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Learning culture and performance in organizations; a systematic literature mapping

Cultura de aprendizagem e desempenho nas organizações: um mapeamento sistemático de literatura

Cultura de aprendizaje y desempeño en organizaciones: un mapeo sistemático de la literatura

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KEYWORDS

Learning culture.
Performance.
Organizations.

Abstract: In the current context of high competitiveness among organizations, organizational learning culture has been considered a key concept both for academia and for organizational environment, including the public sphere. This systematic mapping analyzes the scientific production regarding to the study of the relationship between the learning culture and the performance in organizations, in the period from 2013 to May 2023. From 68 articles initially retrieved in the Redalyc, Scopus, Spell and Web of Science databases, 18 articles were selected. As a result, it was possible to perceive the remarkable discrepancy at the quantity between the studies that relate the culture of learning and the performance in the private and public sectors, as well among the publication produced internationally and the national ones. Yet, most of the research considered indicated a direct and positive relationship between the learning culture and the performance in organizations. It is concluded that it is important to develop a strong learning culture to enhance the impact on organizational performance.



PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Cultura de
Aprendizagem.
Desempenho.
Organizações.

Resumo: No atual contexto de alta competitividade entre as organizações, a cultura de aprendizagem organizacional tem sido considerada um conceito-chave tanto para a academia, quanto para o ambiente organizacional, inclusive na esfera pública. Este mapeamento sistemático analisa a produção científica em relação ao estudo da relação entre a cultura de aprendizagem e o desempenho nas organizações, no período de 2013 até maio de 2023. Dos 68 artigos da busca inicial nas bases de dados Redalyc, Scopus, Spell e Web of Science, foram selecionados 18 artigos. Como resultados, pôde-se perceber a notável discrepância do quantitativo entre os estudos que relacionam a cultura de aprendizagem e desempenho no setor privado e público, bem como entre as publicações produzidas fora do país e as nacionais. Ainda, a maioria das pesquisas consideradas indicaram uma relação direta e positiva entre a cultura de aprendizagem e o desempenho nas organizações. Conclui-se que é importante desenvolver uma cultura de aprendizagem forte para, assim, potencializar o impacto no desempenho organizacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Cultura del Aprendizaje.
Actuación.
Organizaciones.

Resumen: En el contexto actual de alta competitividad entre organizaciones, la cultura de aprendizaje organizacional ha sido considerada un concepto clave tanto para la academia como para el entorno organizacional, incluido el ámbito público. Este mapeo sistemático de la literatura analiza la producción científica con relación al estudio de la relación entre cultura de aprendizaje y desempeño en las organizaciones, en el período de 2013 a mayo de 2023. De 68 artículos inicialmente recuperados en las bases de datos Redalyc, Scopus, Spell y Web of Science, se seleccionaron 18 artículos. Como resultado, fue posible notar una notable discrepancia en cantidad entre los estudios que relacionan la cultura del aprendizaje y el desempeño en el sector público y privado, así como entre las publicaciones nacionales. Además, la mayoría de las investigaciones consideradas indicaron una relación directa y positiva entre la cultura del aprendizaje y el desempeño en las organizaciones. Se concluye que es importante desarrollar una fuerte cultura de aprendizaje para potenciar el impacto en el desempeño organizacional.

Introduction

When considering the context of rapid and profound transformations, it is evident that organizations are increasingly seeking to improve their structures, processes, and human capital in order to foster adaptability and resilience in this environment. To this end, learning has been used as an important tool to achieve results, through the promotion and valorization of knowledge acquisition and sharing, as important elements of an organizational culture (Dos Santos, Damian, & Valentim, 2019).

In this sense, building and solidifying an organizational culture is shown to be essential for the existence of these institutions. Culture demands a dynamic and holistic process, engaging the group and organization in shared learning, as they interact with both the internal and external environments (Schein & Schein, 2022). Therefore, the authors point out shared learning, developed by a group in relation to its organization and how they interact with both the internal and external environments, as a key element to the definition of culture. This learning allows to foster beliefs, values and behaviors among individuals that, with time, become the identity of that group, which will be passed on to new members.

In this study, the idea of learning culture is conceived and, according to Rebelo and Gomes (2017), it can be defined as an organizational culture related to sharing and disclosing information, aiming to foster and enable learning for their members.

