**A STUDY OF CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING CULTURE**

by

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ABSTRACT

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Organizational learning is a term seen quite often in today's leadership, organizational, and employee development literature. But what is it exactly? Is it relevant to the real concerns companies must address on a daily basis? What does it take to build one? How do you know if your organization is capable? And even if its concepts are powerful and sensible, can they realistically be applied with effectiveness in today's for-profit organizations?

This research paper looks at these and other topics focused on building a learning culture. It reveals the theoretical and idealistic precepts surrounding organizational learning, summarizes recent writings, case studies, and observations focused on the fundamentals, and discusses models assembled as blueprints to assist in effectively building learning cultures.

Data for the research was collected from Performance Improvement professionals working in employee development roles for 17 leading North American companies, within 12 different industries. The survey instrument obtained subjective opinions on the current state of companies as relative to components fundamental to building a learning culture. It identified common obstacles, successful solutions, and supporting behaviors focused on information flow, learning solutions, systems thinking, and leadership support, which influence the development and implementation of an organizational learning culture.

Research in this field found many books and journal articles on the principles, components, benefits, and applications necessary to effectively develop a learning culture, but there was little information available on examples of organizational learning practices developed and currently in use within these corporations. Additionally, there was little documentation on the real-time challenges and roadblocks encountered by those employees inside the organization most likely to champion and/or implement the steps essential to building such a culture.

The importance of this study is based on the awareness that for-profit organizations are under great pressure to produce results. They must take an aggressive approach in preparing to handle the changes that arise within their internal and external environments. The philosophy of organizational learning is unearthing those elements within the organization that contribute to its inability to adapt. The focus of this research was to unearth those elements within companies that not only inhibit their adaptability, but also sustain it.

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The importance of knowledge among employees as leverage for increased productivity and overall profitability, has for many for-profit organizations, become a primary component of the strategic process. "Knowledge has become the primary ingredient of what we make, do, buy, and sell. As a result, managing it – finding and growing intellectual capital, storing it, selling it, sharing it – has become the most important economic task of individuals, businesses, and nations" (Stewart, 1999, p. 12). In 1999 alone, organizations with more than 100 employees are estimated to have spent $62.45 billion on formal training (Industry Report 1999, 1999). This is almost $4 billion, or 6.5%, more than in 1998, when $58.6 billion was spent on formal training within the same data group (Holton, Ruona, & Leimbach, 1998). The concept of organizational learning, which espouses the importance of continual learning throughout the organizational system, as well as at the individual level, has progressed in step with this increased understanding. However, as insightful and erudite as are the principles of organizational learning, their results take time to surface, "the learning organization is far more suited for the long march than for the big leap" (Ayas, Foppen, Maljers, 1996). The importance of this study is based on determining if the concepts of organizational learning, which are powerful and sensible in theory, can realistically be applied with effectiveness, in today's for-profit organizations.

Chapter One will present the primary objectives of this study along with a statement of its significance as a research problem. It will acknowledge limitations of the study, list operational definitions of terms included in the research, and lastly, present an overview on the remainder of the paper.

<u>Problem Statement</u>

This study will identify common obstacles, successful solutions, and supporting behaviors focused on information flow, learning solutions, systems thinking, cultural barriers, and leadership support, which influence the development and implementation of an Organizational Learning culture within select North American companies.

<u>Research Objectives</u>

The intent of this research project is to:

1. Identify common obstacles to successfully integrating organizational learning concepts into an organizational system.

2. Discover solutions that have successfully addressed obstacles to integration.

3. Identify behaviors and practices in use that support attempts to build organizational learning cultures.

<u>Significance of the Study</u>

The importance of this study is based on the awareness that for-profit organizations are under great pressure to produce results in a time when "continuing challenges will tax our collective abilities to deal with them" (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Roth, Ross, & Smith, 1999, p. 3). Businesses must take an aggressive approach in preparation to handle the changes that arise within their internal and external environments. "The theory of business has to be tested continually…it is a (sic) hypothesis about things that are in constant flux-society, markets, customers, technology. And so, built into the theory of the business must be the ability to change itself" (Drucker, 1995, p. 31). Is an organizational learning culture an organization's best leverage in its ability to adapt? Senge (1990) believes that "true proactiveness comes from seeing how we contribute to our own problems" (p. 21). The philosophy of organizational learning is unearthing those elements within the organization that contribute to its inability to adapt. This paper will look at the practical and theoretical issues surrounding organizational

learning, retrieve data through the utilization of a survey instrument, and document the survey feedback. The survey instrument has been built to uncover information surrounding performance improvement professional's own opinion of their working knowledge or familiarity with organizational learning. Its intent is to have each respondent identify and articulate current practices within their organizations, which support or inhibit an organizational learning culture and accompanying practices. And in addition, ask them to provide feedback on whether they see an organizational learning culture as an attainable method by which to facilitate change and accelerate growth.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are:

1. All members of the population belong to the International Society of Performance Improvement (ISPI) North American Chapter. Therefore, the sampling may not be representative of all Performance Improvement Professionals.

2. The sampling frame was random, however, it was comprised only from those in the population with an electronic mail (e-mail) address listed in the ISPI membership directory.

3. The survey data is not based on studies within each participating organization; it is derived from the survey respondents' perception of the culture within their organization.

Definition of Terms

Benchmarking – The continuous process of measuring our products, services, and practices against the toughest competitors or those companies recognized as industry leaders.

Collaborative Learning – Small group work where group members learn from one another by working together. (Marquardt, 1996)

Collective Learning – Knowledge gained that is not stored in any individual's mind, but in the practices of all who participate. (Senge, et al., 1999)

Competency – A characteristic underlying a successful performance. (Rothwell & Kazanas, 1998)

Defensive Routines – Actions that are intended to circumvent the experience of embarrassment or threat by bypassing the situations that may trigger these responses. (Argyris, 1999)

Dialogue – A shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together…a living experience of inquiry within and between people. (Isaacs, 1999)

Discipline – A body of theory and technique that must be studied and mastered to be put into practice. (Senge, 1990)

Knowledge – A conclusion drawn from data or information. (Stewart, 1997)

Learning – The way in which individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganize, change or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills, and feelings. (Marsick & Watkins, 1990)

Learning Organization – An organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights. (Garvin, 1993)

Leverage – Well-focused actions that can sometimes produce significant enduring improvements, if they are in the right place. (Senge, 1990)

Mental Models – Deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. (Senge, 1995)

Organization – A group of individuals (who are remunerated), working in structures (simple or complex) for a common cause (manufacturing and selling products or providing services), who, under the proper leadership (the boss), generate a return (payback) to the provider of funds. (Drucker, 1997)

Organizational Learning – The capability of real organizations to draw valid and useful inferences from experience and observation, and to convert such inferences to effective action. (Argyris, 1999)

Theories-in-use – The mental models (assumptions, generalizations, and images) that lie behind our actions. (Argyris & Schein, 1996)

Overview of Upcoming Chapters

The upcoming chapters, two, three, four, and five, make up the balance of the research paper. Following is a brief overview and description of their position in this study.

Chapter two, the *Review of Literature*, focuses on previous research and writings on the subject of organizational learning. Its discoveries provided the foundation, which further established the necessity to pursue the research, and additionally, it serves as historical background and point of reference for the reader.

Chapter three, *Research Methods*, describes the research methodology and design. It summarizes: the identification of the population and sample group, the data collection instrument, the data collection techniques, and the interpretation procedure.

Chapter four, *Analysis of Results*, discusses and analyzes the details of the findings and interprets the results in relation to the Review of Literature.

Chapter five, *Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations*, summarizes observations on chapters one through four, states conclusions on findings from the data analysis, and makes recommendations on further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature for this study was intended to uncover previous research focused

on organizational learning and its feasibility in the for-profit organizational environment. It was

undertaken as a learning exploration to obtain insight and perspective from past and present

theorists and practitioners of Organizational and Management studies. The review provides a

look at conceptual, practical, and cultural issues surrounding organizational learning in the

workplace, while uncovering empirical evidence and models focused on understanding how

learning can be captured, transferred, retained, and effective, in an organizational environment.

Literature was acquired through the search and examination of accessible publications such as

books, periodicals, magazines, and association literature.

The review's design consists of three sections. *The conceptual framework of*

organizational learning reveals the theoretical and idealistic precepts surrounding organizational

learning. Section two, *Current research addressing organizational learning issues*, summarizes

recent writings, case studies and observations focused on the fundamentals necessary to making

organizational learning an actuality. And lastly, *Working models to facilitate organizational*

learning discusses models assembled as blueprints to assist in effectively building an

organizational learning culture.

The conceptual framework of organizational learning

"Now is the time to embrace the invisible" (Wheatley, 1996, p. 57). Wheatley (1996)

infers that the intangibles within organizations such as system dynamics, interpersonal

relationships, and information, are the elements that have the most impact on future success or

failure. Definitions of organizational learning uncovered during this study allude to components within organizations that are predominantly intangible, but in some manner ultimately responsible for organizational success or failure. Before looking at opinions of what organizational learning is, first level-setting its two components learning and the organization, is necessary. An organization is "differentiated from other collections of people by their goal-directed behavior. They pursue goals and objectives that can be more effectively achieved by the concerted action of individuals. They possess three important characteristics: behavior, structure, and processes" (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly, 1979, p. 575). "Organizations are not just a large collection of individuals, they also represent a context with a system for capturing, and imparting the learning of its individual members" (Ayas, et al., 1996). Learning is "movement from superficial knowledge to deep understanding…the opening up of boundaries to stimulate the exchange of ideas" (Garvin, 1993, p. 78). "Learning is about gaining experience, building competence, and avoiding the repetition of mistakes, problems, and errors that waste resources" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 27). Combined, these definitions provide the essence of the organizational learning philosophy.

A pioneer in the field of organizational learning, Chris Argyris states that within an organization, learning takes place under two conditions. "First, learning occurs when an organization achieves what it intended; that is, there is a match between its design for action and the actuality or outcome. Second, learning occurs when a mismatch between intentions and outcomes is identified and corrected; that is, a mismatch is turned into a match" (Argyris, 1999, p. 67). Schwandt (1997) defines organizational learning as "a system of actions, actors, symbols and processes that enables an organization to transform information into valued knowledge which in turn increases its long-run adaptive capacity" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 343). "OL is the process by which organizations become aware of qualities, patterns and consequences of their own experience, and develop mental models to understand these experiences" (McGill & Slocum, 1993, p. 72). Guns says that organizational learning is nothing more than "figuring out what

works or what works better" (Guns, 1996, p. 16). Organizational learning, says Senge (1990), is happening when " an organization is continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (p. 14). Argyris and Schon (1996) share a more detailed definition:

Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization's behalf. They experience a surpassing mismatch between expected and actual results of action and respond to that mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of organization or their understandings of organizational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations into line, thereby changing organizational theory-in-use. In order to become organizational, the learning that results from organizational inquiry must become embedded in the images of the organization held in members minds … and embedded in the organizational environment. (p. 16)

This perspective supports the aforementioned intangible aspect of organizational learning. It explains that people do not act with an individual or an organization, so much as with the mental models we carry of them in our head, the resulting action we take is determined by these mental models (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions and generalizations that influence how we understand the world and how we take action (Senge, 1990). "A mental model is our image or perspective of an event situation, activity or concept" (Marquardt, 1996, p. 45). For learning to occur, "the mirror must be turned inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny" (Senge, 1990, p. 9). A more recent work by Argyris puts forth a practical interpretation of organizational learning "The capability of real organizations to draw valid and useful inferences from experience and observation, and to convert such inferences to effective action" (Argyris, 1999, p. 14).

