

HR Best Practice:

Enabling a Learning Organisation



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“ Without learning, the wise become foolish; by learning, the foolish become wise.”

Confucius



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(Kerka)



Towards a Learning Organisation

Any organisation committed to future success must become a learning organisation.

Why?

To compete and survive demands continuous improvement.

Indeed to be successful in today's knowledge economy, firms need to create learning organisations.



Organisational learning...outcome of



Individual Learning

Adaptive / maintenance / anticipative learning

Team Learning

Two or more persons learning from projects, experience or activity.

System Learning

Systematic processes to acquire, use and communicate organizational knowledge.



The Learning Society and the Knowledge Economy



- The emergence of the idea of the 'learning organization' is wrapped up with notions such as 'the learning society'.
- Perhaps the defining contribution here was made by Donald Schon (1973).
- He provided a theoretical framework linking the experience of living in a situation of an increasing change with the need for learning.





- **A failure to attend to the learning of groups and individuals in the organization spells disaster in this context.**
- **As Leadbeater (2000) has argued, companies need to invest not just in new machinery and technology to make production more efficient, but in the flow of know-how that will sustain their business.**
- **Organizations need to be good at knowledge generation, appropriation and exploitation.**

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(Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell)



“An organisation skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights.”

(Garvin)



Organisations where people are continually expanding their capacity



...to create the results they truly desire, where new thinking is nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together.”

An increase in an “organisation’s ability to take effective action.”

(Peter Senge)



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that facilitates the learning of its members,

both individually / and teams, that continuously transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals.”





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BUT ALSO...



- **To link individual performance with organisational performance**
- **To embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal**
- **To foster inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks**
- **To be continuously aware of and interact with the environment**





- **For organisations faced with today's and tomorrow's economic challenges, learning makes the critical difference.**
- **Through learning, organisations adapt to change, avoid the repetition of past mistakes, and retain critical knowledge that would otherwise be lost.**





- **Too many organizations are unable to learn from their mistakes, they fail to adapt to customer needs and do not improve their processes to meet rising competitive standards.**
- **Most are inefficient learners, learning by accident, due to a lack of systematic processes to facilitate learning.**
- **In the age of information technology, learning is frequently a part of the task itself.**
- **Indeed, Learning and Work have become synonymous terms.**



The Changing Nature of Work



‘Knowledge’ workers constitute the primary means by which firms compete.

**As knowledge = competitiveness,
the ability of individuals and organisations to
learn becomes a primary means of winning.**



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BUT...

What Typical Learning Problems or Barriers could exist within Companies?



A circular collage of various business-related icons. The icons include a lightbulb, a clock, an envelope, a person running, a bar chart, a pie chart, a handshake, a briefcase, and several silhouettes of people. There are also mathematical symbols like plus and minus signs scattered throughout the collage.

- **Empire building**
- **Difficulty in moving knowledge across organisational boundaries and functions**
- **Slow implementation of strategic change efforts**
- **Difficulty in creating cultural change**
- **Need for process improvement**
- **Slowness in adapting to technological advances**
- **Resistance to change**
- **Existing organisational structure**
- **Over emphasis on competition, making looking good more important than being good!**

