



Is Yours a Learning Organization?

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Three Building Blocks for Organizational Learning & Adaptability:

1. Create a supportive learning environment

- a. Do members feel comfortable expressing their thoughts about the work at hand?
Ensure members are not marginalized or belittled when they disagree with peers or authority figures, ask naïve questions, admit mistakes or present a minority viewpoint
- b. Does the organization value and appreciate different points of view?
Learning occurs when people become aware of opposing ideas. Increase your team's energy, spark fresh thinking and prevent lethargy by recognizing the value of alternative outlooks and worldviews
- c. Are members encouraged to be creative, take risks, explore untested approaches?
Learning requires more than solving problems and correcting mistakes –support innovation!
- d. Does the organization place too much emphasis on hours worked and tasks completed?
Supportive learning environments allow time for a pause in the action to encourage a thoughtful review of processes, analysis and creativity. When people are too busy or overstressed by deadlines and scheduling pressures, they are less able to diagnose problems and learn from their experiences

2. Establish concrete learning practices

- a. Is knowledge being shared in systematic and clearly defined ways?
- b. Does essential information move quickly into the hands & heads of those who need it?

A well-known example is the Army's **After Action Review (AAR)** process which involves a systematic debriefing after every mission, project or critical activity, to ensure lessons move up/down the chain-of-command quickly. The AAR is framed by four simple questions:

What did we set out to do?

What actually happened?

Why did it happen?

What do we do next time?

The dissemination and codification of learning is vital for any organization.

3. Reinforce a learning culture through active leadership

- a. Do leaders actively question and listen to employees to prompt dialogue and debate?
People feel encouraged to learn when leaders signal the importance of spending time to identify problems, transfer knowledge and reflect on what was accomplished. A leader willing to entertain different points of view will embolden team members to share new ideas so conventional approaches are not accepted without being scrutinized.
What alternatives have the team considered? What premises or assumptions do they have?

The three building blocks of organizational learning reinforce one another.

- ❖ Leadership behaviors create and sustain supportive learning environments.
- ❖ Supportive learning environments make it easier for managers and employees to execute concrete learning processes smoothly and efficiently.
- ❖ Concrete processes create a positive framework to foster learning for all

Take Aways:

- ❖ Empower team members to create, acquire and transfer knowledge
- ❖ Foster open discussions about what is being learned--help everyone understand what actions contribute to the mission and how and where actions should be directed as you move forward
- ❖ Encourage members to think holistically and systemically—more dialogue is key.
- ❖ Be sensitive to differences among functional/departmental processes and behaviors; groups may vary in their focus or learning maturity
- ❖ Learning is complex and multidimensional; be thoughtful when choosing levers of change

Each organization or functional unit must address their strengths & weaknesses for long-term learning

To what extent is your unit functioning as a learning organization?

Traditional Organization

- Stable environment
- Hierarchical structure
- Strategy formulated at the top and passed down
- Centralized decision-making
- Rigidly defined & specialized tasks
- Rigid culture not responsive to change
- Formal systems of communication tied to vertical hierarchy with many filters

Learning Organization

- Changing environment
- Flat, horizontal structure
- Strategy is established via a collaborative effort across the organization with groups of employees
- Decentralized decision-making
- Loose, flexible, adaptive roles
- Adaptive culture that encourages continuous improvement and change
- Open communication among personal and group networks without filters

Read the full article here: <https://hbr.org/2008/03/is-yours-a-learning-organization>