

Twinning strategy: Is it a vehicle for Sustainable Organizational Learning and Institutional Capacity Development?

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Abstract: - In the era of globalization and internationalization research organizations are lagging behind to enhance their organizational performance and to keep pace with the ever-changing world. This article presents the idea of twinning strategy as a mechanism for sustainable organizational learning and enhancing research performance under globalized in conditions. The development of organizational learning seems to promise one of the answers to the challenges created by increased international competition and the growing importance of innovation in the knowledge economy. Twinning of research organization is an ongoing debate of Horizon 2020 for advancing the policy and practice of capacity building in international development cooperation. The purpose of this article is to assess why twinning is an instrument for building and strengthening institutional capacity?. Twinning approach specifically address networking gaps and deficiencies between the research institutions of the low performing member states and regions that mitigate the stress through collaboration between internationally-leading counterparts at European Union (EU) level. By doing so this study not only indicate that twinning is the unique method for sustaining organizational learning and capacity building but also it shows how the distinctive features of twinning strategy can be the key of institutional development.

Key-Words: - competitiveness, capacity building, excellence, globalization, institutional development, organizational learning, sustainable, strategy, twinning.

1 Introduction

In today's global world, increasing organizational learning as well as generating new knowledge is crucial to maintain and enhance the European Union's competitiveness. As a consequence, development of organizational learning seems to promise the challenges created by increased international competition and the growing importance of innovation in the knowledge society.

Therefore, the question of institutional development become a key element for assessing and strengthening the overall development of an organization's effectiveness. In this transition condition, the idea of 'twinning strategy' has become a vehicle for sustainable organizational learning means for building and strengthening institutional capacity[1]. Subsequently, twinning of research organization is a current discussion of Horizon 2020 the EU framework programme for research and innovation, especially for advancing the policy and practice of capacity building through international cooperation development.

In another way, it can be said that it is prerequisite for sustaining organizational competitiveness and

enhancing research performance as discussed by the EU policymaker Bertelsmann Stiftung in his book the "European Way of life"[2]. Where, innovation and research excellence will positively impact on our lives in order to ensure plus maximize the social and economic benefits of new ideas. According to the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida),[3] 'twinning' is the distinctive method for promoting institutional capacity building and improving knowledge transfer between research institutions in addition to industry across Europe that will embrace open innovation and development co-operation too.

On the other hand, World Bank [1], for example, defines twinning as a "process that pairs an organizational entity in a developing country with a similar but more mature entity in another country," and recognizes the method as one of its four primary technical assistance delivery modes, along with long-term advisors, short-term advisors, and training. Accordingly, the European Community (EC) [4-5] has already started employed numerous twinning projects since 1998 to facilitate the accession process for countries that wish to join the

European Union (EU). Where, twinning takes the form of the secondment of EU experts for over a year, with a combination of other arrangements such as short-term missions, training, and specific technical services[3].

Since then research shows that institutional development and organizational learning are generally not issues of major significance for partner organizations in twinning arrangements. Even at the individual level the focus is on training rather than learning, which results in the usual emphasis on formal off-job training rather than seeking opportunities for learning from work.

Hence, to better understand twinning this article attempted to put forth, through an overview and review of the literature, project papers, some common elements and distinctive features of twinning and practices of twinning arrangements and relationships, as well as some factors for successful practices. It tries to present the concepts and the ways of twinning strategy benefiting the low performing regions institutions by developing cooperation with leading institutions and by how this current twinning approach might be renovated. However, this article suggests that through twinning strategy organizations are capable to achieve distinctive advantages, i.e. organizational development and organizational learning that play the role as a vehicle to sustain and to strengthen institutional research capacity.

2 Theoretical Background of the Twinning Approach

During the early phase of 1980s the significance of twinning approach has got the prominence by various international co-operation agencies such as: Sida, Norad (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation), WBI (World Bank Institute), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation for Development). These international organizations realizes the significance of twinning method and triggered to implement it in several projects in order to promote effective institutional capacity building of various countries specially for the benefit of LICUS (Low-Income Countries Under Stress) and to improve their respective institutions.