Moving beyond definitions, DiBella and Nevis (1998) offer three viewpoints observed from academic literature, and three vital criteria of organizational learning. The three viewpoints or perspectives are the normative, developmental, and capability. The *normative* view sees organizational learning taking place only under a unique set of circumstances and conditions. It says organizational life on its own "is not conducive to learning" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 9), there must be in place, certain structures and best practices necessary to facilitate organizational learning. The *developmental* perspective looks at organizational learning as being an advanced stage of the organizational life cycle, just another level brought on by experience in the developmental process (DiBella & Nevis, 1998). Proponents of the *capability* perspective believe that "learning is innate to all organizations and that there is no best way for all organizations to learn," so, by their nature, they are systems where learning takes place (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p.4). Ernst & Young has developed a model to assist in workplace learning. It has two parts: (1) manage self as learner and (2) help others learn. Each part is made up of five components: (1) plan (what needs to be learned), (2) reflect on plan, (3) act, (4) reflect on action (use feedback to determine what learning took place and how it can be capitalized on to improve performance), and (5) transfer (make the learning part of the business process) (Marquardt, 1996). "The continuous workplace learning model provides a process for turning work assignments and business problems/opportunities into learning experiences" (Marquardt, 1996, p. 81). The three organizational learning criteria proposed by DiBella and Nevis (1998) are first, that new skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors are created or acquired over time, as a result of daily experiences in the workplace. Next, what is learned must become the property of some collective unit. "Organizational learning is not about how individuals, as individuals, learn in an organization, but about how individuals and work groups working with others learn from one another's experience" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 26). The final criterion is, what has been learned remains within the organization or group even after the individuals leave. This is what makes the second

criterion so crucial, because when experienced employees leave, they take their knowledge with them.

Argyris and Schon (1996) were able to identify obstacles to the organizational learning process through an approach they call the theory of action. It is divided into two distinct components: espoused theories, or the actions of what we say and reveal to others, and theories-in-use, or the mental models that lie behind our actions. The theories of action advocate that the theories-in-use must be brought to the surface and understood as the beginning of an effort to design and produce new actions (Argyris & Schon, 1996). In other words, learning to understand the data in our mind that helps formulate our perceptions is where we must start if we are to change. Argyris (Cayer, 1997) believes that the theories of action are theories about effectiveness, that "actions are life activities intended to bring about consequences" (p.54). If the consequences produce effectiveness, then the actions which lead to those consequences are being reinforced (Cayer, 1997).

To convert the theories of action to practical application, Argyris and Schon (1996) used a model from electrical engineering to further explain theories-in-use. Single-loop learning is learning "that changes strategies of action or assumptions underlying strategies in ways that leave the values of a theory of action unchanged (p. 20). So, when a problem occurs, actions are taken to solve the problem and perhaps even keep it from happening in the future, but nothing is done to assess values or thinking processes that allowed it to happen in the first place. Double-loop learning is " learning that results in a change in the values of theory-in-use, as well as its strategies and assumptions" (Argyris & Schon, 1996, p. 21). From an engineering perspective, a thermostat is a single-loop learner. It is programmed to notice when it is too hot or too cold and to turn itself on to adjust accordingly. If the thermostat asked why it was too hot or too cold, "why it was set at 68 degrees or why it was programmed as it was, then it would be a double-loop learner" (Argyris, 1999, p. 68). An intervention method that Argyris used to help people jump from single to double-loop learning, was to tape discussion sessions of employees and then play

them back to identify the underlying pictures of private thoughts and hidden agendas (Cayer, 1997). A similar intervention, called the container, was used by Senge to move people into a double-loop learning theory-in-use. The premise is to have everyone in the meeting imagine that all their hostile thoughts and feelings are bottled up in a container sitting on the table. As people speak out and put their biases, fears and anger out in the open, the hostility becomes neutralized and is there in the open for everyone to see (Dumaine, 1997).

> " Since Senge's work on the Fifth Discipline, discussions on the concept of learning organizations have grown exponentially" (Griego & Geroy, 1999, p. 151). The Five Disciplines or "component technologies" to build learning organizations, are referred to as disciplines because they are behavioral in nature (Senge, 1990, p. 6)

These five disciplines are:

1. *Systems Thinking*, "which represents a conceptual framework one uses to make full patterns clearer, and to help one see how to change them effectively" (Marquardt, 1999, p. 137). "It is a framework for seeing inter-relationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshot" (Senge, 1990, p. 68).

2. *Personal Mastery*, "the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, focusing our energies, developing patience and seeing reality objectively … the learning organization's spiritual foundation" (Senge, 1990, p. 7).

3. *Mental Models*, "are deeply ingrained assumptions that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Marquardt, 1999, p. 137). "Very often, we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the impact they have on our actions" (Senge, 1990, p. 8).

4. *Building Shared Vision*, "binding people together around a common identity and sense of destiny" (Senge, 1990, p. 9). People excel and learn not because they have to but because they want to.

5. *Team Learning*, "why do teams with individual IQ's of 120 have a collective IQ of 63" (Senge, 1990, p. 9). Team learning is focused around dialogue and discussion, and overcoming patterns of defensiveness that can limit team development.

These five disciplines "boil down to the assertions that people should put aside their old ways of thinking (mental models), learn to be open with others (personal mastery), understand how their company really works (systems thinking), form a plan everyone can agree upon (shared vision), and then work together to achieve that vision (team learning)" (Dumaine, 1994, p. 148).

Current research addressing organizational learning issues

With a foundation established as to what organizational learning is conceptually, following will be an overview of five studies surrounding organizational learning issues. The studies were selected based on their individual content with no intended correlation to one another except that, each adopts a position that identifies elements, which support or inhibit the implementation of an organizational learning culture.

The first study, Creating a Learning Organization: a Case Study of Outcomes and Lessons Learned, was published in the April 1999 International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) monthly periodical Performance Improvement. This study highlights the transition to an organizational learning culture within an established organization, the Electrical & Fuel Handling Division (EFHD), of Ford Motor Company, which supplies automotive parts to Ford and other automotive manufacturers.   It looks at the strategic initiatives, processes, results, applications, and impediments to becoming a learning organization.

Initially, in 1992, a process "to create high-performance launch processes of new and current product lines" was beginning. Simultaneously, an executive management team was beginning an effort " to create a culture based on team learning and shared vision." This was the beginning of the organizational learning initiative. (Bierema & Berdish, 1999, p. 37)

"EFHD's goal was to achieve maximum organizational performance through learning. The intended results were to learn faster than the competition, achieve maximum value and zero

waste, optimize knowledge and understanding, and use energy to be best-in-class producer (rather than fighting political battles)". An attempt to build an infrastructure that would support organizational learning incorporated "cultivating a supportive culture, promoting learning organization awareness, building and involvement, and adopting a community focus". By building a learning organization, EFHD hoped to "strengthen 'soft skills' through developing true openness and understanding of assumptions that govern behaviors and beliefs…in an effort to focus on cultivating open and honest communication among all employees". (Bierema & Berdish, 1999 p. 37)

This study sought to answer two primary questions: "How do participants apply the theoretical concepts of organizational learning?" and "What prevents the effective implementation of a learning organization process"? The methodology used was a case study design using twenty-five volunteers who participated in a sixty-hour course on organizational learning theory and practice. Data was collected through observation, surveys, interviews and meetings. The results showed that "key areas of performance improvement included: dramatic financial turnaround, improved employee attitude, company leadership and new product launches that exceeded budget objectives". Attempting to understand the results from a learning perspective, the authors looked at two areas, individual learning and collective learning. From an individual perspective, " the participants engaged in deeply reflective learning and transferred this learning to the work environment". A consistent theme among participants was also the "improvement in personal mastery they experienced…being provoked to think in new ways". Supervisors began to see things from their employees' perspective, " in one instance an engineer changed so dramatically that he was teased by coworkers about becoming 'soft". From the perspective of collective learning, "participants reported significant learning related to the aspect of shared vision…a new appreciation for the diversity of the team and tolerance of divergent viewpoints". Learning teams were formed "with the sole purpose of practicing the concepts and tools in a safe arena". Shared vision was addressed continually, "simply recognizing that it was

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achievable and that similar values were shared was a breakthrough for many employees". Self-directed learning programs were established and facilitated by individual employees, along with the shift to a systems thinking approach. People began to view their roles differently. One such person said he "can't believe the interconnections I am experiencing. It is like learning a new word and seeing it everywhere you never saw it before". (Bierema & Berdish, pp. 37-40)

Though there was much progress made, several impediments still existed to becoming a learning organization. Management support was not what the employees expected it could be. "They are called the organizational 'clay' representing the impenetrable hard layer in the organization that seems nearly impossible to change". Peer support from those who did not participate in the study was limited. "No one spoke their new language or understood the vision". Also, resources that were requested by participants to continually enhance their learning, were hard to acquire. The authors, however, identified lasting elements that affirm success for EFHD in becoming a learning organization. "Employees see better how they fit into a larger system;" it "created a model to guide and capture company learning;" it "compiled several systems thinking tools to aid the process," and "EFHD now uses dialogue continually to reflect on how processes can be improved". (Bierema & Berdish, 1999, pp. 39-41)

EFHD had a goal to achieve maximum organizational performance through learning. A study with 25 volunteers and 60 hours of course work on organizational learning will not make that a quick reality. However, from an organizational learning perspective "how we deal with most things in our lives depends on how we frame the situation: our mindset, our perspective, our point of view" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998). EFHD has constructed a new frame of perception by its willingness to achieve improved performance through organizational learning concepts. Bierema and Berdish (1999) wanted to answer two questions: how can the concepts be applied, and what are obstacles to implementing processes related to organizational learning? Answers were uncovered for both. They discovered the applications were most obviously revealed through feedback centered on the individual and collective learning processes. Changes among the

volunteers were manifested by the way they not only viewed learning, but by their awareness of its transference. Obstacles, of which they are now aware of going forward, were the lack of management support, a non-familiarity with organizational learning concepts and practices from employees outside the study group, and the difficulty of acquiring the resources necessary to succeed. So EFHD now not only knows what they must do going forward to expand the organizational learning culture, but they also take with them those previously mentioned elements of success.

Another work, published through the Rotterdam School of Management, is observations on the roadblocks to learning within organizations, and leadership's role in creating an organizational learning culture. Exploring Organizational Learning: Some Observations on Resistance and Leadership, looks at challenges associated with building an O.L culture. The paper's area of focus is the complexity of organizational learning, learning barriers within the organizational environment, and leadership's impact on behavioral change.

