22%	3.67	1.389

n=110

On the practice 'people identify skills they need for future work task', 57% of academic staff indicated that this practice takes place in UNIMA. The results could mean that to an extent, academic staff are enabled by UNIMA to identify the skills they require to perform future works tasks. For instance, members identify areas that need improvement in

teaching during assessment meetings (e.g. to assist weak students during the next academic year).

Regarding the practice 'people are given time to support learning' 57% of academic staff indicated that this practice does take place in UNIMA. Based on UNIMA's Conditions of Service, academic staff are entitled to leave for further training (UNIMA Conditions of Service). However, only staff that are on permanent employment and have been confirmed in their appointment are given time for training. This could be the possible reason why only just above 50% of academic staff perceives that this practice takes place.

However, only 26% indicated that the practice that people view problems in their work as an opportunity to learn takes place in UNIMA. These results could be attributed to the absence of a performance appraisal system in UNIMA. Performance appraisal is a process that enables the assessment of past performance and setting of new performance targets (ABE Manual).   In UNIMA, the absence of appraisal processes could contribute to the failure of staff to view the problems encountered in their work as a learning point since they do not get feedback on their performance.

The results of this study are in line with the results of Abbasi et al. (2012) in Tarbiat Modares University in Iran and Ali (2012) at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) who both found that faculty members perceived continuous learning to take place at the moderate level. Abbasi et al. (2012) indicated that faculty members indicated that they engage in continuous learning opportunities to achieve personal and professional growth and to decrease the gap between their current and desirable situation.

Although the results of this study seem to suggest that to some extent, practices of continuous learning do take place in UNIMA, they nonetheless leave a lot to be desired in terms of characterising UNIMA as a learning organisation.

4.3.1.2 Inquiry and Dialogue

Regarding inquiry and dialogue, Table 4.3 indicates that out of the six practices, only two are perceived by academic staff to be practiced in UNIMA.

Table 4.2: Inquiry and Dialogue

Learning Aspect	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost Never	Mean	SD
In my organisation, people treat each other with respect	54%	41%	5%	4.47	1.155
In my organisation, people are encouraged to ask why regardless of rank.	53%	27%	20%	4.24	1.659
In my organisation, whenever people state their views, they also ask what others think.	45%	41%	14%	3.99	1.468
In my organisation people listen to others views before speaking	42%	46%	12%	4.13	1.264
In my organisation, people give open and honest feedback to each other.	34%	44%	22%	3.79	1.563
In my organisation, people spend time building trust with each other	26%	54%	20%	3.72	1.342

n=110

Regarding the practices 'people treat each other with respect' (54%) and 'people are encouraged to ask why regardless of rank' (53%) of academic staff perceive that these practices take place in UNIMA. UNIMA has a policy statement regarding issues of discrimination in its Conditions of Employment which stipulates on the equality of all members of staff in UNIMA. Further, academic staff are encouraged within the same conditions, to question controlling officers on any issues affecting them (Sec. 4f).

However, the aspect 'people spend time building trust with each other' had only 26% of academic staff indicating that this practice takes place in UNIMA. This result may mean that the culture of being open to each other and providing feedback is not enhanced in UNIMA.

In a similar study by Ali (2012) at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), the result showed a moderate level perception. According to Marsick and Watkins (1993) Inquiry and Dialogue is about changing the culture of learning to support questioning, feedback and experimentation of members. However, it seems this is not the case in UNIMA since academic members of staff have indicated that seeking others views and ideas, getting feedback and building trust do take place in UNIMA but to a lesser extent.

In summary, the results of the study have indicated that less than half of the practices relating to individual learning do take place in the UNIMA. Ali (2012) asserted that an organisation can become a learning organisation when individuals in it realise that they are learning. In UNIMA, this seems not the case; therefore, these results are not sufficient for UNIMA to be characterised as a learning organisation.

