HR Best Practice:

Enabling a Learning Organisation

ACA



Speaker: Paul Gauci

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"Without learning, the wise become foolish; by learning, the foolish become wise."



The assumption



'Learning is valuable, continuous and most effective when shared and that every experience is an opportunity to learn.'



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.





But any organisation is only as good as its people...

and continuous improvement in business is about the development of people

and therefore creating a

learning organisation culture.





Organisational learning...outcome of



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.





One has to distinguish between *organisational learning* and the *learning organisation*:

•....organisational learning is where learning takes place that changes behaviour of <u>individuals or groups</u> within the organisation

...the learning organization is where learning is taking place that changes the **behaviour of the organisation** itself'.





Organisational Learning (Chris Argyris) is widely recognised and practiced,

however many find the notion of Learning Organisation fine in theory but surprisingly rare to find

... easy to imagine but hard to implement!



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.





- The loss of the *'stable state'* means that our society and all of its institutions are in *continuous* processes of transformation.
- We cannot expect 'new stable states' that will endure for our own lifetimes.
- We must learn to understand, guide, influence and manage these transformations.
- We must make the capacity for undertaking them integral to ourselves and to our institutions.



• We must, in other words, become adept at learning.



• We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are 'learning systems', that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation. (Schon 1973)

 One of Schon's great innovations was to explore the extent to which companies, social movements and governments were learning systems – and how those systems could be enhanced.





- 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.



The Learning Organization



- It was in this context that Peter Senge (1990) began to explore 'The art and practice of the learning organization'.
- Over 750,000 copies of *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) were sold in the decade following its publication

- and it is probably this book that has been the most significant factor in popularising the notion of the learning organization.





Definitions of the 'Learning Organisation'



Learning Organisation



"An organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself to achieve superior competitive performance."

(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)

TO SUM UP



"An enterprise that focuses on the continuous improvement of its processes, products and services;

that facilitates the learning of its members,

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





BENEFITS



Benefits

- Superior performance
- Gaining a competitive edge
- Continuous Improvement and Quality
- Facilitating change and adaptation
- Encouraging Innovation
- Harnessing creative energy
- Developing an entrepreneurial spirit
- Creating a capacity for self-transformation
- Continuous Development and Growth
- Life long learning
- And role fulfilment...beyond job satisfaction







Why the need for Learning Organisations?







NOT ONLY ...

to provide continuous learning and development opportunities for employees



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.







Workforce Competence

'Learning is not something that requires time out from being engaged in productive activity; learning is at the heart of productive activity'

(Zuboff, Harvard Business School)





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.



Video







What <u>Typical Learning Problems or Barriers</u> could exist within Companies?

Activity

BU



Typical Learning Problems within Companies

- 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!







and...

• 'Closed' vs 'Open' Behaviour and Communication

• The 'myth' of the management team giving the appearance of a cohesive and united team

• And people not acknowledging that ... "they may know a lot but they still need to learn much more."





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.





Knowledge is a key asset...to be leveraged and exploited for competitive purposes.





• In a time of drastic change , it is the learners who inherit the future.

• Those who have stopped learning, find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.







LEARNING IS NOW EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS



Creating a Culture of Learning - LinkedIn Case Study





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In summary



- A learning organisation embodies an attitude, an atmosphere. The desire to learn can be found in individuals, teams, processes, systems and structures.
- Learning is the central value of the organisation.
- In this environment, innovation is not just encouraged, it's celebrated.
- Change is avidly sought rather than avoided





• For organisations to maintain a leading status they need to obtain that

'learning edge'.

'The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only sustainable advantage.'

(Arie De Geus of Royal Dutch / Shell)





Indeed the organisation's ability to learn may become

its primary adaptive ability for coping and capitalising on the change

present in our environment.





'The lessons you learn and your speed in learning those lessons may be the defining factor in your organisation's success, as well as its survival.'





Enabling a Learning Organisation





"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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Activity



Creating a Learning Organisation

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



7 Practices and Approaches



A BLUE-PRINT?

- 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



1. Thrive on Change



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".



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2. Encourage Experimentation



"Every change requires a new participative experiment. That is the central tent behind the concept of a learning organisation. It's also the hardest principle to master."





 Promote an experimental mindset – if learning comes through experience, it follows that the more one participates in guided experiences, the more one learns.

- It's not just a matter of tolerating mistakes.
 Organisations have to know how to learn from mistakes and failures in a systematic way.
- It means developing mechanisms whereby information about mistakes and successes can be easily stored and retrieved for the benefit of the entire organisation.



3. Clarify and Communicate Success and Failures



- For learning to be more than a local affair, knowledge must be spread quickly and efficiently throughout the organisation.
- Mechanisms to do this include written, oral and visual reports; site visits and tours; staff rotation programmes; education and training programmes linked to implementation and standardisation programmes.





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.