Ayas, Foppen & Maljers (1999) propose that organizational learning "implies a series of complex behavioral processes" which serves as "an additional 'tool or infrastructure' through which an organization's performance can improve". The authors describe an organization as consisting of strategy, structure, culture, and systems, but state however, "they actually are a 'system' of individuals with (different) goals, (lack of) power, and (no) sense of responsibility and attitudes". Organizational learning in the author's opinion is complex because learning "occurs at the individual level, and organizations ultimately learn through its [sic] members". They intimate that many believe the idea of organizational learning is a metaphor, "organizations cannot learn, individuals do". In addition, there are many different levels of learning, single and double-loop, active, adaptive, generative, strategic and tactical, and the difficulty increases as the level of learning rises. Ayas et al. believe that proponents of organizational learning fail to look at the complexities beyond their fundamental statements of what they feel a learning organization

is. Many overlook the impact of change processes, or fail to observe a topic at a deeper level. For example "studying the learning processes of individuals within the organizational context, provides insight over factors facilitating or inhibiting individual learning…it highlights the difficulties in attaining higher levels of learning both for the individual and the organization". (Ayas et al. 1996)

The next topics of focus in this study were the learning barriers within organizational settings, and the relationship between learning and the reason for learning. Learning under normal circumstances can be difficult at all levels of the organization, especially if employees cannot differentiate the need for learning and what they already know. "When drastic changes are needed and fast learning is required, then training and learning laboratories can be of great help…because learning is not necessarily a normal outcome of existing practices and procedures". But under normal circumstances employees learn as they work "especially when they are not on 'training', they learn how to survive and operate within their organizational milieu". Some resistance to learning arises when people already know too well their role and its relation to the organizational culture, "they have learnt the ropes, and these lessons about how their organization works may obstruct their openness to further learning". Additional learning is embraced when employees can see how what they are being encouraged to learn relates to their organizational function. A desire is created "when they can see that what they are learning will help them do what they are being rewarded for doing in ways which will be valued". In others words, barriers to individual learning can be lowered if on a personal level, people can see the benefit of the time they expend in the learning process. (Ayas et al. 1996)

Beyond individual barriers to the learning process are structural barriers. As mentioned above, the process can be impeded if departmental and individual rewards and values do not correlate with new learning. But beyond even the rewards, culture and hierarchical structure, the authors propose that it is the politics behind these elements that affect learning. "This political element derives from the fact that organizations are differentiated into specialisms, [sic]

departments, sub-groups of various kinds, within a structure of hierarchy where power, resource, prestige, and reward are differentially distributed. These specialisms breed differences of perspective, priority, and interest". Learning, which is basically the transfer of information, gets caught in the middle of these differences, instead of being viewed as something for the better, it is seen as threatening, "information becomes a resource useful to protect or advance sectional interests". Ayas et al (1996) quote Salaman & Butler (1994) as they expand on the political barriers; "people resist innovations and the accompanying training for two related reasons: (1) they fear the change as having implications for their sectional position, and (2) because they are suspicious of those who initiate the change whom they see as distinct from themselves – as 'them' as in contrast to 'us' (Salaman & Butler, 1994, pp. 39-40). With this mindset in place, learning becomes something beyond what it is supposed to be, " …new knowledge, systems, and techniques are viewed suspiciously, even rejected because they are seen to represent the priorities of others whose priorities are distinct…" (Salaman & Butler, 1994 pp. 39-40). Learning, rather than being beneficial, is obstructed because it has become a mechanism for additional fear, skepticism, and political gamesmanship. (Ayas et al.)

The last focus of this observation is on leadership's role in supporting or discouraging organizational learning behavior. "Leadership and organizational culture are intertwined. Leaders will have to ensure that learning will gradually become a vital part of the culture of the organization". Leaders are responsible for managing perceived understanding and communicating the vision in such a way that changes are embraced. They must be aware of the organizational culture, be able to view its imperfections, and not advocate through their actions, the dysfunction caused by power and politics. "Leaders together have a decisive influence on the strategy, structure, culture, and systems of an organization, they formulate and/or facilitate the organizations direction". Ayas et al. support the need for different leadership styles depending on the developmental stage of the organization, young, middle-life, or mature. However, no matter which stage "to be effective in changing behavior, not only structures, processes, and strategies

have to be recognized, but also the organizational culture will have to be given its due".

Leadership must acknowledge and possibly accept responsibility for the perceptions, thoughts,

and feelings, which underlie the culture, and be willing to honestly accept the realities.

Additionally, leaders need to promote learning by accepting uncertainty and building trust.

"Creating trust at all levels is an imaginative mental shift from control and punishments to

opportunity and rewards". Listening to both employees and customers becomes paramount to

building discussion for open communication. Leaders should assess whether the feedback they

receive is literal within the company, or just individual perception. (Ayas et al. 1996)

 "Learning and change mostly take place on two dimensions: (1) Effective change and

regulation, is learning a bottom-up process or is it initiated and regulated top-down? (2)

Objective and subjective perception, is learning about reality somewhere 'out there', or has it to

do with 'in here' in the minds of the individual"? They conclude that resistance and barriers

create learning opportunities that need to be studied. These can lead to insights into how the

culture, systems, or structure of the organization is inhibiting or encouraging the learning process.

From these insights leadership can identify where change needs to take place, or proposed

changes suspended. "Effective learning and change requires a dynamic balance between out-

there and in-here, and between discretion, complimentarity and regulation". (Ayas et al. 1996)

Though a paper of conceptual observations, Ayas et al. (1996) identify three themes,

which are ubiquitous in one way or another, throughout the literature reviewed for this paper; it is

a complex process, barriers to learning abound, and leadership support is imperative. The

complexity of the process is spoken of as systemic by Senge (1990), Marquardt (1996), DiBella

& Nevis (1998), and Argyris (1999). All actions within an organization have some effect

elsewhere in the organization, and learning cannot be considered as separate from the routine

functions of operation.   As well, the learning process cannot focus solely on its methodology

without considering the complexities of the individual learner and his or her environment,

perception, competencies, and motivation. Barriers do not only arise from the obvious matters

i.e. time, money, manning, and technology, they are most often found in the non-obvious. Mental models (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Dumaine, 1994; Garvin, 1993; Marquardt, 1998; and Senge, 1990) are the barriers formed by individual thinking, and go unnoticed both externally and internally. Individual actions become barriers because of the results that go unobserved. The thinking that led to those actions is ignored, "both designers and implementers… must actively seek out evidence during the realization of strategy that may disconfirm their reasoning and lead to new information about the environment" (Argyris & Schon, 1996, p. 259). Political struggles create barriers because of myopic mindsets that view the parts and not the whole, "functional divisions grow into fiefdoms…cutting off contact between functions. The result: analysis of the most important problems in a company, the complex issues that cross-functional lines, becomes a perilous or nonexistent exercise" (Senge, 1990, p. 24). Leadership's role is to ultimately manage, organize, coach and control in such a manner that the catalysts of these barriers, and comprehension of their complexities, are identified. They must be confronted, assessed objectively, and dealt with in a way that reworks them from productivity obstacles, to knowledge capital, used as leverage for future learning.

The next study, published in The Academy of Human Resources Development 1999 conference proceedings, is Predictors of Learning Organizations: A Human Resource Development Practitioners Perspective. This is "an empirical study which looked at predictive practices that would enable organizations to achieve learning organization success" (Griego & Geroy, 1999, p. 151). The term predictor is used as a designation of something that is thought to have future guarantees. The authors (Griego & Geroy, 1999) apply this term because of determinations made from a 1996 Learning Organization Profile by Marquardt (1996). Marquardt's profile (survey) consisted of five sections, which were identified as subsystems within an organization. Respondents were asked to decide to what extent these ten statements in each section pertained to their organizations. The five subsystems were learning dynamics,

organization transformation, people empowerment, knowledge management, and technology application.

Predictors of the Learning Organization at which the study looked were: training and education, rewards and recognition, vision and strategy, information flow, individual and team development, gender, and military, versus civilian populations. The focus was on current practices within these areas "which could predictably lead to learning organizations", with the intent being to determine "the 'what' that leads to learning organization success". (Griego & Geroy, 1999, p. 152)

Two surveys were used and administered to forty-eight professionals within various occupations, both civilian and military. The surveys determined there to be two significant predictors of learning organizations, (1) rewards and recognition, and (2) training and education. Those participants who answered positively that they received rewards and recognition on the job, and belonged to an organization that emphasized training and education, were most likely to assess their work environment as a learning organization (Griego & Geroy, 1999). This meant that "individuals within organizations who felt their work was appreciated, [were] rewarded for taking chances, not punished for mistakes, … and felt their work environment was supportive of practices that included skill training, problem solving education, and diagnostic tool support…, tended to see their organization in the context of a learning organization" (Griego & Geroy, 1999, p. 156). The data recognized that rewards and recognition had the greatest impact on respondents' sense of being in an organizational learning environment.

Griego and Geroy (1999) concluded from these findings that for an organization to become come one that is learning, it must focus on these two areas of significance: systems related to rewards and recognition, and systems which encourage knowledge sharing and education. They infer; "HRD and HRM professionals should emphasize behaviors and strategic change, which focus on these two significant predictors of learning organizations" (Griego & Geroy, 1999, p. 157).

The study succeeds in focusing further on the predictors determined through Marquardt's profile (1996) by uncovering from the employee's perspective, practices they feel must be provided to sense they are part of a learning organization.   It must be understood however, that there are no guarantees an organizational learning culture is operating as a result of a focus on these two areas. It would be presumptive to assume that is all it takes. For this reason the authors refer to rewards and recognition systems, and knowledge sharing and education, as two "significant predictors" (Griego & Geroy, 1999, p. 157).

Managerial Practices to Facilitate Learning Within Learning Organizations is also a current study taken from <u>The Academy of Human Resources Development 1999 conference proceedings</u>.   It asserts the premise that for organizational learning to exist there must be continuous learning, both formally and informally within the organization. The author (Ellinger, 1999) believes that managers will be responsible for assuming the "role of teacher, coach, educator, and facilitator", and propose that the human resource professional is the architect of this happening. "By working with all employees to make self-managed learning more effective" and specifically working with managers by providing coaching and train-the-trainer expertise, "they can help build an infrastructure… and create a culture for learning". Ellinger's belief aligns with authors Brinkerhoff and Gill (1994) from a 1994 publication, where they stated "the responsibility for developing employees and directing their learning must shift from the HRD department to the direct supervisor. They must analyze performance impediments, design learning processes, and help to implement on-demand learning interventions" (p. 22). The purpose of Ellinger's study is to "examine the multiple ways managers facilitate the learning of their employees when they perceive themselves to be facilitators of learning within learning organizations", and to determine the types of behaviors most beneficial to managers as facilitators of learning. (Ellinger, 1999, p. 172)

Personal interviews were conducted with twelve managers from four different participating organizations. These managers were chosen because they had been recommended " as being exemplary facilitators of learning" within their organizations. During the interview process, managers were asked to "describe at least four effective and/or ineffective critical incidents when they perceived themselves to be facilitating their employees' learning". The results uncovered 13 "sets of behaviors (see figure 2.1) that managers enacted as facilitators of learning". These behaviors were then assigned to one of two clusters of behaviors, Empowering or Facilitating behaviors. "Empowering behaviors referred to managers' behaviors that appeared to encourage employees to assume personal responsibility and accountability". These behaviors centered on managers asking thought provoking questions that encourage their employees to arrive at possible solutions on their own. Facilitating behaviors were "oriented towards managers' behaviors that promoted new levels of understanding, new perspectives, …to foster learning and development". These behaviors centered on managers taking on the roles of coach, mentor, and trainer to their immediate subordinates. Ellinger concludes that the findings from this study are "distinct in that they focus more on the learning component from which improved performance appears to be a by-product", rather than problem solving or performance improvement as the end-state. The future implications from this study are that trainers and human resource professionals "may no longer be considered the sole providers" of employee development. Trainers and HR professionals can now include these thirteen behavior sets in management development programs as a tool to help managers "become more skilled at facilitating learning". (Ellinger, 1999, pp. 173-176)

The take-away from this study, is the 13 behavior sets identified from Ellinger's interviews. These behaviors could be considered common sense fundamentals to effective leadership; open communication, building interdependent relationships, employee motivation, an enabling work environment, and coaching. These skills or behaviors if presented as curricula for a leadership development program, could conceivably be well received by potential attendees. It

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would however be interesting to see the response by potential attendees, if they were asked to participate in an organizational learning development program. Would it be as well received as a leadership development program? Granted, those interviewed for the sampling frame were already considered to be exemplary facilitators of learning. But would most managers be uncomfortable using these behaviors as tools for learning, and rather concentrate instead on the end-state of improved performance? Could they be convinced that productivity gains would indeed result as a "by-product" (Ellinger, p. 174) of a strategic focus on learning as an organizational norm?

Figure 2.1. Clusters of behavior sets that managers enacted as facilitators of learning. Source: Ellinger , 1997

Empowering
Holding back-not providing answers
Question framing to encourage employees
      to think through issues
Transferring ownership to employees
Being a resource- removing obstacles

Facilitating
Creating and promoting a learning
    environment
Broadening employee's perspectives-
    getting them to see things
    differently
Stepping into other to shift
    perspectives
Using analogies, scenarios, and
    examples
Setting the communication
    expectations- fitting into the
    big picture
Working it out together- talking it
    through
Engaging others to facilitate learning
Providing feedback to employees
Soliciting feedback from employees

The final study documented from this review of literature was taken from a 1998 publication of the Society for Advanced Management, S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal. Toward a Learning Organization: The Strategic Building Blocks looks at necessary organizational fundamentals and structure, and employee competencies essential to implementing the concepts of organizational learning in an attempt to build a learning organization.