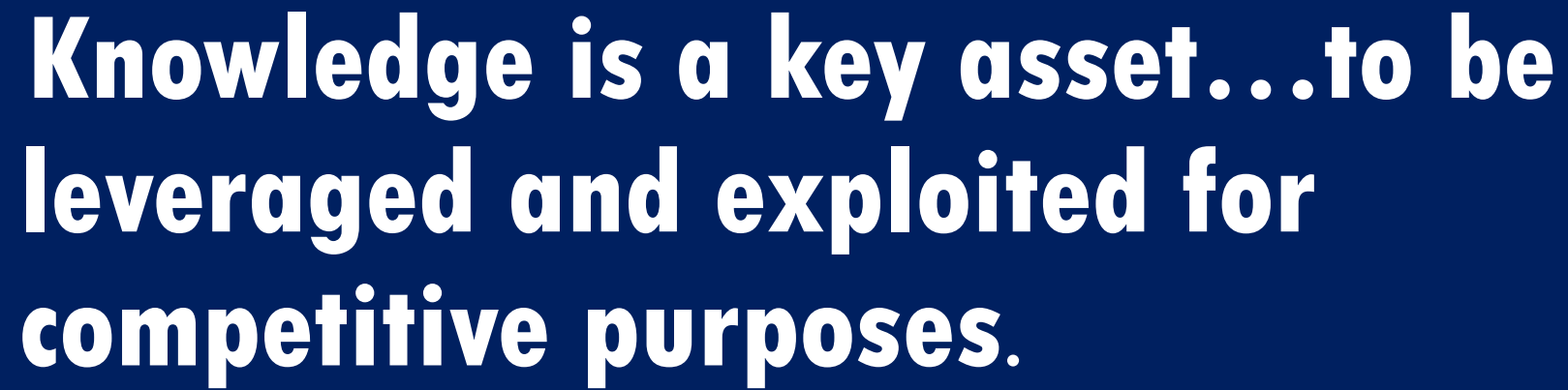


To attack these problems,

organizations need to recognize learning as key issue in any strategic decision.

In other words, they need to become more intentional about their learning.













“When you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience.

People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative.”

(Peter Senge)



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***How can we,
acting as Catalysts,
make this happen?***

- This is not a ready-made recipe for success...but **a set of principles** which are necessary for sustainable success.
- These principles do not guarantee success but they show the characteristics for success

The success of our organisations rests on our ability to manage and thrive on change

Get used to permanent change...it's like “a permanent white water rafting trip down an uncharted river - a hair-raising adventure that more and more companies are finding they cannot avoid”.

(Lewin)



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4. Facilitate Learning from the External Environment

GE's "Best Practices" Teams are searching within their own entity and in companies around the world for better ways of doing things.





The Iceberg of Ignorance

Problems known to top managers	4%
Problems known to middle managers	9%
Problems known to supervisors	74%
Problems known to rank and file employees	100%





The old way is for senior managers to do all the thinking
while everyone else ...

“wields the screwdrivers”

But **tapping into the greater energy available when all the team is engaged** can result in improved products, services and an improved work environment.



(Strata)

A learning culture rewards breakthroughs and initiative.



Organisations must become **more intentional about their own learning processes.**

Being intentional means that there is a process in place to disseminate the information.



- **Learning organisations need to provide employees with the tools to identify and develop competencies.**
- **If learning organisations are to develop ... both parties – employer and employees, have to be active participants - a partnership for mutual advantage.**