4.3.2 Academic Staff Perceptions of Team Level Learning in UNIMA

Team level learning in a learning organisation is described by practices in the dimension of collaboration and team learning as presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.3: Collaboration and Team Learning

Learning Aspect	Almost Always	Somewhat	Almost Never	Mean	SD
In my organisation, teams/groups treat members as equals, regardless of rank, culture or other differences	54%	32%	14%	4.25	1.417
In my organisation, teams/groups focus both on the group tasks and on how well the group is working	41%	44%	15%	3.97	1.430
In my organisation, teams/groups revise their thinking as a result of group discussions or information collected.	39%	41%	20%	4.03	1.493
In my organisation, teams/groups have the freedom to adapt their goals as needed	36%	50%	14%	3.99	1.378
In my organisation, teams/groups are rewarded for the achievement as a team/group	31%	39%	30%	3.53	1.595
In my organisation, teams/groups are confident that the organisation will act on their recommendations	25%	43%	32%	3.35	1.589

n=110

According to the results, only one practice out of six has just above half (54%) of academic staff indicating that the aspect 'teams treat members as equals regardless of rank, culture or other differences' is practiced in the organisation. For instance, during curriculum development, members are placed into teams based on their area of specialization. In these teams, there are members of different academic ranks, i.e. Professors, senior lectures and assistant lecturers. Equal treatment is given to all team members regardless of their academic rank.

However, for the other practices, responses indicating that practices of collaboration and team learning take place in the organisation ranged from 41% to 25%, the lowest being the practice 'teams are confident that the organisation will act on their recommendations'. The results could be because of UNIMA's centralized structure where all decisions are made at the University Office. For instance, regarding assessment of grades, the final approval is made by University Senate, while the lower level (i.e. departments) will just pass over the grades to Faculty, College then the University Senate. Going up the hierarchy, chances of having recommendations taken on board become slim since most decisions are made at the top.

Team learning is an essential ingredient in the learning organisation concept. According to Piercy (2007) team learning serves as an important catalyst providing individuals within organisations opportunities to interact, exchange ideas and experiment. However, Mbassana (2014) asserts that it may happen that when individuals learn they fail to share the results. This seems to be the case in UNIMA according to the results.

The results seem to be inconsistent with past research by, Ali (2012) who found a relatively moderate level on the team learning dimension but are in line with Abbasi et al. (2012) where team learning scored the lowest. The results seem to suggest that in UNIMA, learning practices at team level do not take place at a level to characterise UNIMA as a learning organisation.

4.3.3 Academic Staff Perceptions of Organisational Level Learning in UNIMA

At the organisational level learning, academic staff were asked to rate the organisation based on four learning dimensions of Embedded Systems, Empowerment, Systems Connection and Strategic Leadership. The results of the learning practices indicated a very low perception by academic staff to warrant UNIMA to have characteristics of a learning organisation.

4.3.3.1 Embedded Systems

Responses ranged from 38% (organisation maintains an up-to-date database of employee skills) to 24% (organisation makes its lessons learned available to all its employees) regarding practices of embedded systems taking place in UNIMA (Table 4.5). The results clearly indicate a very low rating by academic staff on practices of embedded systems taking place in UNIMA.

Table 4.4: Embedded Systems

Learning Aspect	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost never	Mean	SD
My organisation maintains an up-to-date base of employee skills	38%	33%	29%	3.78	1.588
My organisation uses two-way communication on a regular basis such as suggestion schemes, electronic bulletin boards or town hall/open meetings	31%	47%	22%	3.71	1.492
My organisation enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily	32%	36%	32%	3.67	1.557
My organisation creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance	30%	43%	27%	3.50	1.652
My organisation measures the results of the time and resource spent on training	26%	33%	42%	3.18	1.638
My organisation makes its lesson learned available to all employees	24%	39%	37%	3.31	1.663

n=110

The results seem to suggest that UNIMA cannot be characterised as a learning organisation since members felt that there are no sufficient systems which enable employees to learn from past mistakes and measure results; lessons learned are not shared with the employees and communication between employees and the organisation is limited.