"More important is the need to explain how to become a learning organization, not what it is" (Goh, 1998, p. 15), is the premise on which the author (Goh, 1998) assembles his reasoning to identify organizational "core strategic building blocks". Maintaining that much has been written on organizational learning, he acknowledges that lacking has been literature to assist in making it happen. He declares that "literature on organizational learning has been elusive in providing practical guidelines or managerial actions that practicing managers can implement to develop a learning organization…, organizational learning is a long-term activity that will build competitive advantage over time and requires sustained management attention, commitment, and effort". Based on research of articles and organizations, Goh has identified practices, processes, and designs that differentiate companies that learn. These practices and policies which make-up the strategic building blocks, were "mentioned repeatedly" throughout the research. The building blocks – mission and vision, leadership, experimentation, transfer of knowledge, and teamwork and cooperation – are described individually below. (Goh, 1998, pp. 15-16)

Mission and Vision

Having a mission and vision that are clear and understood by employees is a strategic building block of the learning organization because it empowers employees to perform in accordance with the knowledge of priorities within the organization. The author states that "without this, people will not extend themselves to take responsibilities or apply their creative energies". A clear understanding of the organization's mission and vision assures "actions that are aligned" with organizational goals. (Goh, 1998, p.17)

Leadership

To encourage employees to innovate, take risks, and handle uncertainty, "a shared leadership style in a nonhierarchical organization" is required. Managers become "coaches, not controllers; level or rank is not as important as the ability of the individual to contribute to the organization's performance". Leaders need to be able to "facilitate change…, provide feedback…, involve employees in decision making…, and accept criticism without being overly defensive". (Goh, 1998, pp. 17-18)

Experimentation

New knowledge must be used to "capitalize on new opportunities open to the organization" and new ideas will come from "questioning the current status quo and how things are done". Experimentation "encourages individuals and teams to continuously improve work processes and try new ideas". Time and rewards can be built into an employee's activities to encourage the pursuit of new findings, which may lead to improved product development and new innovative products. (Goh, 1998, p. 18)

Transfer of Knowledge

Transfer of knowledge includes: the employee using new skills and knowledge on the job; information being transferred to other parts of the organization; "learning from past failures and talking to other staff members about successful practices or experiences", and benchmarking other companies for best practices. "Learning organizations not only encourage these practices [sic] but also have mechanisms or systems that allow them to happen". (Goh, 1998, p. 18)

Teamwork and Cooperation

"By working in teams, employees bring their collective skills and knowledge to bear on problems and develop innovative ideas for the organization". Teams should include members from various parts of the organization who work together problem solving. A "cross-functional teamwork environment breaks down the 'stovepipe syndrome' and encourages teamwork and cooperation. (Goh, 1998, p. 19)

For these strategic building blocks to be effective, Goh believes that two "supporting foundations" are essential. First, "there has to be an effective organization design that is aligned with and supports these building blocks. Second, appropriate employee skills and competencies are needed for the tasks and roles described in the strategic building blocks". Organizational structures of learning organizations have traditionally been "flat and decentralized, with a minimum of formalized procedures in the work environment". An earlier study (Goh & Richards, 1997) shows that there is "a negative relationship between formalization and learning capability" in organizational structures. Citing another article of research (Mohrman &

Mohrman, Jr., 1995), the author mentions that the flatter organizational structure "places work-teams closer to the decision-makers" enabling increased learning capability not as obtainable in a more formal structure. (Goh, 1998, p. 19)

Employee skills and competencies receive great attention in learning organizations, however not in the traditional sense of individual task-oriented skills. Goh states that "learning organizations invest in training experiences that develop entire teams or whole work units…the development of common experience". Competencies are developed that contribute to functioning within a learning organization, "such as shared leadership, coaching behaviors, and providing feedback". Training focuses "more toward behavioral skills and less toward technical skills that have a short shelf-life". (1998, p. 20)

Goh concludes that to become a learning organization, an organization must first measure itself against the strategic building blocks and supporting foundations. Through this measurement process, the organization can determine "the existing learning capability…and identify the weak strategic building blocks". The skill development programs can be evaluated to "ensure they are aligned and provide support to the strategic building blocks". But in addition, the performance of the organization must be impacted positively "to take hold in organizations and gain credence and support by practicing managers". (1998, p. 21)

Evident in this study's findings is the importance of an organizational wide effort, in the attempt to build a learning organization. The strategic building blocks can only be realized from a truly strategic perspective. The study supports the conceptual writings of authors cited earlier in this review (Argyris, 1999; DiBella & Nevis, 1998; Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1994):

"Learning is a continuous, strategically used process-integrated with and running parallel to work" (Marquardt, 1996, p. 20).

"To maximize learning, the design of knowledge work must be formalized and aligned with the influence of decision makers; in effect, becoming a learning organization requires having the right organization structure" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 9).

"A learning leader must help members develop an insight into organizational shifts and develop the motivation for alignment. A learning leader must assess the adequacy of an organization's culture, detect its dysfunctionality, and promote its transformation…" (Argyris, 1999, p. 5).

"…leverage lies in the interactions that cannot be seen from looking only at the pieces you are holding" (Senge, 1990, p. 67).

The findings of this study concur with the prevailing beliefs on organizational learning Mission and Vision, Leadership, Experimentation, Transfer of Knowledge, and Teamwork and Cooperation can be driven from various functional areas or hierarchical levels. But to enhance productivity through learning, company wide, these strategic building blocks must be embraced and executed by all.

Working models to facilitate Organizational learning

This section of the Literature Review will overview three models intended to facilitate the process of organizational learning in an organizational environment. Each model is built around factors that influence the process of learning and adaptation, both individually and organizationally.

The first model is taken from a 1996 book titled The Faster Learning Organization: Gain and Sustain the Competitive Advantage, by author and consultant Bob Guns. Guns explores the concept of a "faster learning organization" or FLO, as a component of organizational strategy. Recognizing that learning is a competitive advantage, facilitating faster learning within the organization helps sustain and augment that advantage. "Faster learning requires simpler and more efficient ways to learn, fewer steps in the learning process, and more attention paid to leveraging opportunities." Guns FLO Model and accompanying "quick test," are tools in the process of developing a FLO. See figures 2.2 and 2.3 below. (Guns, 1996, pp. 1-3, 12)

Figure 2.2. The FLO Model's intent is to help all employees or teams develop faster, the
        necessary skills to increase organizational learning. Source: Guns, 1996.

Vision: To sustain competitive advantage through faster learning

Strategies: To realize the FLO vision

S		
U		
R	**Cultivate**	**Transform**
G		
E		

Executives   Human Resource Personnel   Leaders and
                                                      Members of
                                                      Entrepreneurial

Teams
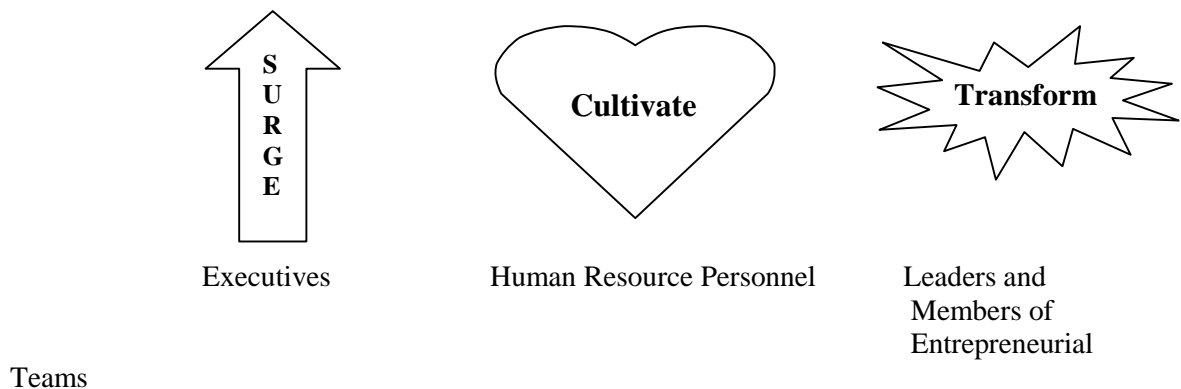
Tactics: To implement the strategies (by using methods for accelerating learning)

Skills: To develop the abilities necessary to deliver strategies

Executive	Leader	Team Member	Individual Learner
Visioning	Facilitating group process	Applying technical competence	Questioning, listening, reflecting
Facilitating strategic dialogue	Collaborative coaching	Contributing as a team member	Reading, writing, computation
Action modeling	Managing change	Leading teams	Leveraging knowledge
Mental modeling	Strategic thinking	Running a micro-business	Learning how to learn

Technology: To support the access to, capture of, and transfer of learning

**Measurement
& Reinforcement:**   To measure, monitor, and support progress in implementing the
                           strategies (by using a variety of tools)

<u>Figure 2.3</u> The Quick Test for a FLO gauges roughly an organization's current status as a Faster Learning Organization. Source: Guns, 1996.

Instructions: Rate each characteristic on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=low, 5= high)

Our Organization…
- ❏ Assesses its strategic situation realistically.
- ❏ Has a clear and motivating vision of itself as a FLO.
- ❏ Responds quickly and effectively to competitive conditions.
- ❏ Quickly converts information into valuable knowledge.
- ❏ Has technology that is up-to-date.
- ❏ Continually reduces cycle time.
- ❏ Is more innovative than its competition.
- ❏ Confidently and capably handles change.
- ❏ Enhances its performance through both incremental improvement and break throughs.
- ❏ Operates its teams as micro-businesses.
- ❏ Outperforms its competition.

Interpretation Scale
 0-25: Start implementing a FLO now.
26-35: [sic]
35-45: You're off and running. Work on the tactics and skills of a FLO.
 46-55: Your organization is outstanding! Keep refining and fine-tuning.

Discuss the results with coworker(s) to see what action ideas they might have to move your organization higher on the scale or to maintain an excellent status.

The major components of the FLO Model are *Vision, Strategies, Tactics and Skills, Technology*, and *Measurement and Reinforcement*. *Vision* provides the motivation necessary to encourage faster learning. "Visioning is a continual process of creating a view of the future and testing the present against it" (Guns, 1996, p. 91). The vision must be in alignment through out all levels of the organization to provide full impact. Four *Skills* - Executive, Leader, Team Member, and Individual Learner, and the activities within them, are the drivers of the FLO Model. These skills "are applied to tactics designed to implement the strategies and accelerate learning" (p. 7). *Tactics* include collaborative coaching within the Leader skill set, leading teams

as a Team Member skill, and leveraging knowledge as an Individual Learner skill. *Technology* supplies the administrative support to monitor learning output from the FLO Model. Technology is seen as a supplement to the FLO by "supporting the access to, capture of, and transfer of learning" (p. 9). *Measurement and Reinforcement* are essential to assure "motivation, commitment, and improvement" (p. 9) continue. These are the processes that monitor and measure the implementation of the FLO Model. A final component, *Strategies,* serves as the nucleus of the FLO Model, the activities within all others components of the model need to support these strategies. Within the Strategies component, three separate strategies, Surge, Cultivate, and Transform, are executed to integrate faster learning. The author believes that FLO Strategies "complement-rather than interfere with-whatever organizational strategies already exist" (p. 44).