Accordingly, Sida have speculated whether the notion of organizational learning might provide a productive framework for twinning projects. So they took initiative to induce the 'twinning' strategy as an experiment in order to promote sustainable

organizational and institutional capacity building in developing countries[1],[6],[7].

In general, twinning strategy can be considered and regarded as a useful and effective method of sustainable institutional capacity development by outside aid organizations, but it is more effective at the operational than the institutional level. Though from literature survey it reveals that if the twinning approach is used in a proper way, it can be an optimal technique for institutional capacity building and support for general and integrated services[8].

2.1 The Notion of Organizational Learning

The impression of organizational learning is currently the subject of a huge area of discussion on writing and debate. Usually in the field of organization and management, practically two separate literatures have been developed, i.e some scholars and practitioners who are trying to clarify, develop, and operationalize the concept, the others mainly for the profession and academic writers who perceive organizational learning as 'the learning organization'. Which is the recent trend of management science and commonly known as potentially profitable managerial skill [7].

This article tries to classify the concept of organizational learning based on various scholars, management experts opinion and their perspectives. The first reference to organizational learning was introduced and presented by Cyert and March in their book "*A Behavioral Theory of the Firm.*" As per their understanding [9], organizational learning is a field of academic research and professional practice with a relatively recent development. Conferring to their viewpoint, companies learn from experience with the intention of adapting themselves to the conditions of the environment.

In another way, according to organizational learning theory, there are two types learning existing within the organization, i.e. exploitative and exploratory learning which are crucial for development. Exploitative learning refers to the learning activities within the organization's current knowledge base for the refinement and extension of existing competences, technologies, and paradigms, whereas exploratory learning refers to the learning activities beyond the organization's knowledge base for experimentation with new alternatives[10].

On the other hand, some researchers like Power & Waddell, Watkins & Marsick, agreed that the concept of learning organization has been linked to innovation and performance in organizations. The capacity for change and continuous improvement to meet the challenges in the environment in which

organizations operate that has been associated with the capability of these organizations to learn[11]. Simultaneously, Grindle and Hildebrand [12], also pointed out that strengthening of organizations and, more broadly, of institutions is an urgent and crucial priority in many developing countries. Alternatively, Castaneda and Fernandez mentioned that organizational learning is a process based on individual learning through private and public organizations engaged in creating and obtaining knowledge for the purpose of institutionalizing. As, the changing conditions of the environment or to change the environment proactively, depending on its level of development [13]. Therefore, in continuation to the previous discussion it can be said that organizational learning is the key of managing change and organizational survival.

2.2 The Idea of Twinning for Enhancing Research Excellence

The concept of ‘twinning’ is not precisely a new thought in the era of research excellence development arena. In 1984 Cooper [14] mentioned that twinning can be defined as a professional relationship between an operating entity in a developing country and a similar but more mature organization in another part of the world. Concerning twinning approach different authors, policy makers & researchers have different opinion. In 1999 researcher Askvik [15] pointed out that the idea of twinning has been proposed as one of the alternative strategies to promote institutional development in development aid programme, as the concept of twinning its theoretic base and practical experiences were not well described or documented during that period. Consequently, Proctor, in 2000 suggested that there is a need for continued evaluation of practical experiences in order to identify the importance of twinning concept especially in the field of research excellence enhancement where, innovative approaches are much needed[16].

On the other hand, according to Annan, 2003 research capacity enhancement, on a global scale, is highly unbalanced between the more developed and the less developed world. Therefore, based on this background greatest number of development agencies prioritizes the significance of research capacity enhancement programmes such as: Danish Development Cooperation Agency (Danida) [17,18]; also Maxwell’s debate for the development of research in Europe: towards an star alliance[19]; and development cooperation agencies interest in knowledge-based aid [20],[21].