For instance, the performance management system is still in draft form, which could be a reason for such results. According to Armstrong, (2009) performance management systems emphasises development and the initiation of self-managed learning plans for employees in an organisation. Without such a system, members cannot learn to improve their performance for their own benefit as well as that of the organisation.

4.3.3.2 Empowerment

Academic staff were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceive UNIMA as an organisation that empowers them. The results are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.5: Empowerment

Learning Aspect	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost Never	Mean	SD
My organisation invites people to contribute to the organisations vision	50%	39%	11%	4.32	1.407
My organisation gives people choices in their work assignments	36%	34%	30%	3.81	1.541
My organisation recognises people for taking initiative	35%	33%	32%	3.66	1.693
My organisation gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work	31%	41%	28%	3.59	1.546
My organisation builds visions across different levels and groups	30%	39%	31%	3.51	1.596
My organisation supports employees who take calculated risks	23%	25%	52%	3.04	1.659

n=110

The results indicate that only one practice 'invites people to contribute to the organisations vision' had 50% of academic staff indicate that this takes place in UNIMA. The ratings for the rest of the practices of empowerment ranged from 36% to 23% with aspect the 'organisation supports employees who take calculated risks' scoring the lowest. The results seem to suggest that empowerment is not a common practice in UNIMA, since more than two-thirds of academic staff perceive that this practice does not take place. This could be the case since UNIMA has a centralized hierarchical structure where most decisions are made at the University central office. Leufven et al. (2015) asserted that previous research has attributed low scores on empowerment to organisations that display a centralized hierarchical structure where lower level employees may have limited access to information and authority to make decisions. Having a centralized structure constrains the ability of local management to determine what is best for their part of the business (Armstrong, 1999).

4.3.3.3 Systems Connection

This dimension involves connecting the organisation to its environment both internal and external (Ali 2012; Dima et al., 2009). Table 4.7 shows the results in relation to systems connection dimension of a learning organisation as perceived by academic staff of UNIMA.

Table 4.6: Systems Connection

Learning Aspect	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost never	Mean	SD
My organisation encourages people to think from a global perspective	42%	42%	16%	3.92	1.521
My organisation helps employees balance work and family	33%	34%	33%	3.55	1.684
My organisation encourages people to get answers from across the organisation when solving problems	30%	43%	27%	3.58	1.511
My organisation encourages everyone to bring the customers view into the decision-making process	27%	39%	34%	3.42	1.570
My organisation works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs	26%	53%	21%	3.80	1.451
My organisation considers the impact of decisions on employee morale	24%	29%	47%	3.13	1.671

n=110

The results indicate that academic staff perceived that all practices of systems connection do not take place in UNIMA to an extent to characterise it as a learning organisation. On the aspect 'encourage people to think from a global perspective' only 42% of respondents agree that this practice takes place. However, such low result could be attributed to lack of modern information technology systems in UNIMA such as internet connectivity. Internet is an essential ingredient to remain connected with the world. In UNIMA, academic members indicated that slow internet connection hinders them from connecting to the world. Further programs of collaborating with other universities seem to be taking place at a minimal level.

The aspect 'UNIMA considers the impact of decisions on employees' had only 24% indicating that this practice does take place in the organisation.

4.3.3.4 Strategic Leadership
Table 4.8 presents the results of the dimension of strategic leadership.

Table 4.7: Strategic Leadership

Learning Aspect	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost never	Mean	SD
Leaders generally support requests for learning opportunities and training	51%	40%	9%	4.35	1.411
Leaders empower others to help carry out the organisations vision	30%	49%	21%	3.85	1.479
Leaders ensure that the organisations actions are consistent with its values	33%	44%	23%	3.77	1.542
Leaders continually look for opportunities to learn	33%	47%	20%	3.69	1.590
Leaders share up to date information with employees about competitors, industry trends and organisational directions	28%	46%	26%	3.65	1.542
Leaders mentor and coach those they lead	27%	37%	36%	3.45	1.640

n=110

On the aspect 'leaders support requests for learning opportunities and training', the results indicate that 51% of the respondents perceive that this practice does take place in UNIMA. Heads of Departments, Deans and the Registrar usually give approval and support for relevant training programs for members, including further studies, both local and international conferences and workshops. However, only 27% of respondents indicated that they perceive the aspect 'leaders mentor and coach those they lead' to be practiced in UNIMA. The results could be attributed to that there is no open policy in UNIMA that encourages leaders to mentor and coach fellow members of staff.