The Surge strategy is intended to identify leverage points that can help accelerate learning and provide the means for the organization to "surge" ahead of the competition. Guns proposes two factors that are critical to the success of this strategy, "(1) The executive group's commitment to faster learning as the primary route to improved performance and (2) a method for clearly identifying strategic leverage points and for accelerating learning around those points." The next of the three FLO strategies, Cultivate, falls under the supervision of the Human Resource function. It is intended to create a profile of an accelerated learner that serves as an aid in hiring and individual development. Guns suggests a six step process to create an action plan to build this profile: (1) discuss what a fast learner looks like, (2) develop a profile of a fast learner, (3) rate the behaviors and skills, (4) decide on a method for applying the profile, (5) design an action plan for developing and hiring people, and (6) implement and monitor the action plan. This profile is intended to align the capabilities of individuals with the elements necessary to implement the FLO process. The final strategy within the FLO Model, Transform, is intended for use by Leaders and Team Members alike. This strategy, driven by and through an entrepreneurial team environment, serves to create a climate that encourages transformation to learning and

growth among individuals and teams within an organization. It "presents the leaders and members of entrepreneurial teams with the opportunity of a lifetime: to grow their teams as micro-businesses." The author proposes a four-step approach for a team to continually improve performance: (1) benchmark to industry leadership, (2) spinning-off (offer services outside the organization), (3) reconfiguring the business, and (4) mentoring other entrepreneurial teams. The intent of this strategy is to accelerate learning by providing a challenge to teams that "will drive the teams motivation, performance, and commitment to make the business succeed" (Guns, 1996, pp. 45-63).
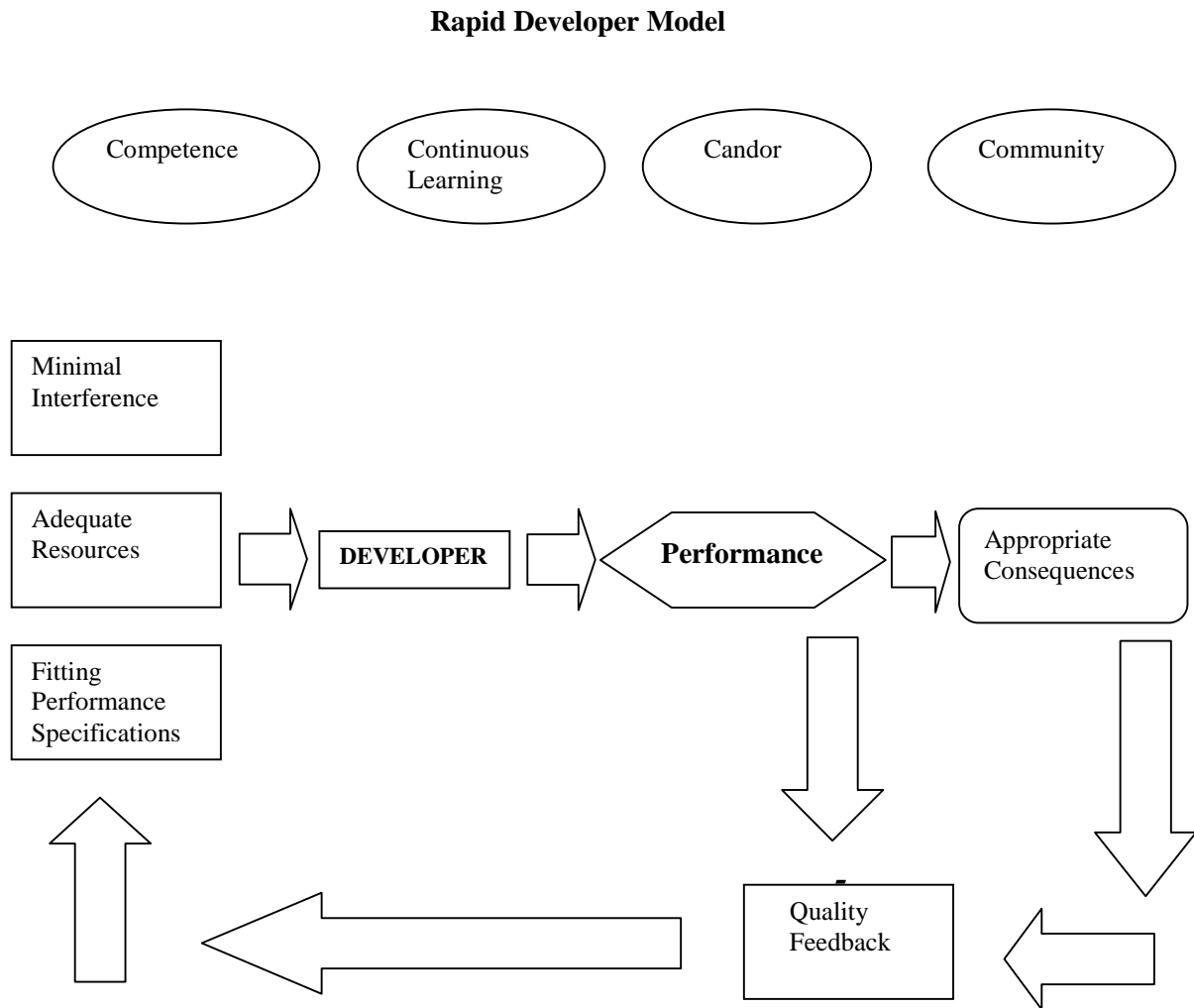
The FLO Model provides an action plan to accelerating learning within an organization. This may be seen as an advanced development stage within an organization already committed to organizational learning. The alignment and implementation of the model's activities with existing organizational strategies, certainly could become an enormous undertaking. However, in a less ominous view, it is fundamentally a set of guidelines to assist an organization in its learning processes. At its most basic level, accelerated learning within an organization already committed to learning, requires a focus on only "two factors: (1) how quickly individuals and groups learn, and (2) how quickly that learning is transferred to other individuals and groups within the organization" (Guns, 1996, p. 22). With this in mind, the extent and speed with which an organization advances through the FLO Model should correlate with progress of those two factors.

The next model uncovered in this review of literature is a study from The Academy of Human Resources Development 1999 conference proceedings, and is titled A Test of a Rapid Developer Model: Workplace Factors Associated with Learning and Development (Alexander, 1999). The study looks at those factors influencing how quickly employees learn and develop in an organizational atmosphere of change. The author (Alexander, 1999) states, "three elements affect how quickly individuals learn and develop in organizations: (1) the characteristics of the

individual, (2) the quality of the learning intervention, and (3) the elements that compose the work environment (p. 520). The premise is that learning and change are mutually exclusive because of the cultural factors within organizations. The challenge then becomes to develop, overtime, a culture that both embraces (and holds constant) learning and change (Schein, 1992). The Rapid Developer Model is composed of nine factors associated with culture, work environment, learning, and performance. If identified and understood, Alexander believes these factors can lead to rapid development and learning of individuals within organizations. The hypothesis used to validate the model was that those employees identified as rapid developers by their superiors were more likely to perceive work environment factors in place that supported their performance. Whereas those not identified as rapid developers, did not share this same perception. The definition given to managers to identify a rapid developer was "someone who has learned new information and exhibited new behaviors relevant to changes quicker than other individuals. Ideally, these changes in behavior lead to results that align with new expectations" (p. 523).

These nine factors are separated into two areas: "situational factors," which fall under the direct control of management, and "cultural factors," which result from leadership activities over long periods of time (Alexander, 1999, p. 522). Figure 2.4 displays the Rapid Developer Model, and the nine factors are explained below.

Figure 2.4. The Rapid Developer Model looks at factors influencing how quickly employees

learn and develop in an organizational atmosphere of change. Source: Alexander, 1999.

Rapid Developer Model

Competence

Continuous Learning

Candor

Community

Minimal Interference

Adequate Resources

DEVELOPER

Performance

Appropriate Consequences

Fitting Performance Specifications

Quality Feedback

This first set of factors fall under direct control of management at all levels within the organization.

Situational Factors*:*

1.   *Fitting Performance Specifications*

The greater the understanding by employees of the company's expectations, the better will be their performance.   This factor is operating when performance specifications are "clear, realistic, align with other expectations and support the business strategy" (Alexander, 1999, p. 522).

2.   *Adequate Resources*

In order for employees to effectively perform the tasks associated with expectations, resources must be easily accessible and readily available. The resources include "information, staffing, time, and the appropriate tools" (Alexander, 1999, p. 522).

3.   *Minimal Interference*

Employees must be allowed to display new behaviors and perform job tasks with minimal interference. Processes should also be in place to support their efforts. "When job procedures and workflow are logical for the new tasks, and there is opportunity with minimal obstruction to perform the new tasks" this factor is present. (Alexander, 1999, p.522).

4.   *Appropriate Consequences*

Consequences of past performance impact the quality of an employee's future performance. These consequences can either be positive, reinforcing a desired performance, or negative from the employee's perspective, curbing undesired performance or behavior. This factor is in place "when consequences are designed to support the newly desired performance, aligned with other performance expectations, timely, and meaningful to the performer" (Alexander, 1999, p. 522).

5. *Quality Feedback*

Employees need feedback to either stifle undesirable behavior, or reinforce productive behavior associated with tasks. Quality feedback is present when "relevant, accurate, timely, specific, and easy to understand" (Alexander, 1999, p. 522).

Alexander (1999) found that the next set of factors results from leadership activities over a long period of time.

Cultural Factors:

1. *Competence*

"Politics cannot be considered more important than performance in measuring employee value". Smart work creating greater results, rather than just hard work creating more results, is now essential. The Competence Factor is present when: "results are valued more than hard work, performance is valued more than political connections…, individuals take personal responsibility…, and there is tolerance of unusual style or behavior of people who do good work" (p. 522).

2. *Continuous Learning*

This is the organizational perception that new innovations and gradual growth are important, and mistakes are part of the learning process. This factor is active when systems are in place to support continuous improvement, and "capture, store, and transfer knowledge" (p. 523).

3. *Candor*

Candor is present in an organization when trust and honesty is pervasive among and between all levels of the organization, and the challenging of assumptions is of greater importance than a code of conduct. It is realized when employees are not intimidated by confronting a superior or challenging unsubstantiated talk or actions of others, and active reflection is part of the culture.

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4. Community

Shared commitment among employees is evident through support given to those seeking

help, individual performance is understood in its relation to the organization as a whole,

and there is a sense among employees that they can make a difference. The Community

Factor is functioning when "shared commitment helps individuals to take risk knowing

that others will help them" (p. 523).

To determine if the factors within the Rapid Developer Model do indeed affect the speed

at which employees learn and develop, Alexander (1999) utilized for research three organizations

that "were undergoing significant organizational change in which important learning

interventions were occurring…." Working through managers in various functional areas,

Alexander conducted interviews, background research, behavior assessments, and facilitated

group discussions to come up with a sample group of 56 for study. The participants were divided

equally into two groups; those who were seen by their managers as rapid developers based on the

previous definition, and a comparison group. Each was given a 30-minute telephone interview on

their perception of the various factors within the model as they related to their specific work

environment. The interview process broke the groupings down further by specifically identifying

13 individuals as rapid developers, or the "respondent-selected group" thus leaving 43

respondents as non-rapid developers, in the comparison group. The research results showed that

"selected rapid developers show more presence than the comparison group on all nine of the work

environment factors…there is a difference between these two groups and the model is supported

when respondents select the rapid developers." (Alexander, 1999, pp. 523-525)

From this study Alexander (1999) concludes that the findings "help provide rationale for: (a) why major organizational change is so difficult, takes so long, and often fails; (b) why individuals undergo such stress, frustration, and great difficulty in adapting to major change; and (c) why the return on training and other learning interventions is typically so marginal" and that "an enabling work environment appears to be vital to learning, change, and performance". In addition, he recommends "fix the work environment first and provide managers with the information they need ". Results showed that specific interventions within participating organizations, even with strong leadership support, failed because the work environment was not supportive of the initiative. Managers were also found to lack the knowledge that would enable them to not only identify specifics essential for increased development and learning, but in addition, "provide the appropriate managerial support necessary to accelerate the learning process." (pp. 525-26)

Alexander's model, study, and accompanying conclusions support principles in the field of organizational learning "New learning contains several specific characteristics…it is performance-based, continuous… part of everyone's job description… and …a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Marquardt, 1996, p. 32). "The purpose of organizational learning and the acquisition of organizational knowledge, is to provide the foundation for rapid, dramatic organizational change" (Thompson, 1995, p. 85). DiBella and Nevis (1998) list the following as "Facilitating Factors…that determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizational learning cycle" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 61): performance gaps, climate of openness, continuous education, and involved leadership. The model's nine factors also support basic beliefs surrounding employee development. "People don't perform as expected for many different reasons: they don't know what's expected; they don't have the tools, they don't receive feedback; or they don't know how to do it" (Mager & Pipe, 1997, p. 3). Five necessary components of employee performance are competency, resources, direction, work environment, and motivation. All five of these exist in the Rapid Developer Model, motivation

dependent on appropriate consequences and quality feedback. If all of these elements within an employee's work environment were encouraged and monitored, perhaps the rapid development would take care of itself. "The key is to see learning as inseparable from everyday work" (Senge et al., 1999, p. 24).