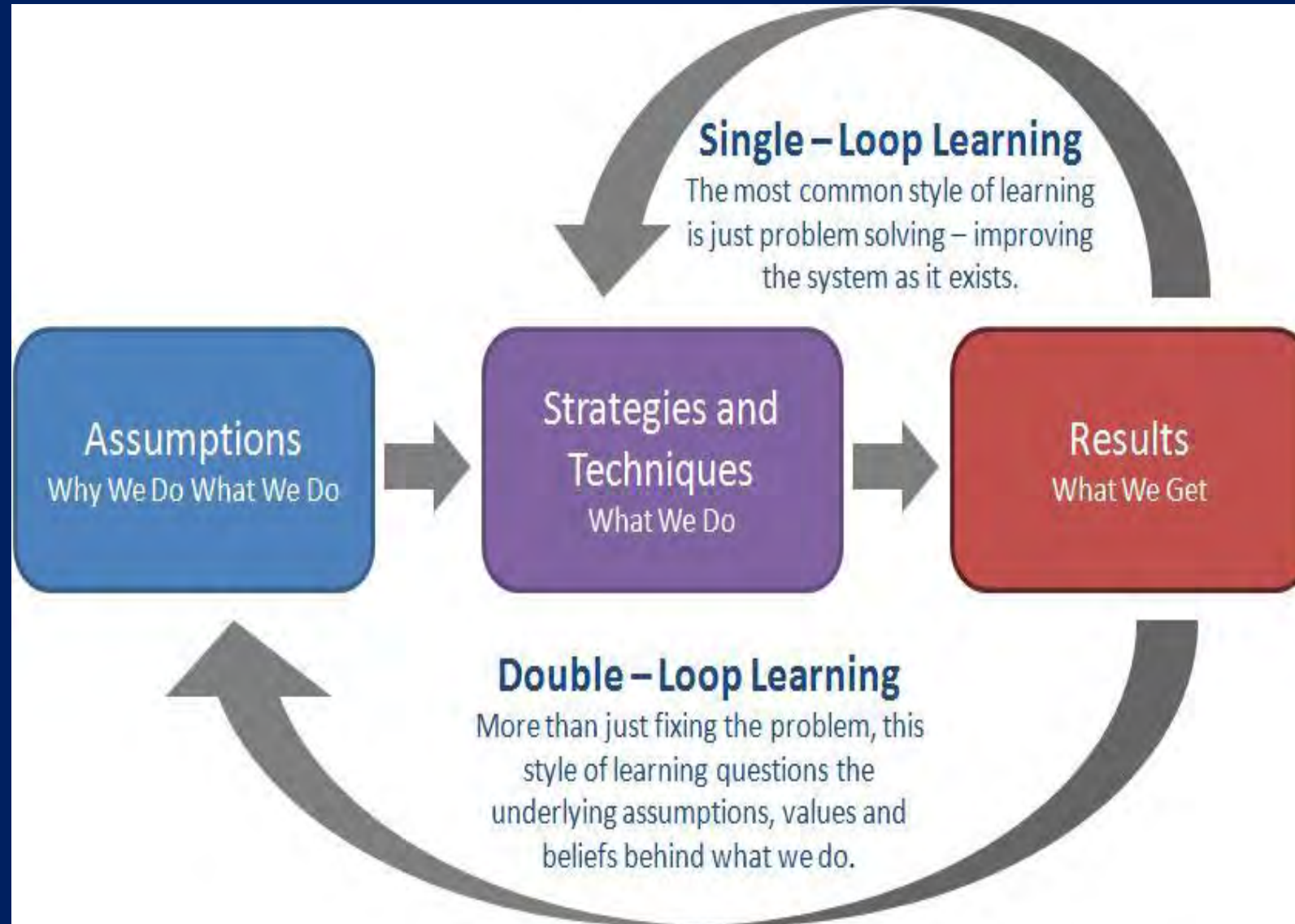
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• MEASUREMENT

- **Well-grounded definition, actionable and easy to apply**
- ## **MANAGEMENT**
- **Clear guidelines for practice, filled with operational advice rather than high aspirations.**
- ## **MEASUREMENT**
- **Tools for assessing an organization's rate and level of learning to ensure that gains have in fact made.**

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EXPERIMENTATION



- **Systematic search for and testing of new knowledge.**
- **It is usually motivated by opportunity and expanding horizons, not by current difficulties (as happens in problem-solving)**

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COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE



- **Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.**

(E. Wenger)

- **Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this.**
- **Communities among practitioners create a direct link between learning and performance, because the same people participate in communities of practice and in teams and business units.**
- **Practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing, as well as the more explicit aspects.**
- **Communities are not limited by formal structures: they create connections among people across organizational and geographic boundaries.**

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Leaders are **catalysts**,
turning shared **purpose**
into shared **results**



“Effective organisations function by means of supportive relationships which, if fostered, will build and maintain people’s sense of personal worth and importance”

(Likert)





"Sharing knowledge is not about giving people something, or getting something from them. That is only valid for information sharing."

"Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping one another develop new capacities for action; it is about creating learning processes."

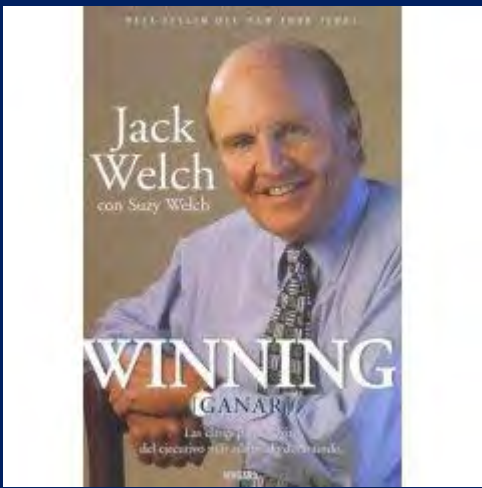
Peter Senge



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the process by which personnel understand and recognize not only the value of the programme but their place in it.”





***“An organization's ability to learn,
and translate that learning into
action rapidly, is the ultimate
competitive advantage.”***

Jack Welch