The results leave a lot to be desired regarding the role of leaders in UNIMA to enhance learning of staff members since leaders are expected to demonstrate the importance of learning in the organisation by supporting, empowering and championing learning. According to (Piercy, 2007), leaders are required to establish organisation learning as an essential component and priority of the organisations strategic action. However, this seems not to be the case in UNIMA. In summary, the results seem to suggest that at the organisational level learning, UNIMA is not doing enough to encourage and enhance learning. These results therefore lead to the conclusion that UNIMA is not fully a learning organisation.

4.4 Differences in Perceptions of Academic Staff Based On Their Characteristics

Since respondents were presenting their perceptions on UNIMA as a learning organisation based on their experiences in their respective constituent colleges, further analysis was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in perceptions amongst respondents based on their characteristics. Table 4.9 presents the results of this analysis which show that there were significant differences in respondents' perceptions of UNIMA as a learning organisation based on the academic staff members Constituent College.

Table 4.8 Differences in Perception Based On Respondents' Characteristics

Dimension	Gender	Age	Academic Position	Constituent college	Length of service
Continuous Learning	.055	.493	.457	.001*	.096
Inquiry and Dialogue	.298	.148	.271	.000*	.071
Collaboration and Team Learning	.104	.262	.270	.000*	.292
Embedded System	.080	.009	.761	.000*	.012
Empowerment	.160	.450	.459	.000*	.017
Systems Connection	.595	.074	.674	.000*	.066
Strategic Leadership	.353	.226	.789	.000*	.350

p*<0.001

In order to present the extent of the differences between the constituent colleges, Appendix B provides a summary of the response ratings on the differences on each of the seven dimensions of learning.

Regarding differences in the practices of Continuous Learning, all (100%) of academic staff at KCN indicated that this practice takes place, at Chancellor College 64% of the academic staff agreed that the practice takes place while at Polytechnic it was 54% and at COM 53.3%. The results therefore, suggest that academic members of staff of KCN perceive that at their college, all practices pertaining to continuous learning do take place unlike in the other colleges and these differences according to Table 4.9 are statistically significant.

At the team level learning practices (Collaboration and Team Learning), all academic staff of KCN indicated that this practice takes place, with below average rating from Chancellor College (36%), Polytechnic (36%) and COM 20%. Again according to Table 4.9, the results indicate a significant difference between the colleges.

On differences at the organisational level learning, the practices of strategic leadership had higher ratings compared with the other. At KCN, again all (100%) of academic staff indicatd that this practice takes place, at COM 73.3% while at Chancellor College 68% and Polytechnic had the lower ratings where only 48% perceived that this practice takes place. These results indicated significant differences in perceptions of academic staff in the constituent colleges.

Similar results were obtained in all the other dimensions where KCN had all staff indicate that the practices of a learning organisation do take place (Appendix B).These results could mean that only KCN has the characteristics of a learning organisation. The possible explanation of these differences could be that each of the constituent colleges has developed their own Strategic Plans, the basis of which is the UNIMA Strategic plan (2012). However, the focus of the plans in terms of priorities and resource allocations could be different in the respective colleges.