The final organizational learning model studied in the literature review is A Sociological Model of Organizational learning (Casey, 1999), and was also published in The Academy of Human Resources Development 1999 conference proceedings. This model's foundation is a previous work by sociologist Talcott Parsons. The work, Parsons' Theory of Action (Parsons, 1951), focuses on the relationship between the actions of employees and their ability on the whole to adjust to internal and external environmental influences. It implies "that both performance and learning processes have the capacity to change or disrupt the equilibrium in the organization-situation relationship". Casey's organizational learning model looks at organizational behavior as an insight into "how people collectively engage in the dynamic social actions associated with learning", and in addition, it views learning as action that can affect the organizational culture. (Casey, 1999, pp.143-146)

Casey uses Parsons' 1951 theory of action framework to build an organizational learning model for an intervention that diagnoses learning needs around an organization's strategic planning process (figure 2.5). She postulates that Parsons' set of "functional prerequisites" and "action subsystems" of the "general system of action" can be used as a way to understand the "social nature of collective learning" (Casey, 1999, p. 146) in response to change initiatives in today's organizations. In essence, the functional prerequisites, adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance are the inner-workings that drive an organizational system. Adaptation is the ability of the organizational system to interact with and respond effectively to, its external environment. According to Rocher (1975) goal attainment provides the motivation for achievement, it is "all actions which serve to define the goals of the system to mobilize and

manage resources and efforts to attain goals and gratification" (p. 42). Integration is the

execution of activities and the collaboration of systems, between segments that make-up the

organizational entity. And pattern maintenance, the final functional prerequisite, is the cultural

component that ensures the sharing of knowledge and information. It is "a system of actions

which accumulates and distributes energy in the form of motivation" (p. 42). Applying these

prerequisites, Parsons believed, would show that the learning subsystems cannot operate alone,

their effectiveness "relates to the total system of action" (Casey, 1999, p. 145).

Casey's (1999) comparative is drawn when she states "the organizational learning system

carries out four functional prerequisites so that learning is maintained for the collective". The

learning subsystems are environmental interface, action-reflection, structuring, and meaning-

memory. They support in order the prerequisites: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and

pattern maintenance. Each subsystem enables these functional prerequisites and is dependent on

input from the other subsystems. Environmental interface "serves as the information portal for

the organizational learning system". Action-reflection is the activities "used to accomplish goals

of the organizational learning system". The Structuring subsystem brings together other

organizational subsystems and facilitates "integrative acts such as networking and creating

policies". And lastly, the meaning-memory learning subsystem "provides the collective meaning

and memories" throughout the organization. It helps assure the consistency of messaging in the

effort to establish cultural uniformity. (p. 146)

Below, Casey (1999) applies Parsons' (1951) general theory of action as the foundation

for an organizational learning model used in the strategic planning process of two recently

merged companies.

Environmental Interface Subsystem (Adaptation) – The strategic planning process

(environmental interface) is intended to be a mechanism that deals with known or unknown

environmental changes. For the process to be effective individual learning in the manner of

information must take place, this enables employees to better adapt to impending changes. The

learning, which serves to strengthen organizational system, can be transferred formally or informally.

Action Reflection Subsystem (Goal Attainment) – A clarification of the direction, goals, and objectives created during the strategic planning process (or change initiatives) is essential at the individual level. Employees need to understand the impact of the changes on their position. Not only should reflection be used during the planning process to determine the impact of decisions, reflection at the individual level or within groups, can reinforce the effect on work.

Structuring Subsystem (Integration) – The functional prerequisite integration, is an organizational learning need that can be brought on through different scenarios. Most often it involves the need to communicate information via formal and informal networks across all areas within the organization.

Meaning/Memory Subsystem (Pattern Maintenance) – This subsystem serves as a foundation for the organizational culture. It encourages that first of all, some type of vision, mission, and set of values are defined by the organization. And secondly, that they are known, Understood, and communicated with reference to past organizational objectives and goals, at the individual level.

Figure 2.5. Diagnosing Learning Needs using Parsons' Theory of Action components. Individuals and organizations are viewed as learning systems with similar required functions and needs, when responding to critical issues. Source: Casey, 1999.

Functional prerequisite and Learning subsystem	Basic questions to be asked	Individual (example of identified learning need)	Organization (example of identified learning need)
Adaptation (environmental interface)	How can the individual/organization obtain environmental information?	Understand needs for product and services.	Obtain staff input on needed product and services.
Goal Attainment (action reflection)	How can the individual/organization establish and meet goals?	Translate organizational goals into personal goals.	Act and reflect to determine goals.
Integration (structuring)	How can the individual/organization be integrated both internally and externally with other systems?	Understand his/her role in relationship to other roles and structure of the organization.	Communicate information about the strategic planning process and the goals and objectives of the organization.
Pattern Maintenance (meaning/memory)	How can the individual/organization create meaning in the work of the organization?	Understand the values and beliefs of the organization.	Transmit the values and beliefs of the organization through the strategic planning process.

In her summary (Casey, 1999) asserts that more research must be conducted on the relationship between learning in the workplace and the "impact of organizational actions" (p. 149). The information known about adult learning needs to be linked to the literature surrounding organizational learning systems and studied in its relation to organizational practices. The strength of this model is its confidence in the impact that the learning subsystem has on the integrity of the whole organizational system. The authors' willingness to convert Parsons' theoretical declarations into an instrument for a strategic planning process, reinforces the rudimentary role that learning has throughout the system, "dysfunction in one learning subsystem

will jeopardize the effectiveness of the whole system…" (p. 146). Learning is quite often seen as a process outside the organizational system; a luxury to address after everything else is running smooth. In fact, "any given condition is affected by the applied knowledge of its membership" (Thompson, 1995, p. 86); "only when we give up the illusion that the world is created of separate unrelated forces, can we then build a learning organization" (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Casey's model bolsters this line of thinking.

<u>Summary</u>

The goal of this literature review was to establish a knowledgeable foundation, with the objective of developing a research instrument that is germane to the principals and applications of organizational learning. It was to serve as a framework for an objective assessment of the many interpretations, inherent and proposed benefits, and practical challenges associated with the field. Its purpose was to reveal to the author a full scope of doctrines, as footing for first time research into organizational environments.

The review focused on three different areas: the conceptual framework of organizational learning, current research addressing organizational learning issues and working models that help facilitate organizational learning. The conceptual review opened all the doors to the various paradigms around organizational learning. It looked at several perspectives, some quite erudite, others more practical. Argyris (1996 & 1999), Schon (1999), and Senge (1990 &1999) presented learning opportunities from a psychological, scientific, and even holistic perspective. Marquardt (1996) perceived organizational learning as developing through strategic and tactical operational activities, while DiBella and Nevis (1998), forced the reader to observe from all sides and described three differing perspectives on organizational learning: normative, developmental and capability.

The review of current research was an examination of practical applications of numerous ideas and principles discussed in the conceptual review. Bierema and Berdish (1999), in a tested intervention, found that their efforts were successful in not only laying the groundwork for an

organizational learning culture, but also in uncovering impediments which were then used as learning points for future research. Ayas, Foppen, and Maljers (1996) presented the inherent difficulties faced when trying to incorporate new ways of thinking into an organizational system functioning under its own parameters. Their observations supported the hypothesis of this paper; application, no matter how pertinent the precept, is the challenge.

Next Ellinger (1999), through a process of interviews, revealed the importance of direct supervisory participation in advancing employee learning. From those results came the sets of empowering and facilitating behaviors of supervisors and leaders, which were professed to be a strong indication of the importance of learning as an initiative beyond just the Human Resource and Employee Development function. Griego and Geroy (1999) looked at organizational practices that could be used to predict the success of knowledge gain. The determination was that the two most important areas of focus should be a system of rewards and recognition, and processes that encourage the spread of discovery. Lastly, Goh (1999) looked at the fundamentals around employee competency and organizational processes and composition. The determination was that mission and vision, leadership, experimentation, transfer of knowledge, and teamwork and cooperation should provide the foundation for becoming a learning organization.

The final focus of the Review of Literature was on Models built around organizational adaptation and learning processes. Guns (1996) presented us with a model intended to expedite the employee learning process. The FLO or Faster Learning Organization Model, (Guns, 1996) is built around three strategies executed in three different functional areas using various skills that incorporate organizational learning principles. Alexander (1999), continuing with the theme of expediency, shares a model intended to incorporate the necessity of attention to different areas, including change, culture, leadership, individual adaptability and the environment, in order to quickly develop employees. The Rapid Developer Model (Alexander, 1999) looks at situational and cultural factors that must be considered when in an organizational environment of change.

Finally, Casey's (1999) model, the last to be reviewed, points out the importance of collective learning and organizational structure in a company's ability to effectively deal with change.

Following in Chapter Three are descriptions of the research methods, data sources, and data collection instrument, which were built concurrently as a result of the information uncovered in this Review of Literature.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This study will identify common obstacles, successful solutions, and supporting

behaviors, which influence the development and implementation of an organizational learning

culture within select North American companies. Objectives of the research include:; identifying

common obstacles to successful integration of organizational learning concepts into

organizational systems; discovering solutions to overcoming those obstacles; and identifying

existing behaviors and practices supportive of building an organizational learning culture.

Chapter three will look at the research design, sources of data, the data collection techniques, and

the interpretive research methodology.

Research Design

The approach for this descriptive study is primarily exploratory. It has been developed to

complete a cross-sectional study among a random sample of Performance Improvement

Professionals in North American for-profit companies. Its goal is to measure quantitatively and

qualitatively, in a broad scope, the current climate of organizational learning concepts within the

for-profit organizational community. The delivery system for the survey will be via electronic

mail (e-mail).

The design is intended to discover what companies are doing in the area of organizational

learning. It will examine four specific areas, which are: what environmental constraints are

limiting its influence; what solutions are being developed to overcome those constraints; from

where within the organization the advocacy or opposition of implementing and sustaining an

organizational learning culture originates; and lastly, from the objective and subjective responses,

assess the practicality of attempting to build an organizational learning culture.

For three reasons the researcher firmly believes that the population, method of survey, and survey instrument are each appropriate to the study: 1) This population's role is closest to implementing the fundamentals necessary to enable an organizational learning culture, more than any other position within an organization. 2) This survey method ensures an economical, manageable, deliberate, and expedient manner in which to gather data. 3) The instrument's make-up will facilitate obtaining objective and subjective data for comparison, and uncovering current issues and concept applications surrounding organizational learning.

