III. Developing a model of the 'learning organization'

III. 1 Assumptions

Whereas OL theory deals with learning processes in organizations, LO literature tries to provide an organizational model which fosters those processes. Consequently, it is not interested in those processes themselves but in the organizational structures, systems and values that encourage them. That is why this paper will not study organizational learning theories but will focus on LO concept. However, a working learning definition is necessary to set up a bottom layer for discussion. The dictionary definition of learning merely refers to "the activity of obtaining knowledge"[1]. From this point of view, nowadays, due to the fact that every organization tends to adopt some kind of information system (technological or not) to obtain knowledge in a certain way, it could be said that every organization learns. However, learning in the context of 'learning organizations' not only implies the production and accumulation of knowledge in structured and unstructured ways but also, and that is what is essentially characteristic, to be able to modify organization behaviour (Garvin, 1993) in order to innovate and adapt to a fluctuating environment (Senge, 1990). It is evident that every organization can produce and store data and can even do both activities in an articulated and organized way. But what is not so common is for organizations to systematically use that information to reflect on their processes and to think about new and innovative tactics to adjust to or to modify

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[1] Cambridge Dictionary Online: http://dictionary.cambridge.org

organization context. So, it could be said -paraphrasing Jensen- that "all organizations learn but not all are learning organizations".[2]

Thus, as a working definition for learning in a LO the definition proposed by Argyris & Schon (1996) will be adopted. Learning will be considered in this context as the ability "to adapt to changing environments, draw lessons from past successes and failures, detect and correct the errors of the past, anticipate and respond to impending threats, conduct experiments, engage in continuing innovation, build and realize images of a desirable future" (p.xvii).

In addition, I will not adopt an 'a priori' definition of 'learning organization'. This definition will be drawn on the model I will develop in this section which tries to integrate values, systems and processes in a structured framework that would be fostered by the key point of this model, leadership.

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[2] The original sentence is "all organizations are learning organizations but not all are learning equally well" (Jensen, 2005). In the context of my long study it is evident that only organization that are learning or trying to learn well can be called 'learning organizations' and therefore, I do not agree with Jensen's words.