4.5   Mechanisms of a University as a Learning Organisation

This section presents and discusses the study findings relating to the mechanisms put in place by UNIMA to characterise it as a learning organisation. Table 4.10 provides a summary of the mechanisms:

Table 4.9 Mechanisms of Learning Organisation

Mechanism	Strongly agree/agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree /disagree
Organisation has a library that enable members to learn	76%	10%	14%
Organisation enhances learning through collaboration with others	73%	14%	13%
Organisations training policy supports learning of members	67%	21%	12%
Organisation guides members towards its vision, mission and core values	62%	21%	17%
Organisation has open systems of communication that enables members to learn	62%	19%	19%
Members are awarded for their achievement	59%	24%	17%
Organisation has a vibrant ICT infrastructure that enable members to learn	37%	18%	45%

n=110

The results indicate that the mechanism that UNIMA has a library that enable members to learn scored highest 76%, followed by learning through collaboration 73%; training policy that supports learning of members 67%; guides members towards vision, mission and core values 62%, open systems of communication that enables members to learn; and members are awarded for their achievement 59%. However, only 37% agree to that UNIMA has a vibrant ICT infrastructure that enables members to learn.

In today's world, the existence of an effective ICT infrastructure is a fundamental requirement for being a successful learning organisation (Obasi & Motshwegwa, 2005). However, this is not the case in the UNIMA as just one-third of respondents agree to the

existence of a vibrant ICT infrastructure. This result suggests that the learning of members is suffocated due to lack of proper ICT infrastructure.

Form the follow-up questions regarding this mechanism, members stated issues such as lack of modern computers, intermittent internet connections as some of the reasons for the low rating of this mechanism. For instance, at The Polytechnic, Faculty of Commerce, members indicate that for over five years they have not had an ICT technician to attend to their technology needs, intermittent internet connectivity with breaks for up to a month, and usually have their budget to purchase modern ICT equipment (including laptops for members) rejected.

On the other hand, academic members seem to agree on a higher level (76%) that UNIMA has a library that enables the learning of its members. Each of the constituent college of UNIMA has vibrant Library boasting large volumes of books, journals and e-catalogue system. According to Obasi and Motshwegwa (2005) a university can be characterised as a learning organisation if it has a vibrant library to enhance learning. Access to the library by academic staff is not limited and materials are updated frequently. Based on the results, UNIMA can be said to be moving towards becoming a learning organisation.

67% of academic staff indicated that UNIMA has a training policy that enables the learning of its members. It is interesting to note that at the time of the study, the training policy was still in its draft form. Based on the Conditions of Service, UNIMA has only stipulated procedures for approving and supporting leave for further training of academic members. However, other training mechanisms such as induction, on-the-job training and development, workshops, peer review, participation in college/departmental and cross institutional groups, participation in external committees and professional bodies, self-directed study, self-reflection, shadowing, coaching, mentoring and undertaking new roles and responsibilities have only been highlighted in the draft training policy. This could be the reason for a lower rating on this mechanism.

Regarding mechanisms put in place for UNIMA to be characterised as a learning organisation, it can be said that UNIMA is on the right path, though it cannot be fully characterised as one. There is need for continuous improvement in areas that as a university will enable UNIMA to become a learning organisation.

4.5   Chapter Summary

The chapter has discussed and presented the study findings. The results have shown that in almost all dimensions that characterise a learning organisation, UNIMA is falling short. There is however a slight indication that in the dimensions of continuous learning and inquiry and dialogue, there are some aspects that are being practiced in UNIMA. In addition, there are significant differences between academic staff perceptions regarding UNIMA as a learning organisation based on their constituent college. Further, the results have indicated that a number of mechanisms such as library, faculty collaboration with other universities and open systems of communication are already in place in UNIMA and that members are aware of their existence. The next chapter draws conclusions and makes recommendations from the study.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the University of Malawi (UNIMA) could be regarded as a learning organisation. This chapter draws conclusions and makes recommendations for UNIMA based on the study findings. In addition, suggestions for further research are presented.