Facilitate Learning from Alliances

- The intent should not only be to profit from an alliance, but to also learn from it.
- Consider up-front what can be learned from the alliance
- Ensure adequate exchange of personnel to bring learning back to the host company





Facilitate Learning from Customers and Suppliers

They represent a free research and development source and its probably the best one.

80% of all product innovations are initiated by the customer

(Pascal and Athos)





5. Facilitate Learning from Employees

"Some of the most effective consultants your organisation could ever hire are already working for you. Employees themselves, more often than not, know what needs to be done to improve operations."





The Iceberg of Ignorance

Problems known to top managers4%Problems known to middle managers9%Problems known to supervisors74%Problems known to rank and file employees100%





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.



6. Reward Learning



"It is only when you link pay and promotion to the intangible factors of teamwork, openness and objectivity, that the organisation knows that you are serious and begins to modify its behaviours."

(Strata)

A learning culture rewards breakthroughs and initiative.





7. Intentionally Retain and Retrieve Organisational Memory

Learning from past experience, philosopher George Santayana coined the phrase:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

(Santayana)





Organisations must become more intentional about their own learning processes.

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





Mutual Benefit

- 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.



3Ms in Learning Organizations



• MEANING:

• 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.



TYPICAL ACTIVITIES OF LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS



- SYSTEMATIC PROBLEM SOLVING
- EXPERIMENTATION WITH NEW APPROACHES
- LEARNING FROM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE AND PAST HISTORY
- LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES OF OTHERS
- TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY





SYSTEMATIC PROBLEM SOLVING

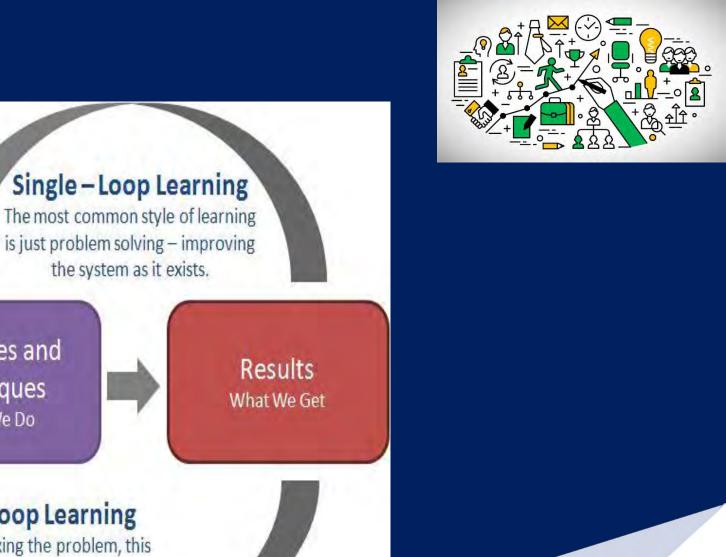
Ideas of Quality Movement

Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle
Insisting on data rather than assumptions

• DOUBLE-LOOP LEARNING

Insisting on assumptions (overleaf)





Strategies and Techniques What We Do

Assumptions Why We Do What We Do

Double - Loop Learning

More than just fixing the problem, this style of learning questions the underlying assumptions, values and beliefs behind what we do.



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)





LEARNING FROM PAST EXPERIENCE

- Companies must review their successes and failures, assess them systematically, and record the lessons in a form that employees find open and accesible.
- A productive failure is one that leads to insight, understanding, and thus an addition to the commonly held wisdom of the organization.



LEARNING FROM OTHERS



- Not all learning cames from reflection and self-analysis.
- Sometimes the most powerful insights come from looking outside one's immediate environment to gain a new perspective.
- **BENCHMARKING** is an ongoing investigation and learning experience that ensures that best industry practices are uncovered, analyzed, adopted and implemented.
 - The greatest benefits came from studying practices, the way that work gets done, rather than results, and from involving line managers in the process.





TRANSFERING KNOWLEDGE

• FOR SUCCESFUL LEARNING, KNOWLEDGE MUST SPREAD QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY THROUGHOUT THE ORGANIZATION.

• Ideas carry maximum impact when they are shared broadly rather than held in a few hands.



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.





Leaders as Change Agents





"Leadership in a learning organization starts with the principle of creative tension.

Creative tension comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, our "vision," and telling the truth about where we are, our "current reality."

The gap between the two generates a natural tension."

Peter Senge



'Change Agents' are involved in both the promotion and management of change.

They have to inspire and motivate;

manage and organise ideas,

people and things -

and support other people in the process!





"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

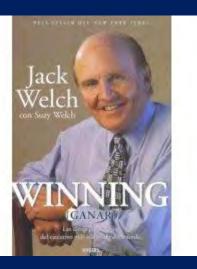


Achieving Organisational Goals

"Aligning, educating and motivating staff towards institutional objectives;

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



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