The impetus of this study came from a question on the part of the researcher as to the practicality of incorporating organizational learning practices into for-profit organizational systems. Research in organizational learning literature found many books and journal articles on the benefits of organizational learning, and results of interventions conducted by external consultants (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1992; Schein, 1978), but there was very little information on examples of organizational learning practices developed and used from within organizations. Reasons for this, including influences and organizational systems, vary within each for-profit operation. The external environment surrounding an organization may be conducive to organizational learning, but influences inside may inhibit its effectiveness, or conversely, support may exist internally; however, factors outside the organization may impede carrying out such practices. This study's intent was to uncover these issues through feedback received from within today's organizations.

The study was conducted by first determining a population within the field of Performance Improvement Professionals that was representative of for-profit organizations in North America. The membership directory for the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) was chosen because of its balanced industry representation, and the researcher's ability to gain access to the membership database, which is the foundation of the sampling frame. The survey instrument was developed based on ideas, concepts, and models uncovered during the review of literature. The review of literature began with materials,

conceptual and theoretical in nature (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1992; Guns, 1996), and progressed

into uncovering recent studies (Holton, Ruona, Leimbach, 1998) surrounding organizational

learning and its practical application. Ideas from these readings served as the foundation for

focusing on factors, both broad and specific in scope, which contribute to satisfying the study's

objectives.   The survey's sole purpose was to gather as much relevant data as possible from

which to compile results that would assist in formulating a hypothesis around each objective.

Sources of Data

The population of the study included individuals who are North American members of

the ISPI in a for-profit organization, working in a position with a job title falling under the

category of Training Director/Manager/Coordinator, and have a listed e-mail address in the ISPI

membership directory. The population size is a stratified random selection of 115 individuals

from 76 different companies. They are seen as appropriate to the study because they are

professionally involved in the specific area within organizations (employee development) that has

an integral contribution to the development of an organizational learning culture.

The sample group chosen was a systematic random sampling of 52 individuals selected

from the population. The sampling was completed in two phases: first, by selecting every third

name within the population list and second, by enlarging the sample group through the selection

of every seventh name on the list. This sample can be considered representative of the population

because it was extracted from a population taken from a larger list of professionals within the

field of Performance Improvement and represents 21 different industry categories (see table 3.1).

The size of the sampling error is plus or minus five percent based on the population size.

Table 3.1   Industry Categories

Industries represented in the sample population	Industries represented by respondents	Respondents per industry
Aerospace		
Airlines		1
Commercial Banks		1
Computer & Data Services		1
Computers, Office Equipment		4
Computer Peripherals		1
Computer Software		1
Diversified Financials		3
Electronics, Electrical Equipment		
Foods		1
Forest & Paper Products		1
Hotels, Casinos, Resorts		
Insurance P&C (mutual)		
Mail, Package, Freight Delivery		
Management Consultants **		2
Network Communication		1
Petroleum Refining		
Pharmaceuticals		1
Scientific, Photo, Control Equipment		
Semi-Conductors		
Specialty Retailers		

Source: Fortune.com   ** category not part of Fortune classification

Data Collection Techniques

The primary goals of the data collection process within this study were as follows: 1) Track current sentiment among professionals in the organizational performance improvement function towards building organizational learning cultures. 2) Identify common obstacles that prevent this from happening. 3) Discover solutions implemented to overcome these obstacles. 4) Locate successful models which organizations have used or developed.

The instrument's design is intended to be user friendly and practical from the respondent's perspective, while ensuring a high level of response for the sampling results. It uses a Likert interval scale as the method of data collection. The design consists of 24 questions to

solicit opinions on subject components, with response possibilities ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and the category of "not sure" as an additional option. The questions were pre-designed to fall within one of six classification groups. One group assesses the respondent's familiarity with organizational learning principles and concepts and the other five are based on central themes of organizational learning mentioned frequently in the literature reviewed for this research. These six groupings, entitled Self-Evaluation, Learning Solutions, Information Flow, Manager's Role, Cultural Barriers, and Systems Thinking, form the Survey Roll-up matrix for comparison, interpretation, and discussion in Chapter Four. In addition, there are four open-ended questions to gather data on practices currently in use that either encourage or discourage organizational learning, plus one supplementary open-ended question for the respondent to volunteer any further comments. By utilizing open-ended questions, obstacles, solutions and intervention models unique to each organization are uncovered, allowing a current perspective of realities within participating organizations.

Requests for a willingness to participate in the survey were sent first to 38 members of the sample group taken from the ISPI membership directory population. Included in the request was an assurance that neither the individual or company name would be documented. After a second attempt to solicit these requests, it was confirmed that 14 of the 38 requests were undeliverable to the existing e-mail addresses. The researcher then conducted a second systematic random sampling from the same population by choosing every seventh name from the population list. In six cases that seventh name was already part of the sampling group, at which point the next, or eighth, name was selected. This second selection process resulted in an additional 14 names in the sampling who were sent requests for participation, all 14 e-mails were found to be deliverable. These two systematic random samplings made up the total sample group of 52.

Those within the sampling group who responded affirmatively to participation in the study were sent the survey as an attachment to an e-mail, with the instructions to complete on-line

and return (via e-mail) to the researcher. These returned surveys were then converted to hard copies for evaluation. Two weeks from the date of the initial distribution, a second round of e-mails was sent to non-respondents from the first attempt, as well as to people who had responded affirmatively to the request to participate, but had not yet returned the instrument.

<u>Interpretive Research</u>

The interpretation procedure was carried out in and viewed from two distinct aspects. The quantitative aspect took the responses from the interval scale questions (4-27), placed them in the appropriate classification group within the survey roll-up matrix, (see table 4.1) and ran statistical analysis. These findings formed the basis for interpretation and were reviewed while the open-ended responses were sorted by hand and grouped according to each question. Descriptive statistics of the computer-generated responses analyzed response frequency, individual and group mean, and individual and group standard deviation to interpret individual questions, group classification profiles. The open-ended responses were first studied to discard any irrelevant responses, then to determine if there were any patterns, overlying similarities, or predominant themes in relation to environmental attitudes, practices, and behaviors. These were then broken down further, based on parallel subject matter and/or unique examples. Combined, these results portrayed an overall survey response climate, and served as the basis for the statistical inference in chapter four and conclusions and recommendations in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Introduction

Having extracted the data from the survey responses, run the statistical analysis, and separated, categorized, and analyzed the open-ended response, the results will now be presented in five sections. Section one will be a brief overview of the professional demographics of the sample group. Section two will introduce descriptive statistics for survey questions four through 27. Section three will provide a descriptive analysis of responses from survey questions 28 through 32. And lastly, sections four and five will interpret the findings from sections two and three respectively, as well as summarize their linkage to the central themes uncovered in the Review of Literature.

Professional Demographics

Of the 38 people in the sample population, responses were received from 18, a 47.4% response rate. These 18 respondents represented 17 different companies from 12 of the 21 industry categories represented by the overall study population. The 12 industry categories were airlines, commercial banks, computer and data services, computer/office equipment, computer peripherals, computer software, diversified financials, foods, forest and paper products, management consultants, network communication, and pharmaceuticals. Of the 17 companies represented, nine were included in Fortune magazine's year 2000 list of America's largest 500 companies ranked by revenue, The Fortune 500 (Fortune.com, 2000). Of those nine, six were in the top 100 (Fortune.com, 2000). Four of the 17 companies represented were included in Fortune magazine's list of Top 100 Companies in America to Work for (Fortune.com, 2000). Finally, four of the 17 were privately held corporations (Fortune.com, 2000).

The sample group consisted fully of professionals working with internal customers in a Performance Improvement function, with the exception of one respondent who had a consultative

function in Employee Development for customers outside the organization. The job titles within this function were varied and included, but were not limited to, Director of Employee Development, Senior Manager of Training and Development, Professional Development Manager, Performance Consultant, Learning Consultant, and Corporate Learning Manager.

Years of experience within a Performance Improvement function were relatively high for the group. Sixty-seven percent, or 12 of the respondents, had 10 or more years of experience, and of those, 50%, or nine respondents, had over 14 years of experience in the field. Five respondents had two to six years of experience, one between six and ten years, and no one in the sample group had less than two years involvement as a Performance Improvement Professional.

Descriptive Analysis of Summated Scale Survey Questions

The data from questions four through 27 was entered into the survey roll-up matrix of the six classification categories around which the data recovery instrument was designed (table 4.1). The frequency of responses for each question was recorded in the appropriate response category with an additional category of omit to denote how often a question had been overlooked by respondents. In addition, frequency charts of responses for all group classifications, excluding Self-Evaluation, were created (see Appendix E). Statistical extraction was then completed for the mean and standard deviation of responses, both individually and within categorical groupings. (Note that the Cultural Barriers classification is composed of negatively directed questions, and thus, the numerical value of responses are diametrical to those in other classifications.) Next, the results were evaluated, correlated with the research objectives, and interpreted for further discussion later in this chapter. Below is the survey roll-up matrix, notable statistical highlights from this roll-up can be found in Appendix item F.

Table 4.1   Survey Roll-up Matrix

Self-Evaluation	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Omit	0	0/0	sd	gsd
27- I handle myself in a manner that is supportive of O.L. principles and practices.	8	9			1		1.71		.99	
4- I have a basic understanding of the concepts of O.L.	6	10			1	1	1.71	1.87	1.05	1.16
17- I am a champion for the concepts and practices of O.L.	8	4	2	1	2	1	2.00		1.50	
11- I would feel comfortable discussing the concepts of O.L. with other T&D professionals.	7	5	4		2		2.06		1.09	
Learning Solutions								2.35		0.99
5- My organization encourages and supports its employees to not only become better workers, but also improve themselves individually.	12	3	1	1	1		1.53		1.07	
6- Organizational leaders openly encourage learning by employees at all levels.	5	10	1	2			1.88		0.78	
16- Employee empowerment is not only talked about, but actually practiced.	2	8	3	4	1		2.59		1.12	
24- Most employees have some influence in the process of creating the company vision and mission.		4	4	7	3		3.41	2.71	1.00	1.03
Information Flow										
7- When organizational changes are occurring, employees are informed as to why and what to expect.	1	8	5	3	1		2.65		1.00	
9- Knowledge gained through learning is shared with other teams and departments.	1	8	3	6			2.71		0.99	
10- In a meeting environment, employees do not have reservations about openly expressing their opinions on an issue or point of view.	2	6	5	4	1		2.71	2.34	1.10	0.98
22- Employees are encouraged to provide feedback on decisions made, and actions taken, by those at the leadership level.	1	8	2	7			2.76		1.03	
Manager's Role										
8- Front-line management is encouraged to develop employees through on-the-job training and coaching.	5	9	1	1	2		2.06	3.33	1.09	1.22
26- Managers and non-managers, presently work together to solve problems.	3	10	2	2	1		2.24		1.03	
15- During meetings and dialogue, most managers encourage employees to think through issues, rather than always supplying the answers themselves.	2	9	3	4			2.47		0.94	
13- When mistakes are made, employees are not criticized, but encouraged to learn from them.	1	8	5	4			2.59	2.59	0.87	0.96
Cultural Barriers										
12- Employees are reprimanded for not openly agreeing to management's directives.	1		5	8	4		3.82		1.01	
25- Within my organization, only T&D personnel are responsible for learning interventions.	3	4		8	3		3.30		1.45	
20- People in my organization tend to keep knowledge and information to themselves because they believe it will increase their power base.	2	2	5	7	1	1	3.12		1.27	
21- Many people in my organization portray themselves in one manner, but take actions and make decisions, which go against this portrayal.	2	6	2	7	1		3.06		1.14	
Systems Thinking										
18- Employees are encouraged to understand the perspectives of people in other positions.	2	9	4	2	1		2.41		1.00	
19- Employees are informed of how their role functions within the overall organizational process, and have open lines of communication to other areas of the organization.	1	10	2	5			2.53		0.94	
23- Individuals and teams are encouraged to reflect on actions which led to successes or failures.	1	7	6	3	1		2.71		0.99	
14- Problem solving in most departments involves not only finding a solution, but also identifying what led to the problem and how it can be prevented from happening again.		10	2	6			2.71		0.92	

Descriptive Analysis of Qualitative Survey Questions

Questions 28 through 32 on the survey instrument solicited subjective and objective

comments from the respondents on obstacles, solutions and current behaviors within their

organizations that influence organizational learning. The table below depicts the individual and

total response rates for each question on the 18 returned surveys, while Appendix item D provides

a verbatim list of responses for each question.