5.2 Summary of the Study Findings

The main aim of this study was to examine the extent to which UNIMA is a learning organisation using the Watkins and Marsick (1993) model. Firstly, the study specifically examined the perceptions of academic staff of UNIMA as a learning organisation. The study findings indicated that aspects of a learning organisation are not practiced in UNIMA at a level that can characterise UNIMA as a learning organisation. Further, the findings indicated significant differences between perceptions of academic staff based on constituent college.

The second objective of the study was to investigate the mechanisms that UNIMA as a university engages in to enhance its status of becoming a learning organisation. The findings of the study were that mechanisms such as vibrant libraries, training policy, collaboration, systems of sharing organisation vision and open communication systems are already in place. However, there is still more that must be done by UNIMA to maintain effective ICT infrastructure.

5.3 Conclusion

The first conclusion emerging from this study is that UNIMA is not a full learning organisation. Based on the findings of the study, there were very low ratings in all but two of the core dimensions that characterises a learning organisation.

In-depth analysis of the results indicated that there could be some factors that led to such results. It seemed that in UNIMA there are policies that are restrictive in enabling members to learn as individual as well as teams. At the time of study, most policies that

would enhance learning in UNIMA were still at the draft level e.g. the Training Policy and the Performance Management System Policy.

The second conclusion drawn from this study is that UNIMA's learning efforts are not consistent between its constituent colleges. There are no concerted efforts to harmonize learning activities in UNIMA. The results from each Constituent College of UNIMA seem to indicate contrary perceptions of academic staff based on their membership of the college. This can be attributed to different management styles in the colleges since each college have their own strategic plans.

The final conclusion from the study is based on the mechanism put in place by UNIMA as a university to characterise it as a learning organisation. UNIMA has so far established systems that enable learning of all members in the organisation. However, factors such as lack of resources, poor funding from Government, and lack of integration between departments are hindering the full implementation of the mechanisms for learning in UNIMA.

The overall conclusion drawn from the study, suggest that UNIMA cannot be characterised fully as a learning organisation but is on the right path to becoming a learning organisation.

5.4   Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to UNIMA as it transforms itself in the turbulent environment to become a learning organisation:

5.4.1   Promote Learning Culture: UNIMA should enhance and encourage learning culture in the organisation at all levels. Armstrong (2008) defines a learning culture as one in which learning is recognized by top management, line managers and employees generally as an essential organisational process to which they are committed and in which they engage continuously. Learning culture promotes learning since it is recognized at all levels of the organisation. Employees become committed and engaged to the learning continuously if they are supported from the top.

Strategies for enhancing learning culture in UNIMA can include:

- empowering employees – so they can manage their work within certain boundaries (Armstrong, 2008)

- encourage employees to network

- coach and mentor employees in order to draw out talents

- provide a supportive learning environment

5.4.2   Implementation of policies: UNIMA must ensure the implementation of policies that promote learning in the organisation, most of which are still at draft level. Implementation should include holding workshops both at college and faculty levels, seminars and problems solving teams. Members will be encouraged to learn when they clearly are aware what form of support the organisation will provide for learning and what the organisation expects of them.

5.4.3   Share organisation's vision at all levels: UNIMA should find new ways of articulating the vision for the future. UNIMA must adopt a facilitative style of management (Armstrong, 2008) in which responsibility for decision-making is ceded as far as possible to employees. Members should be made aware of the direction the organisation is moving, since many seem to be unsure. Workshop, seminars and conferences organised for staff members could enhance this knowledge.

5.4.4   Manage Change: UNIMA should facilitate change processes that aim at transforming the organisation (UNIMA Strategic Plan, 2012) into a learning organisation. These processes must ensure changes are institutionalized in the organisation, to benefit both the organisation and individual members. Change management activities may include improving information exchange within UNIMA, increase efficiency of ICT infrastructure and develop new learning strategies e.g. e-learning.

5.5   Suggestions for Future Research

This study was aimed at assessing perceptions of academic staff only. Further research may require assessing the perceptions of other staff in UNIMA, since for UNIMA to be a learning organisation, it requires the concerted efforts of all its members of staff, who must all learn together.

