

Being a Learning Organisation: Reaching For Excellence

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Peter Senge*, the Director of the Center for Organizational Learning at a leading business school argues that real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human and that through learning we:

- ✓ become able to do things we were not able to do before
- ✓ expand how we perceive the world and our relationship to it
- ✓ extend our capacity to be creative and innovative

Learning organisations are those that appreciate the inherent value in people learning, developing, growing and changing so that they lead the business to greater success.

Leaders in learning organisations do not simply offer random training to all and they don't necessarily have the biggest training budgets; what they will have is a passion for excellence and an understanding that their people are the way to achieve this.

If you stop learning today, you stop leading tomorrow

Howard Hendricks

Through technology, most employees have instant access to vast amounts of information and they often do not need to wait for information to be passed down from management. Skilled learners can sift, sort and utilise what they need, in order to make effective decisions and take successful action in your business.

The role of the business leader in a learning organisation is less about what you "know" and "control" and more about how you share knowledge, learn from your actions, and reshape your own knowledge based on new experiences, perspectives, and ideas. It is about role modelling effective learning behaviours to your employees.

An ability to embrace new ideas, routinely challenge old ones, and live with paradox will be the effective leaders premier trait

Tom Peters

In learning organisations, there is an emphasis on learning by doing, trying it out to see what works, and learning from our mistakes. The leaders in a learning organisation need to foster a no-blame culture; one where people are inspired to take calculated risks, challenge themselves and others, and are empowered to make decisions and take responsibility.

Learning takes many forms, and leading organisations are recognising that "one size fits all" training is not the solution to their needs for business excellence. Great learning organisations will invariably have:

- ✓ Effective induction programmes that ensure new employees feel included and welcomed, that promote the value of the organisational culture, and that get them up to speed quickly with the essential workplace knowledge
- ✓ Meaningful appraisal and supervisions systems that support employees in dealing with difficulties, recognise good work, offer constructive feedback on areas for development, identify learning needs and plan ways to meet those needs

- ✓ Robust procedures for learning needs analysis so that learning opportunities absolutely match the requirements, and that any learning interventions are evaluated for quality and in terms of the outcomes both in the short and long term
- ✓ Coaching and / or mentoring programmes for targeted, personalised, individual support in key business areas and for developing talent
- ✓ Relevant on-the-job training, training programmes, workshops, courses or action learning sets to meet specific skills and knowledge development needs
- ✓ Promotion of self learning through e-learning, access to books, trade magazines and articles, membership of professional bodies, research opportunities, attending conferences, seminars and professional networks
- ✓ Management support for all learning interventions that are offered so that employees understand the desired outcomes and expectations, and that objectives for learning are set, agreed, monitored and reviewed
- ✓ Ways of recognising and recording the skills and knowledge that already exist within the business so that these can be shared and passed on to other employees
- ✓ Effective feedback mechanisms for ensuring that successes are celebrated, that praise and reward are given regularly, consistently and meaningfully, and so that “lessons learnt” from things that didn’t go so well are used effectively for future improvements
- ✓ Promotion of the value in life-long learning to maintain and enhance skills, enthusiasm, interests, good health and fitness, a sense of well-being, energy and life-balance

The Campaign for Learning state that research shows that lifelong learners are more likely to be happier, healthier, have better jobs, contribute more to society and live longer and more fulfilled lives.

The Campaign for Learning’s National Workplace Learning Network has been set up to support individuals and organisations to develop a culture of learning in the workplace. One of the key messages that the Campaign for Learning promote is that offering learning to your employees need not be costly, time consuming or inconvenient. It is intended to enhance, not detract from your business.

Learning at Work Day takes place annually; it is run by the Campaign for Learning and takes place as part of Adult Learners Week. The day is intended as both a celebration of learning, and promotion of the benefits that continuous learning can bring to individuals and organisations.

You can find more details about the Campaign for Learning and Learning at Work Day at <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/WorkplaceLearning/lawday/index.asp>

This year, Learning at Work Day is on May 22nd – what will you be doing to encourage your employees to continually develop, to be the best they can and to be looking for improvements at work?

* *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 1990, Peter Senge, ISBN 0-385-26095-4.