Since then the concept of twinning emerged as an alternative form of development cooperation programme known as technical assistance[3],[16]. In spite of various opinion about twinning strategy there is a continuous debate in the literature, whether twinning approach can be considered as a method or as a metaphor. According to Askvik [15], the interpretation of twinning as a metaphor. As primarily it refers to the notion of similarity between the partners, not how the partners are related to each other. In contrary to this perspective, twinning has also been applied as a distinctive method, for example by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), for institutional capacity building in development cooperation and by the Danish Development Cooperation Agency (Danida) as described later in this article.[3],[21].

Hence it can said from literature survey that twinning strategy does not have a single, distinctive explanation as shared by all different supportive organizations. But it is necessary to highlight that the concept of twinning, strategy its design and practice vary from one organization to another depending on organizational consequences .

To comprehend the approach of twinning better, this article attempted to put forth, through a review of the literature and available project documents, some common elements and features in the design and practices of twinning arrangements and relationships, as well as some distinguishing factors for successful practices shared by the above mentioned aid organizations. In short, twinning can best be defined as a mutual exchange between entities with divergent cultural backgrounds aimed at learning and better understanding.

3 Methodology

This study is principally based on a combination of both empirical evidence and inductive reasoning. Empirical argument depicts method of gaining the knowledge, whereas, the inductive argument shows some degree of support in the form of probabilistic reasoning and the origin of most scientific theories.

Definition of a twinning used in this research

The definition of “twinning” has been narrowed for the purpose of this study. The main goal of this research is not an examination of different aid organizations programme such as : Sida, Danida and WB etc. Where these development agencies are functioning in a variety of ways. Thus, it emphasizes primarily on those twinning concept, which can be classified as having a “sustainable institutional

capacity development”, i.e. research excellence enhancement for sustainable growth that enable organizations to strengthen their methodical plan; for stepping up and encouraging scientific excellence as well as increasing innovation capacity in specific research field which are deliberately managed and well organized (institutionalized). In another way, twinning approach provide a conceptual framework to describe as well as to analyze the smart specialization strategy that enable institutions to improve the local innovation system and network with the technology frontiers for sustainable organizational learning and institutional capacity development.

The reason for the narrower definition is accepted in the fact that it is possible to compatible with the conceptual reinforcements of the smart specialization strategy (S3) approach, which is a programmatic framework to guide institutions development policy. Development of appropriate instruments for synergy opportunities in competitive/structural funding with respect to research and development capacity-building in infrastructure but also crucially in human resources and multidisciplinary approaches; maximizing use of generated knowledge through university-business dialogue and deployment of knowledge in both technological and social innovation[22].

In order to complete the study within the specified time frame, the empirical phase of the study has been done on the basis of different academic expert’s opinion under the EU research and innovation policy framework. Comparative study has been done on the basis of preliminary research undertaken by European Commission (EC) and EU Horizon 2020 programme .Where they have attempted to add value through insights that have emerged on the twinning and smart specialization strategies. The outcomes of this investigation manifest the distinctive features of twinning approach, its advantages and goals of smart specialization strategies, synergies between their different priorities and aspects that facilitate the sustainable organizational learning and institutional competitiveness.

4 Results & Discussion

The preliminary investigation of this study explores the potential contribution of twinning strategy an its distinctive features that could be the advantages for research capacity enhancement and institutional development in relation with the implementation of smart specialization strategies. The findings from the evolutionary economics literature, (based on the opinion of the different national and international

development support agencies programme, projects, academic experts as well as EU framework) have generally given a comparative overview about the conceptual aspects of twinning and the objectives of smart specialization strategies as mentioned below.

The below mentioned Fig.1 tries to exemplify that twinning approach could be a powerful instruments to foster institutional capacity development, due to the presence of smart specialization’s priorities that enhance the community participation in one way. Alternatively, advantages of twinning method reinforce managerial skills of an organization by improving organizational learning, i.e. (human resources development) that leads to promote innovation and province growth due to their intrinsic competences. Where, the synergical effect of both the strategies enhance organizational development.