Further, there is need to consider the impact of learning organisation practices on the performance of the organisation as well as of individuals. This study focused only on perceptions. However, there is need to examine how the practices of a learning organisation can impact on the performance of UNIMA.

There was an interesting finding regarding differences amongst the constituent colleges. This could be a researchable area in order to examine learning strategies being used in the constituent colleges in order to identify the basis of the differences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Academic Members of Staff of UNIMA

MALAWI POLYTECHNIC

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACADEMIC MEMBERS OF STAFF OF UNIMA

Dear Respondent,

My name is Joyce Masamba an MBA student at the University of Malawi, The Polytechnic. This survey is a part of my dissertation work for completion of the MBA. The study has been directed at academic members of staff of UNIMA. The aim of the study is to analyse the extent to which UNIMA can be regarded as a learning organisation.

Your responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of completing this academic work. Your decision to participate in this study is entirely voluntary. Filling this questionnaire will take you at least 20 minutes.

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tick in the box that best describes you and fill in blank spaces as required.
1) **Gende**r: Male   [   ]   Female   [   ]

2) **Age**:   21- 30 years   [   ];   31- 40 years [   ];   41-50 years [   ]

           51 -60 years   [   ];   61 years above [   ]

3) **Academic position**:
   i.   Professor   [   ]

   ii. Associate Professor[   ]

   iii. Senior Lecturer   [   ]

   iv. Lecturer   [   ]

   v.   Assistant Lecturer [   ]

   vi. Staff Associate   [   ]

   vii. Other:

        _____

4) **Constituent College of UNIMA**:
  i. Chancellor College   [ ]
  ii. College of Medicine   [ ]
  iii. KCN   [ ]
  iv. Polytechnic   [ ]

5) **Faculty:**
  i. Education   [ ]
  ii. Humanities   [ ]
  iii. Law   [ ]
  iv. PAS   [ ]
  v. Social Science   [ ]
  vi. Science   [ ]
  vii. Medicine   [ ]
  viii.   Nursing   [ ]
  ix. Applied Sciences   [ ]
  x. Built Environment   [ ]
  xi. Commerce   [ ]
  xii. Education & Media   [ ]
  xiii. Engineering   [ ]

6) **Length of Service:**

Less than 1 year   [ ]   1 year < 2 years   [ ]   2 years < 5 years [ ]
5 years > 10 years   [ ]   10 years above   [ ]

B. DIMENSIONS OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION
*Tick below the statement that best describes your organisation (**college**) rating on a scale 1-(almost never) to 6- (almost always).*

INDIVIDUAL- LEVEL LEARNING *In my organisation:*	Almost never 1	2	3	4	5	Almost always 6
1. People openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
2. People identify skills they need for future work tasks	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
3. People help each other learn	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
4. People can get money and other resources to support their learning	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
5. People are given time to support learning	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
6. People view problems in their work as an opportunity to learn	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
7. People are rewarded for learning	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
8. People give open and honest feedback to each other.	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

9. People listen to others views before speaking	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
10. People are encouraged to ask why regardless of rank.	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
11. Whenever people state their views, they also ask what others think.	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
12. People treat each other with respect	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
13. People spend time building trust with each other	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

TEAM/GROUP LEVEL LEARNING *In my organisation:*	**Almost never** **1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Almost always** **6**
14. Teams/groups have the freedom to adapt their goals as needed	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
15. Teams/groups treat members as equals, regardless of rank, culture or other differences	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
16. Teams/groups focus both on the group tasks and on how well the group is working	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
17. Teams/groups revise their thinking as a result of group discussions or information collected.	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
18. Teams/groups are rewarded for the achievement as a team/group	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
19. Teams/groups are confident that the organisation will act on their recommendations	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL LEARNING *My organisation:*	**Almost never** **1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Almost always** **6**
20. Uses two-way communication on a regular basis such as suggestion schemes, electronic bulletin boards or town hall/open meetings	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
21. Enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
22. Maintains an up-to-date base of employee skills	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6
23. Creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
24. Makes it lesson learned available to all employees	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
25. Measures the results of the time and resource spent on training	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
26. Recognises people for taking initiative	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
27. Gives people choices in their work assignments	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