Fleury and Fleury (1995) also highlighted the importance to develop a culture of learning, in which the relationship between organization and environment is permeated by proactivity, through individuals with initiative, in a constant process of learning and self-development. Specially in the current stage of high competition among organizations, the organizational learning culture has been considered strategic (Schmitz, 2014).

Yang (2003) emphasizes that learning culture has a strong impact on organizational performance, since it is capable to reflect the organization's behavior in terms of learning and development. As noted by Schein and Schein

(2022, p.28), several papers (Cegarra-Navarro, Jiménez-Jiménez & Garcia-Perez, 2021; Choi, 2020; Khan & Bashir, 2020) indicate that effective organizations are those that maintain a relationship between efficient learning and a good organizational performance.

In regard to organizational performance, its definition is related to the level to which an organization achieves its goals (Certo & peter, 2010), which, according to the literature, could be financial and non-financial (Macedo & Silva, 2005). Following this line of research, Marsick and Watkins (2003) defend that a learning culture makes a significant influence on the improvement of organizational knowledge (such as the increase on the number of suggestions implemented by the company compared to a previous period) as well as financial knowledge (such as the decrease of response time to customer complaints compared to a previous period).

Culture has also become a key factor to the public sector, particularly after the public management reforms that began in the 1990s. The demand for a more capable model of Public Administration that is more intimately connected to a public interest and with a more efficient service provision is constantly increasing. The concept of efficiency, brought by the Constitutional Emend n° 19/1998 (Brasil, 1998), reinforces the search for a highly result-oriented management style, as well as the improvement of the public sector performance, focused on the professional development of its public servants (Abrucio, 2007).

Thus, based on the statement of Schein and Schein (2022, p. 28) that “studies of effective organizations always point out that the good performance and efficient learning depend on keeping these two dimensions together”, as well as the existing absence regarding studies that relate learning culture with the organizational performance in the public sector, already pointed out by Amaral, Paiva and Lima (2020), this research aims to present an analysis on scientific production that study the relationship between learning culture and organizational performance, from 2013 to May 2023. To do so, a systematic mapping of the literature was adopted as the methodology, aiming to contribute with this field

through collecting the available data in databases of scientific production.

This article is organized into five sections, beginning with this introduction. The second section presents theoretical/conceptual elements regarding the topic that was the foundation of this research. In the third section, the methodological steps of this study are presented. Next, on the fourth section, the study results are presented and discussed and, finally, the fifth section presents the final considerations.

Theoretical elements of the research

Organizational learning culture and performance

Studies on organizational culture started to emerge in the 1980s and consolidated itself as a field of knowledge in Business Administration, with emphasis on the characteristics of the Japanese model, considered the cause of success for Japanese companies, as well as the inspirational role of leaders and the development of a strong and successful culture (Freitas, 2012).

Even with the passage of years, this topic is still highly discussed, particularly due to the complexity when conceptualizing it. Therefore, as oriented, the definition given by Dias (2013, p. 69) was used:

The concept of culture adopted by those that dedicate themselves to the study of business administration originates from sociology or anthropology, and is generally defined as: a group of values, beliefs, ideologies, habits, behaviors and norms that individuals share in the organization and that arise from social interactions, which generate patterns of collective behavior that establish an identity among its members, identifying them with the organization to which they belong while distancing them from others.

From this concept, it is worth to notice that, according to Schein (2019), there are three levels of analysis, either for an individual or an organization: artifacts (structures, processes and visible and noticeable behaviors), exposed beliefs

and values (ideas, objectives, ideologies, rationalizations) and basic premises (beliefs, perceptions and unconscious naturalized feelings). Hence, to know and understand an organization's culture, it is necessary to understand these key elements that, according to Chiavenato (2012), started to be noticed by researchers as elements that can cast an even larger influence on performance and results in a highly competitive environment.

So, according to Silva (2001), it is on the grounds of an organizational culture concept that the learning process is perceived, either in the moment of developing central values or when transmitting them to the new members of an organization. As a result, the author affirms that the conception of an organizational culture becomes indissociable from learning.

In face of the importance of the learning topic for organizations, Senge (2006) affirms that the companies that stand out are those that know how to promote engagement and the capacity of individuals to learn, in all organizational levels. This is due to the fact that organizational learning is part of a dynamic and interlevel process, related with individual, interdepartmental and group learning, in an integrated and interdependent manner (Antonello & Godoy, 2011).