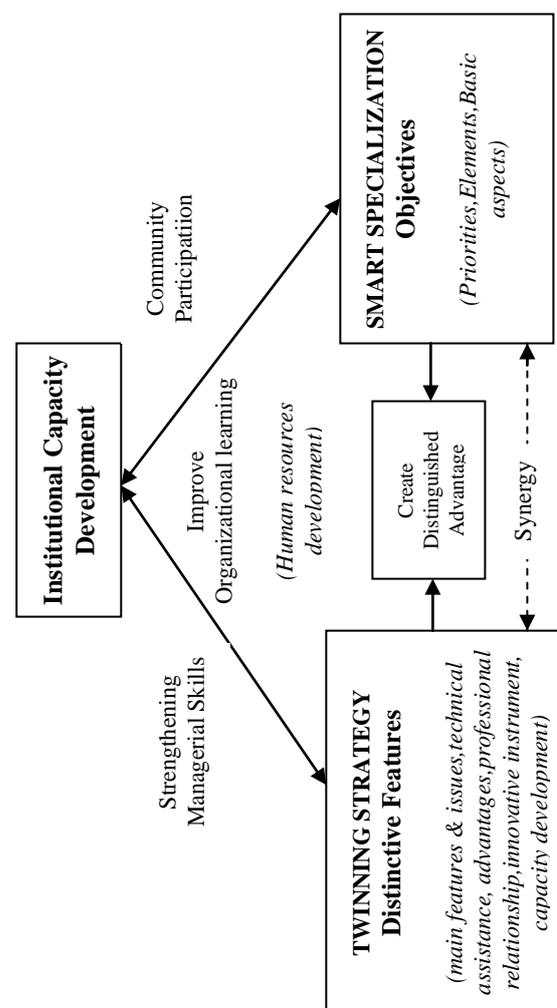


Figure 1: Thematic Model of Institutional Capacity Development in relation with Twinning and Smart Specialization (Own interpretation)

4.1 Twinning is an Instrument for Building and Strengthening Institutional Capacity Development

Similarly, the below mentioned Fig.2 combines both the placed as well as resource-based and positioning views to illustrate the perception of twinning strategy and its distinguishing features that enable an institution to make good progress in relation to their technical/professional development objectives.