28. Invites people to contribute to the organisations vision	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
29. Gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
30. Supports employees who take calculated risks	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
31. Builds visions across different levels and groups	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
32. Helps employees balance work and family	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
33. Encourages people to think from a global perspective	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
34. Encourages everyone to bring the customers view into the decision-making process	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
35. Considers the impact of decisions on employee morale	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
36. Works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
37. Encourages people to get answers from across the organisation when solving problems	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP *In my organisation:*	Almost never 1	2	3	4	5	Almost always 6
38. Leaders generally support requests for learning opportunities and training	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
39. Leaders share up to date information with employees about competitors, industry trends and organisational directions	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
40. Leaders empower others to help carry out the organisations vision	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
41. Leaders mentor and coach those they lead	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
42. Leaders continually look for opportunities to learn	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
43. Leaders ensure that the organisations actions are consistent with its values	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

C. LEARNING OGANISATION MECHANISMS

*Tick below the statement that best describes the **activities** undertaken by your organisation College) to promote learning, rating on 1- (Strongly disagree) to 5 – (Strongly agree)*

MECHANISMS FOR A LEARNING ORGANISATION	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
44. My organisation guides all members towards its vision, mission and core values	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
45. My organisation has a vibrant ICT infrastructure that enable members to learn	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
46. My organisation has a library that enable members to learn	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
47. My organisations training policy supports learning of members	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
48. In my organisation, members are awarded for their achievement	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
49. My organisation enhances learning through collaboration with others	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
50. In my organisation, there are open systems of communication that enable members to learn	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐

51. Other learning activities offered by my organisation include:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

D. Tick the statement that best describes your views of your organisation on a scale rating of 1 – (strongly disagree) to 5 – (strongly agree)

I view my organisation as:	Almost Never 1	2	3	4	5	Almost always 6
52. One that emphasises continuous learning of individual members	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
53. One that promotes inquiry and dialogue by individual members	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
54. One that encourages team learning and collaboration in all groups	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
55. One that provides systems of capturing and sharing of knowledge	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
56. One that connects with its environment and communities around	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
57. One that makes members of staff to be empowered	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
58. Having leaders that encourage learning	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐
59. A learning organisation	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐

Thank you for taking your time to complete the questionnaire. Please return it to jmasamba@poly.ac.mw

Appendix B: Differences Based on Constituent College

Difference in Perception based on Constituent College

Dimension	College	Almost always	Somewhat	Almost never
Continuous Learning	KCN	100%	0	0
	Chancellor College	64%	24%	12%
	Polytechnic	54%	34%	12%
	COM	53.3%	20%	26.7%
Inquiry and Dialogue	KCN	100%	0	0
	COM	53.3%	20%	26.7%
	Polytechnic	34%	42%	24%
	Chancellor College	24%	72%	4%
Collaboration and Team Learning	KCN	100%	0	0
	Chancellor College	36%	56%	8%
	Polytechnic	36%	40%	24%
	College of Medicine	20%	53.3%	26.7%
Embedded Systems	KCN	100%	0	0
	Polytechnic	38%	24%	38%
	COM	20%	40%	40%
	Chancellor College	12%	80%	8%
Empowerment	KCN	100%	0	0
	Polytechnic	47.3%	65.5%	17.3%
	Chancellor College	44%	48%	8%
	COM	0	80%	20%
Systems Connection	KCN	100%	0	0
	Chancellor College	32%	52%	16%
	Polytechnic	30%	34%	36%
	COM	20%	53.3%	26.7%
Strategic Leadership	KCN	100%	0	0
	COM	73.3%	0	26.7%
	Chancellor College	68%	24%	8%
	Polytechnic	48%	20%	32%