To accomplish that, some features are needed in order to cultivate a learning-centered organization, such as to seek alignment between individual and organizational goals, communication effectiveness among people, fields and levels, as well as the development of a systemic vision of the organizational phenomenon, by individuals that are part of it (Fleury & Fleury, 1995).

From the intersection of these concepts of culture and learning, the idea of a learning culture is conceived, "oriented towards the promotion and facilitation of employee learning, while being shared and disseminated, in order to contribute with development and performance" (Rebelo & Gomes, 2017, p. 330).

To develop this concept, it is necessary to evaluate the learning organization, demonstrating its relationship with organizational performance. In this sense, the *Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire - DLOQ*,

encompasses seven dimensions of a learning organization and two measures of organizational performance.

Given the relevance of this questionnaire, a more detailed explanation is warranted (Marsick & Watkins, 2012). The *continuous learning* dimension evaluates how well the organization encourages employees to seek new skills and knowledge in order to apply learning in their daily activities. The *inquiry and dialogue* dimension evaluates how well the organization encourages employees to express their opinions, question the status quo and commit to constructive discussions. The *collaboration and team learning* dimension evaluates facilitating practices of collective learning and the exchange of knowledge among team members, in building trust and achieving common goals. The *systems to gain and share knowledge* dimension evaluates information technology systems and processes to gain, store and disseminate information and knowledge. The *empowerment of people towards a collective vision* dimension focus on capacity building and the alignment of workers with the strategic goals and vision of the organization. The *connection with the environment* dimension examines the organization capacity to connect and respond to changes in the external environment. The last dimension, *strategic leadership towards learning* evaluates the role of leadership in promoting and sustaining a learning culture that supports continuous learning and innovation.

At last, two measures of performance are evaluated: *financial* (return on investment ROI - revenue growth and profitability, operational efficiency and cost reduction) and, knowledge performance (level of innovation and problem-solving capacity, rate of developing new products and services and effectiveness in using knowledge and acquired skills).

Methodological elements of the research

The literature systematic mapping is a type of review that complement the literature systematic review, which is an important study due to the fact that it allows for the identification of evidences, or the lack of them, to direct future research for systematic reviews, besides identifying fields to

conduct primary studies (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). Besides that, Moher, Stewart and Shekelle (2015), refer the nomenclature “scope review” to this methodological process, affirming that this is the ideal type of review when one needs a broader overview of a specific field.

To conduct this study, the systematic mapping process was carried out from 10/05 to 23/05/2023 in the following journal databases: Redalyc, Scopus, Spell and Web of Science. The document research was articulated by a specific search string, using logical operators, based on article titles as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Search strings for mapping

Search strings	Cultura de aprendizagem. Organizational Learning Culture, Empowerment, and Performance.
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Source: Author’s own elaboration (2023)

The process of inclusion and exclusion when selecting articles for the systematic mapping was developed by three researchers, with the third researcher serving as a tiebreaker when the two first researchers couldn’t reach a consensus. Furthermore, the eligible publications for this study were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion parameters presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Study criteria for inclusion and exclusion

Criteria for inclusion	Criteria for exclusion
Articles published from 2013 to May 2023.	Articles published in other languages
Articles in English or Portuguese	Articles with paid access
Articles fully available for free	Articles duplicated or repeated
Articles of potential relevance to the topic	Articles in which the subject diverges from the considered topic
-	Other types of publication

Source: Author’s own elaboration (2023)

To analyze the findings, the data was organized in Excel spreadsheets, separated by database, breaking down specific information from each article: title, authors, language, journal, year of publication and the respective access links.

Presentation and discussion of the results

Initially, the expression “setor público” or “*public sector*” was used as a complementary term, interconnected to the others by the connective “e/and”. However, the results obtained of papers written in the country were almost inexistent. Consequently, a decision was made to broaden the scope of the research removing this term and analyzing contributions to both the public and private sectors.