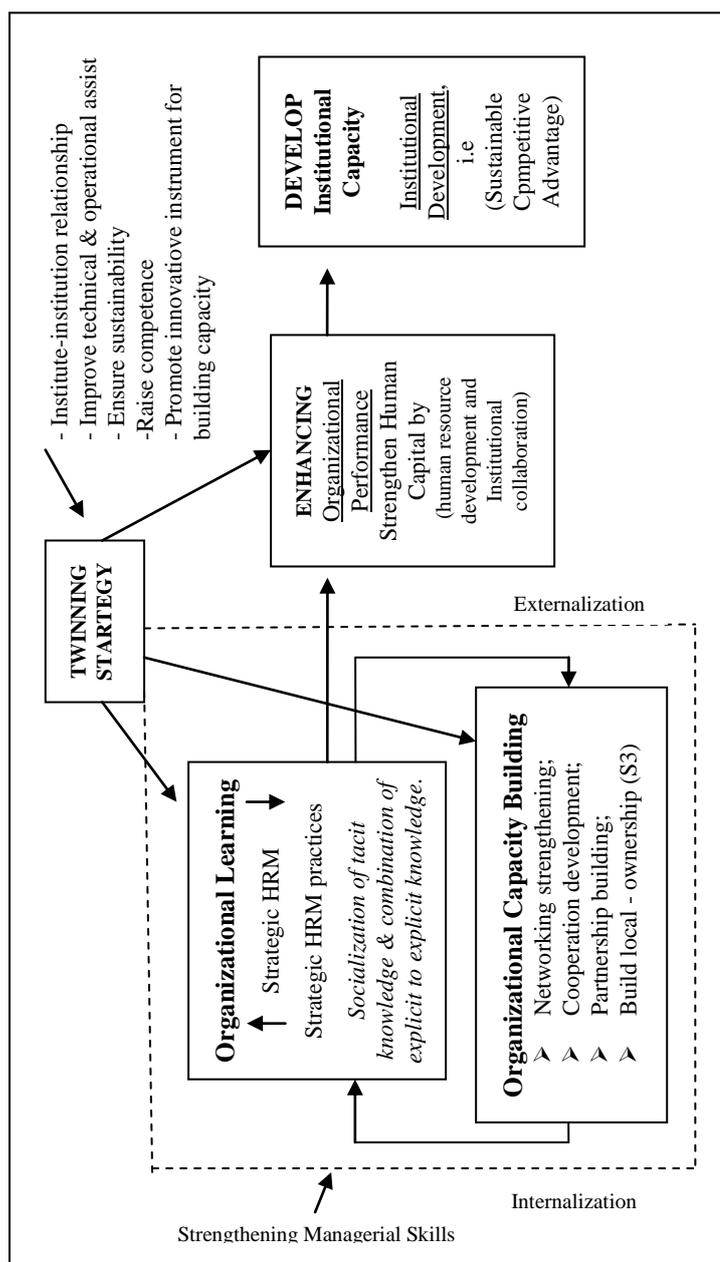


Figure 2: Illustration of Twinning strategy strengthening organizational learning and develop institutional capacity (Own interpretation based on the idea of Wright, et al, Jayne, Khandekar, and Sharma,)[23-27]

The aforesaid Fig.2 represents the impression of twinning method that reinforcing the managerial Knowledge Skills and abilities (KSAs) of an organization by internalization (improving the idea and attitudes, i.e. behavioural development of individual employees within the organization) and externalization (articulation of tacit knowledge). In this knowledge creation process organizations are not only enrich their technical and operational skills; but also they are accomplished of improving organizational learning and organizational capacity building, in order to enhance organizational performance.

As a result, organizational performance build up human capital by human resources development through sharing knowledge within the organization. Where, the following elements are viewed as an important factors for organizational learning processes which elevate the level of an organization from national level (localization) to international level (internationalization). Consequently, it reflects on-

- *organizational culture which not only allows but actively encourages questions by employees at all levels;*
- *continuous development of the Knowledge Skills and abilities (KSAs) throughout the organization is an critical reflection;*
- *regular and varied opportunities for sharing tacit and explicit knowledge its questions and reflection;*
- *constant desire and search aimed at opportunities for learning from the organization's ongoing operations;*
- *taking action based on such type of learning that increase institutional collaboration and internationalization [5]*

(i.e. improving institutions inventiveness to be more participation in international markets to compete globally).

Therefore, with the purpose of justifying the motive of focusing twinning strategy as a vehicle for building and strengthening institutional capacity, it is crucial to highlight the benefits of twinning instrument that facilitate and support specially the low income and middle income countries institutions -

- a) to promote efficiently their institutional capacity;
- b) to achieve sustainable organizational capacity building;
- c) to enhance long-term cooperation with the leading institutions;

- d) empower to be highly flexible in order to cope up with the recent changes;
- e) ensure sustainability; and

carry a notion of learning environment with the organization. Thus, it can be assumed that both the strategies (twinning and Smart specialization) increased effectiveness is the outcome that empowering an organization for enhancing institutional capacity development through knowledge sharing with the intention of sustain organizational learning and capacity building, i.e. to attain sustainable competitive advantage.

