Chapter 11
The OLC Questionnaire: A Measure to Assess an Organization’s Cultural Orientation towards Learning

Teresa Rebelo
University of Coimbra, Portugal

A. Duarte Gomes
University of Coimbra, Portugal

ABSTRACT
This chapter is centered on the psychometric qualities of the OLC questionnaire, which has the objective of measuring the orientation of organizational culture towards learning – a kind of culture that promotes creativity and innovation in organizations. Hence, it includes description and discussion of its conception, assessment of content validity and the main construct validity studies already carried out. Its bi-dimensionality in terms of internal integration and external adaptation processes and its potentialities for research and intervention are also discussed, as well as future research directions to continue its journey of validation.

INTRODUCTION
In organizational learning and learning organization literature (especially in the latest), organizational culture is mostly seen as a facilitating factor for learning in (and by) organizations. This orientation of culture towards learning is called, in the literature, oriented learning culture or simply learning culture and, in short, it is the type of culture that a learning organization should have. It can be described as an organizational culture that is oriented towards the promotion and facilitation of
workers’ learning, and its share and dissemination, in order to contribute to organizational development and performance (Rebelo & Gomes, 2009).

Concerning the characteristics that distinguish this kind of culture from other cultures, the convergence points between authors are easily seen. Among them, we can highlight learning as one of the organization’s core values, focus on people, concern about all stakeholders, stimulation of experimentation, encouraging an attitude of responsible risk, readiness to recognise errors and learn from them, the promotion of open and intense communication, as well as promotion of cooperation, interdependence and knowledge share (e.g., Ahmed Loh & Zairi, 1999; Baetz, 2003; Hill, 1996; Kandemir & Hult, 2005; López, Péon & Órdas, 2004; Marquardt, 1996; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; McGill & Slocum, 1993; Reeves, 1996; Schein, 1992, 1994; Yeung, Ulrich, Nason & Glinow, 1999).

From its definition emerges the central idea underlying this kind of culture, that is to say, the organization, through culture, promotes and values individual learning with the objective that good, or productive, individual learning, through sharing processes, is turned into group learning or organizational learning and, in this way, contributes to organizational performance.

This central idea is responsible for the importance and relevance of learning culture from the nineties to today. In fact, facing more and more global, dynamic and uncertain environments, an organizational culture oriented to productive learning that leads to new and useful knowledge which, in turn, leads to innovative ways to solve problems or optimize processes, increases the probability of an organization being successful.

Therefore, conceived as a relevant facilitator of learning in, and by, organizations, the consequences of this kind of cultural orientation have been studied in the literature, namely its effects on innovation (e.g., Baetz, 2003; Bates & Khasawneh, 2005; Kontoghiorghes, Awbrey, & Feurig, 2005; Sta. Maria, 2003). And, in fact, the majority of studies concerning this issue point out a positive relationship between the existence of a learning culture and innovation in organizations.

Based on the aforesaid, it becomes important to assess an organization’s cultural orientation towards learning. Besides, a valid and reliable measure of learning culture endows managers with a way to assess it in their organizations, enabling them to see and use it as a management tool.

In this respect, and in the area of instrumental research, centred on the development and validation of data collection instruments (Drenth, 1998), this chapter aims to present the OLC (Organizational Learning Culture) questionnaire, describing its development process and giving an overview of the validity studies which have supported satisfactorily its psychometric qualities.

In the scope of this book, the main goal of the present chapter is to present a valid measure of a contextual factor that positively impacts on creativity and innovation in organizations, providing, in this way, a tool for research and organizational assessment.

According to its objective, the chapter has two main sections: the first aims to introduce the central theme – the learning culture -, presenting its definition, some proposals about its critical characteristics and also some assumptions around the concept present in the literature. This section finishes with a discussion, based on some previous research, of the role of this kind of culture in relation to creativity and innovation in organizations. The second main section presents the OLC questionnaire and also its conception, development and validity studies carried out. A discussion about some strengths, shortcomings and application procedures of OLC ends this section. The chapter concludes with some indications for future research and reinforcement of the importance of instrumental research, namely around OLC.