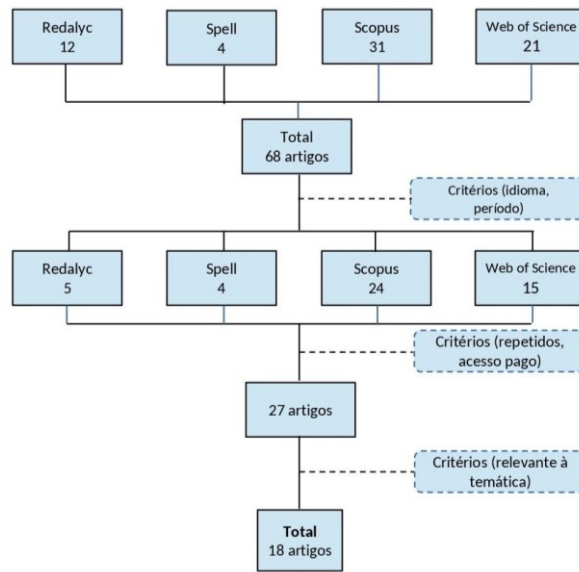
As a result of the screening process discussed in the previous item, 12 articles were found in the Redalyc database, 4 in Spell, 31 in Scopus, and 21 in Web of Science. Thus, through the initial search, 68 publications were identified in the databases considered, using the search strings described in Table 1. Applying the criteria for inclusion/exclusion in reference to the publication period and the article language, there were: five studies found in the Redalyc database, four in Spell, 24 in Scopus, and 15 in Web of Science, with 48 articles left for analysis. Subsequently, the studies that were repeated in the databases were excluded, as well as those that had free access, leaving a total of 27 articles for sample.

The articles from the previous phase were submitted to a title and abstract reading to verify the potential relevance of the studied objective to the topic of this research. A total of 18 articles

were then considered pertinent to the scope of this study, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Process of screening and selecting articles



Source: Author’s own elaboration (2023)

After screening the selected articles, studies were compiled in a single sheet for a better analysis. The main information related to the analyzed works are synthesized in Table 3.

Initial analysis reveals that the considered topic is largely more present in the international literature, with an abundance of publications written in English, which highlights the scarcity of national publications regarding the study of learning culture and performance. From the analyzed studies, it is noted that only four of them were written in Portuguese.

Table 3

Synthesis of the validated works

Title	Year and Authors	Contribution
Linking Transformational Leadership to Organizational Learning Culture and Employee Performance: The Mediation-Moderation Model.	2023 Udin, U.	Examined the role of organizational learning culture as a variable mediator and moderator between the transformational leadership and the employee performance in Indonesia’s health community center.
The Role of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance Through Organizational Learning Culture and Intrinsic Work Motivation	2023 Udin, U., Dharma R. D., Dananjoyo, R.; & Shaikh, M.	Examined the relation between transformational leadership and the organizational learning culture, work motivation and employee performance, as well as the impact of

		learning culture and work motivation in the employee performance.
Examining the effects of supportive work environment and organisational learning culture on organisational performance in information technology companies: The mediating role of learning agility and organisational innovation	2022 Aastha Tripathi, A. & Kalia, P.	Verified the mediator role of learning agility and organizational innovation in the supportive work environment and the organizational performance and organizational learning culture and organizational performance.
How do learning culture and dynamic capability interfere with team performance?	2022 Gonzalez, R.V.D.	Investigated the effects of learning culture and the dynamic capability and team performance of manufacturing teams in the Brazilian industrial sector.
Effects of learning culture and teamwork context on team performance mediated by dynamic capability	2021 Gonzalez, R.V.D.	Analyzed the relation between learning culture and the context of teamwork, based on the mediator role conducted by the dynamic capability, in manufacturing teams of the industrial sector.
How to improve organizational performance during Coronavirus: A serial mediation analysis of organizational learning culture with knowledge creation	2021 Ahmad Qadri, U., Ghani, M. B. A., Parveen, T., Khan, M.W. J. & Gillani, S. F.	Proposes a serial mediation model in which mechanisms underlined to the organizational knowledge through organizational learning culture facilitated the organizational performance during Covid-19.
An Integrative View of Knowledge Processes and a Learning Culture for Ambidexterity: Toward Improved Organizational Performance in the Banking Sector	2021 Cegarra-Navarro, J.-G., Jimenez-Jimenez, D. & Garcia-Perez, A.	Analyzed the relation between performance and learning culture supported by knowledge processes within the organization among companies from the banking sector in Spain
EFQM enablers and business performance relationship: Examining mediating role of organizational learning culture in Pakistani textile sector	2021 Ashraf, H. A.; Ishaq, M. I. & Muhammad Khan, M.	Investigated the influence of enablers of the European Foundation Quality Management model on financial, market and non-financial performance, as well as the mediators' role on organizational learning culture among such enablers and the business performance of textile companies.
The Role of Brand Orientation in Developing a Learning Culture and Achieving Performance Goals in the Third Sector Organizations	2020 Khan, I.; Bashir, T.	Sought empiric evidence of the relation between brand orientation, learning-oriented culture and its impact in the performance of third sector organizations in Pakistan.
Moving beyond Mandates: Organizational Learning Culture, Empowerment, and Performance	2020 Choi, I.	Investigated if the organizational learning culture is associated to organizational performance through the mediator effect of employee empowerment
Cultura de Aprendizagem e Desempenho Organizacional em uma empresa pública	2020 Amaral, J. B., Paiva, L. E. B. & Lima T. C. B.	Analyzed the influence of learning culture in the organizational performance on employees of a public-sector state company.
Factors Influencing Job Performance: Organizational Learning Culture, Cultural Intelligence, and Transformational Leadership	2019 Nam, K.-A. & Park, S.	Examined how the organizational learning culture, the cultural intelligence and the transformational leadership influenced the work performance among government employees in South Korea
The effect of organization learning culture, physical workplace environment, employee trust, employee satisfaction on employee performance of Thailand pharmaceutical industry	2019 Sangperm, N. & Jernsittiparsert, K.	Investigated the impact of the work physical environment, the organizational learning culture, the employee satisfaction, employee trust and