In another way, it can be said that knowledge sharing processes create conditions for a systematic transfer of knowledge within the organization which is used in the creation of new practices or in the change of the implemented practices that has a huge impact on organizational procedures and learning [28]. So, in order to get better results on institutions innovation terms, and organizational performance small/ low performing institutions should be able to cooperate among high performing leading institutions [29], [30]. Hence according to Duarte and Diniz the perspective of social networks, individuals or institutions cannot exist alone in a society. Instead, they will form connections with other people or institutions through various so called 'social networks' and 'business networks'[31],[32].

In an attempt to further understand, it is required to pointed out the statement of Proctor [33], concerning the benefits of the twinning approach that include a diverse range of expertise offered within the involved institutions in cooperation and networks, and the development of a flexible platform for continued programme development. When the most appropriate human resources are assigned to the programme, the political and institutional context is increasingly understood and specific tasks are identified through the learning process.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Finally, grounded on previous dialogue on the topic of *twinning as a strategy* it is necessary to emphasize the fact that in this day and age, the occurrence of twinning concept and the importance of organizational learning has been mixed up with the perception of institutional capacity development strategy. It seeks to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of economic systems and constitutes a leading concept, which acts as an elixir for the regional economic development in association with the Smart specialization S3 strategy and institutional development with the aim of contributing to sustainable development.

In this article, the empirical suggestion shows that the key dimensions of the present business environment are concentrating on proper access to knowledge, skills and technology, where the presence of twinning approach within the organization is considered to be a key player to enhance capacity building in developing countries by materialization of pairs-or 'twins' between similar or better type of organizations.

On the other hand it is significant to indicate that simultaneously Smart specialization strategy is also plays a vital role for enabling business, institutions to enhance its core competencies through interaction and pooling of information between individuals within an organization. It is assumed that the added value of this knowledge development process will lead the territories and organizations to achieve their competitive advantages through the transfer of specific individual knowledge to the collective knowledge, and vice versa.

Subsequently, the conducted research underlines the importance of a high level of implementation of activities networking gaps and deficiencies between the research institutions of the low performing member states and regions that mitigate the stress through collaboration between internationally-leading counterparts at European Union (EU) level. Where, in the area of linking different firms, people, and knowledge at a regional level and cooperation with educational institutions appear as critical factors for the successful regional economic development and institutional capacity enhancement.

However, from the investigation, it has been observed that to a certain extent both the approaches have significance all over the world the challenge today is not only to improve the regional and institutional competitiveness but also to find out the way how they can sustain their organizational learning and institutional capacity building with their existing resources in order to compete in long-run and survive in this dynamic world.

Therefore, this research suggested that – twinning approach could be a very challenging and dedicated approach for the new EU member states regions their research institutions, universities, small and medium enterprises specially for the low performing countries in order to create new business prospect with international competency. For that reason, to establish a platform for long-term institutional twinning within research. Wherever, smart specialization strategy could be supportive for the universities and business to provide assistance (community participation) for sustained long-term transfer of capacities, the basic incentive

behind joint research, which is the synergy experienced when research topics of mutual interest are advanced by combining complementary competencies.

While addressing the key positive aspects of twinning that it (i) combines training with technical assistance; (ii) offers flexible work plans and long-term cooperation; (iii) encourages immediate acceptance of the supplier by the recipient; (iv) spreads positive impact extensively throughout the recipient institution; and (v) offers positive psychological effects to both parties, it is also essential to focus on the main shortcomings that include the potential of conflict between twins such as: (a) lack of incentive; (b) high costs; and (c) the prospective for being a less favorable method when the problems affect to the the country's administration.

In short it can be said that although there remain some gaps in the twinning method for enhancing promising organizational learning and institutional capacity in addition to in the new S3 strategies that has been discussed earlier. Despite of all these drawbacks this study emphasizes the essential aims of twinning strategy which could be really significant for active joint research projects as well as to attain long-term goals. In order to develop organizational performance and sustainability continued joint achievements are recommended to be incorporated for enriching institutional capability and performance that will accelerate them to accomplish the sustainable competitive advantage.

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Dedication

The first author dedicated this paper to her only beloved son "Kanishka Binayak Saha".

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