		employee performance of the Thailand pharmaceutical industry
Mediating effect of knowledge management on organizational learning culture in the context of organizational performance	2017 Wahda	Examined the mediating effect of knowledge management on Organizational Learning Culture in the Organizational Performance for higher education in Indonesia.
Defining and Creating Organizational Knowledge Performance	2017 Watkins, Karen E.	Traced the evolution of organizational learning theory until its manifestation in theories of learning organization and the consequent impact in knowledge performance.
Cultura de aprendizagem contínua, atitudes e desempenho no trabalho: Uma comparação entre empresas do setor público e privado	2015 Cavazotte F. S. C. N., Moreno, V. A. & Turano L. M.	Investigated the relation between continuous learning culture, perception of growth opportunities and individual performance, comparing companies of the public and private sectors
Cultura de Aprendizagem e Desempenho Organizacional em Oscips	2015 Arruda, S. C., Lima, T. C. B., Cabral, A. C. A., Ferraz, S. F. S. & Pinto, F. R.	Analyzed the relation between learning culture and performance in a Nonprofit organization of public interest (OSCIP) in the city of Fortaleza/CE, regarding the financial and knowledge performance, supported by the perception of several organization agents.
Cultura de aprendizagem e desempenho nas TVs cearenses	2013 Silva, A., Cabral, A. C. A., Santos, S. M. D. & Matos Filho, J. C.	Analyzed the relation between Learning Culture and Organizational Performance in TV networks from Ceará, by the perception of its collaborators

Source: Author's own elaboration (2023)

Furthermore, according to what has already been related in the methodological section of the present study, a considerable difference in numbers can also be found regarding the research conducted in the private and public contexts. The public sphere is considered a scenario in four publications, two studies examine the third sector, one of the papers compares the public and private contexts, while the other focus on the context of the private sector organizations.

Considering the analyzed period of ten years, it is worth to notice that most publications were from the year 2020 until the present year, which can indicate that this topic has become increasingly more evident when studying organizations. Therefore, we can refer to the idea defended by Watkins (2017) that the development of a learning culture at various levels is pertinent to the current environment we live in, as it allows for the variety and complexity of responses that this environment demands.

Furthermore, the considered studies have, almost entirely, quantitative research as their methodological database through the application

of questionnaires, with the exception of the previously mentioned research developed by Watkins (2017), in which the author traced the evolution of the organizational learning theory until its manifestation in learning organization theories and the subsequent impact on knowledge performance.

Still regarding the analysis of characteristics presented in these articles, it is worth to highlight the investigation on the relationship of learning culture and performance present in companies and institutions, whether as a primary focus or as a secondary dimension. Most research indicate a direct and positive relationship between learning culture and performance. In light of this, it is possible to mention some examples such as the study developed by Udin (2023), in an Indonesian health community center, which shows that organizational learning culture is highly associated to employee performance and that it is necessary to strengthen this culture in the work environment, in order to improve sustainable performance.

Going the same direction, Ahmad et al. (2021) recommend that companies promote a learning culture to improve organizational performance, given that the results obtained by the authors demonstrate the importance of an organizational learning culture to promote performance through the generation of knowledge in times of crisis, as the one created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The same idea is defended in highly competitive environments, such as the banking sector, which is the context of the study developed by Cegarra-Navarro, Jiménez-Jiménez and García-Pérez (2021), in which data shows that employee learning is directly related to the organization performance.

Corroborating the conception that a learning culture development meaningfully and positively affects the performance of a company, Ashraf et al. (2021) also suggest that, from the results obtained in the research with textile companies, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model of excellence can improve the development of a learning culture, given that it consequently improves the organizational performance. The positive and meaningful relationship between the two analyzed dimensions was ratified by the study conducted by Sangperm and Jermstittiparsert (2019) with the pharmaceutical industry.

This connection was confirmed in studies developed in the country of Brazil, such as Silva et al. (2013), which has detected that a learning culture holds a strong influence on the organizational performance of TV networks, being capable to explain around two thirds of the performance variations. Still in the Brazilian scenario, Arruda et al. (2015) pointed to a significant influence of the learning culture on the performance of a third sector institution. In this sense, Khan and Bashir (2020) recommended that third sector organizations should focus on improving their capabilities and in borrowing management best practices from the commercial sector, such as a learning culture, to achieve their economic, non-economic and social goals in a more efficient and effective manner.

This strong influence of the learning culture in the organizational performance was also perceived in the public sphere, as demonstrated by

Amaral, Paiva and Lima (2020), in a study conducted in a state-owned company which detected that the learning culture factors that most influenced the organizational performance are “Team learning and collaboration” and “Delegating power and accountability”. Still in the public sector, Nam and Park (2019), when conducting research with government servants, found that an organizational learning culture directly influences the work performance of employees and that there is an indirect correlation with transformational leadership.

It is worth to notice, however, that not all studies considered in this mapping point to the same direction. In a public sector study, Choi (2020) did not obtain empirical evidence of a direct and positive relationship between learning culture and performance. The results indicated that organizational learning culture is positively and indirectly associated with organizational performance through employee empowerment. A similar result was found by Gonzalez (2021) in a study conducted in the industrial sector, that emphasizes that, while a learning culture does not directly contribute to team performance, its influence on this performance is positive and indirect, being mediated by dynamic capability.

Seeking a different perspective, Cavazotte, Moreno e Turano (2015) investigated the relationship between continuous learning culture, perception of growth opportunities and individual performance, comparing companies from the public and private sectors. Although it was found that the strength of continuous learning in corporate cultures is positively associated with a higher emphasis on formal performance, through the perception of growth opportunities, the authors observe that employees from private companies tend to display a stronger continuous learning culture within their companies than those from the public company. Thus, promoting such culture tends to be a considerable challenge, specially to Brazilian public companies.

Final considerations

The objective of this research was to present an analysis of scientific production regarding the study of the relationship between learning culture

and organizational performance. To this end, a systematic mapping of the available literature was carried out, based on articles published in Portuguese and English, from 2013 to May 2023, using the Redalyc, Spell, Scopus and Web of Science databases.

Based on the studies carried out and selected related to learning culture and performance, it was possible to notice the clear discrepancy in the quantitative of studies between the public and private sectors, as well as between publications produced outside and inside the country. Still, most of the considered research indicated a direct and positive relationship between learning culture and organizational performance, with this study being increasingly carried out in recent years. Although some of the studies have emphasized that it is not always possible to directly correlate these two dimensions, they revealed the potential indirect correlation when adding another factor to the analysis.

Therefore, research have highlighted that the organizational management must focus their efforts in developing a strong learning culture to promote impact in the organizational performance. However, as observed in the work that compares private and public companies, cultivating this culture can be considered a challenge for the public sphere. Therefore, the importance of the studied topic is demonstrated for organizations, mainly those in the public sector, since, according to Watkins (2017), the correlations between dimensions of a learning culture and performance help leaders see the impact of a continuous learning infrastructure on organizational performance.

That being said, it is important to register that, as with other research, this study has limitations. One of them refers to the quantity of databases consulted, given that it is possible to obtain other results by expanding the quantity of databases and, thus, increasing the number of articles to be analyzed. Furthermore, the criteria of exclusion/inclusion are susceptible to subjectivity. Another aspect worth mentioning is the search for terms only in the publication titles, which may be a limitation of the research. Finally, for future studies, it is indicated the need to expand the studies on the relationship between

learning culture and performance in Brazilian public institutions, considering that most of the research focused on the topic is composed of studies in other countries.

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