Table 4.2   Response rates for the qualitative survey questions.

Question number	Question	Number of responses out of possible 18	Response rate for individual questions	Response rate for questions 28-31
28	In your opinion, what are the primary obstacles within your organization that inhibit building a learning culture?	17	94.4%	--------
29	Please comment on any solutions you have implemented that have helped to overcome these obstacles.	17	94.4%	--------
30	If there were intended solutions that were <u>unable</u> to overcome these obstacles, please share your thoughts on why.	9	50.0%	--------
31	Have you implemented any models that have successfully inspired organizational learning within your organization? If so, please describe.	10	55.6%	--------
32	Please share any additional comments pertaining to organizational learning.	5	27.8%	--------
				73.6%

Statistical Inference of Summated Scale Survey Questions

Analysis of the summated survey questions four through 27 revealed overall an

encouraging organizational learning climate within the North American companies represented.

If 3.00 is considered the statistical center (1 = strongly agree / 5 = strongly disagree) that

represent the respondent's assessment of their organizations' policies and practices, a grand

mean, as determined for all sub-groups, below 3.00 (above for Cultural Barriers classification),

can be seen as positive. This section will interpret and discuss the specific findings of that

analysis within the context of each of the six thematic groups and in relation to the overall

organizational learning principles and concepts discussed in the Review of Literature. The six

thematic classifications are reviewed in the following order: Self-Evaluation, Learning Solutions,

Information Flow, Manager's Role, Cultural Barriers, and Systems Thinking.

Self-Evaluation

The highest degree of affirmative responses in a thematic classification was within Self-

Evaluation. This classification, made up of questions intended to elicit a personal assessment on

the part of the respondents as to their familiarity with and belief in organizational learning

concepts, had an overall grand mean of 1.87. The next closest grand means were 2.34 for

Manager's Role, and 2.35 for Learning Solutions. These numbers indicate that respondents have

a level of confidence in their understanding and support of organizational learning that is, at

minimum, 20% greater than the confidence in their organization's ability to supply the other

necessary components, i.e. learning solutions, management involvement, a systems approach, and

open communications. Their responses to survey questions four and 27, which ask about a basic

understanding and supportive attitude towards organizational learning, individually and

combined, had the highest number of affirmative responses from the survey. In fact, there were

no other questions survey-wide that had zero responses within the Not Sure (NS) or Disagree (D)

categories. And the one factor that kept the two categories of Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A)

from being exclusive was a lone respondent who submitted a Strongly Disagree (SD) reply for

each question.

The other two questions within this grouping displayed a broader degree of uncertainty or

disagreement. Though 17 of 18 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed they had

understanding of organizational learning concepts, when asked if they were a champion of those

concepts, they answered less convincingly. Two were not sure, one disagreed, and two

respondents strongly disagreed that they were champions. The literature reviewed stated that

someone within the organization must believe in and drive the efforts to build and sustain an

organizational learning culture. Though it is best when this support comes from senior leadership, the implementation in part becomes the responsibility of the Performance Improvement Professionals. The results from the Self-Evaluation questions can be interpreted to mean that those in this role perceive themselves as having a strong understanding of organizational learning, but cannot necessarily be expected to believe in or support its implementation.

Learning Solutions

The thematic classification of Learning Solutions, consisting of questions aimed at uncovering perceptions on the existence of practices that incite the spread of knowledge, revealed the most volatile response pattern of all six. However, at 0.99 it had the most standard distribution pattern of all classifications. The volatility came not in the response distribution, but in the consistency of the sample group's confidence levels that the principles inherent to each one of these questions is reflective of their current corporate culture. Question five had the highest number of respondents to strongly agree with any question on the survey (mean = 1.53). Twelve of 18 research participants felt their organization encourages employees to become better individuals as well as workers. Conversely, question 24, which asks how much influence employees have in the process of creating the company vision and mission, with a mean of 3.41, was by far the most disagreed with of all positively stated questions on the survey. The next closest question with such a negative response had a mean of 2.76. Question six under Learning Solutions had the highest percentage of affirmative responses and the lowest degree of response distribution on the survey. With a standard distribution of only 0.78, 83.3% of the Development Professionals either agreed or strongly agreed that their organization encouraged learning by employees at all levels.

The last question within this classification asks about a fundamental principle within a learning organization, that of employee empowerment. With a mean of 2.59, it was the median of all individual response means. But what can be inferred when arguably the most basic of

organizational learning components is perceived as existing in just over half of the participating organizations?

The volatility of responses from this classification on Learning Solutions suggests, as one respondent stated, "the talk at the top is not walked through the ranks." The respondent's perception was that, while both learning and individual improvement may be highly encouraged in theory, in actuality certain factors that advance the process are obstructed. The ability of senior management to gain influence from all employee levels in the vision/mission creation process may not always be feasible, especially given the size of many companies represented in this study. It is a process that would not only involve strong beliefs by those in its lead, but also must be tactically achievable in economies of scale. However inhibited, by structure or mass, it is more process-based than culture-based. Employee empowerment on the other hand, once promoted at the senior levels takes on a cultural appearance at all other organizational levels. From a solutions perspective, encouragement for and support of growth and development is only one component of the learning process. Cultural norms must exist, which enable encouragement and support to reveal themselves during implementation, monitoring, and modification. Though survey numbers show this to be the case in only one-half of the organizations represented, perhaps it can be viewed as an evolving feature in business environments.

Information Flow

The perception of information flow within the organizations represented revealed the widest degree of differences among respondents. The Information Flow classification, which assesses respondents' perception of knowledge sharing within their organization, had the tightest grouping of individual mean – only .11 separate the highest from lowest mean. Also evident, however, is that its group mean of 2.71 is the highest, or most negative of all question groupings. This suggests that of all the themes focused on in this research as imperative to establishing an organizational learning culture, information flow is the least applied, and thus the most dominant obstacle.

The numbers showed that there were minimal extremes in the responses. Questions nine and 22, for instance, have the tightest agree/disagree response distribution from the survey. Eight of 18 respondents agreed, and seven of 18 disagreed that employees are encouraged to provide feedback on decisions made at the leadership level. And when it came to evaluating how much learning takes place through sharing with other teams and departments, eight respondents agreed and six disagreed that knowledge is gained in this manner. This suggests that some organizations value practices that others do not when it comes to the flow of information and sharing of knowledge.

Questions seven and 10 had across-the-board-response distribution, with the category of NS matching with five responses each. Question seven, which assesses the degree to which employees are informed of the changes occurring within the organization, had nine affirmative versus four negative responses. Especially when considering the size of companies represented in this sample group, those results can be considered quite positive. When asked to evaluate the environment of meetings and the willingness of employees to openly express their opinions, respondents, by a count of eight to five, felt that employees did not have reservations on sharing their point of view. This is notable because organizational learning espouses the importance of open exchange and lack of defensive routines. However, even with its positive responses this last set of numbers would indicate some level of dysfunction among certain organizations when it comes to these practices. When employees resist sharing information or openly expressing opinions, the fundamental mechanics that support organizational development, growth and productivity will eventually become antiquated.

Manager's Role

Just ahead of Learning Solutions, the Manager's Role sub-group had the most positive assessment overall, after individual Self-Evaluation. This grouping of questions, intended to measure the respondent's view of the employee-supervisor relationship, with a group mean of 2.34, implies most respondents feel good about manager participation in their employees learning

development. With that said, the majority of respondents were managers themselves, and may have been less critical, or more empathetic, towards the challenges of that leadership role. The response distribution of 0.98 was just 0.01 behind the 0.99 of the grouping with the most standard distribution.

Highlights of this classification indicated that although managers may have a role in the learning process, it is not a certainty, and the highest level of disagreement was in response to statements that parallel traditional management styles. This grouping, along with the Systems Thinking classification, had the highest number of agree responses. Accompanied by only a moderate number of strongly agree responses, this suggests that there was not an expectation among respondents that managers take on that role. For instance, the respondents felt for the most part that front-line management was very strong in encouraging on-the-job training, but not as encouraging when it came to dealing with employee mistakes or developing independent thinking. Traditional management styles (mentioned several times as an obstacle in the open-ended responses) display this type of behavior with employees, such as criticizing rather than encouraging employees to learn from mistakes, giving directives as opposed to soliciting suggestions, and talking through issues. Eliminating status barriers and creating dialogue between employee and supervisor is an important component of the organizational learning process. Members of this sample group have confirmed that, while many organizations have developed this practice, there is still room for improvement.

Cultural Barriers

The Cultural Barriers classification is the only thematic group with negatively stated questions. Its intent was to assess the non-obvious practices within the participating organizations that undermine learning and productivity in the workplace. The overall group mean of 2.67 (converted from negative value) was just above Information Flow as the thematic classification which had the least positive assessment among respondents. In addition, it contained two of the bottom three individual questions with the least positive assessments. Aside

from little overall employee input in the process of developing a vision and mission, questions 20 and 21, with individual means of 2.88 and 2.94 (converted) respectively, exhibited the respondents' perception of the next two most problematic issues surrounding the creation of an organizational learning environment. Question 21 – many people in my organization portray themselves in one manner, but take actions and make decisions, which go against this portrayal – and question 20 – people in my organization tend to keep knowledge and information to themselves because they believe it will increase their power base – had almost identical response patterns. However, the small difference can be viewed as quite significant. The responses to both questions had an equal number of SD, D, and SA, but where question 21 had six agree responses (agreement the problem exists), question 20 had only 2. The contrast came in the responses to question 20, which showed not agreement, but rather uncertainty. The greater number of NS versus A responses in question 20 suggests that respondents found it more difficult to express that people are indeed holding information to build power and, perhaps for that same reason, could not disagree either. But the fact that respondents seemed more confident in their assessment that some people in their organizations have a duality or political manner in which they handle themselves, is interesting. It may be the result of overt action or inaction on the part of these individuals that is more easily observed than the containment of knowledge, or perhaps individual prejudices on the part of respondents that have surfaced.

In addition to the preceding two questions under Cultural Barriers, the remaining two also proved revealing. When asked if employees were reprimanded for not openly agreeing with management's directives, 12 of the 18 respondents felt they were not, five were unsure, and one strongly felt it was the case. Overall this could be viewed as more positive than some of the responses from the Information Flow classification, which for the most part were split evenly on the level of feedback and communication between supervisor and employee. However the more positives responses may result from it being easier to say "no" employees are not reprimanded

than making an assessment on the flow of knowledge and information between employee and supervisor.

The last question of this grouping was the only question on the survey with a bi-modal – though not perfect – response pattern. Based on the nature of the question, it is informative of the state of today's organizations surrounding employee development issues. When asked if Training and Development personnel were solely responsible for learning interventions within the organization, seven respondents said yes and 11 said no. This would indicate that from an organizational learning perspective the majority of companies are on the right track. However, it also indicates that almost 40% of organizations are still caught in an archaic paradigm of learning and development as the responsibility of one functional area. A primary component of an organizational learning mentality is that learning is ongoing and all encompassing.

Systems Thinking

The final thematic classification under which survey questions were categorized and assessed was Systems Thinking. The Systems Thinking questions were intended to uncover the respondents appraisals of their organizational environment as related to an individual's awareness beyond his or her own functional area, problem solving, and the use of reflection to review action outcomes.

The group mean of Systems Thinking matched the median of the overall individual mean of 2.59, placing it with Cultural Barriers and Information Flow as the classifications with the least encouraging assessment from an organizational learning perspective. Question 14 had the most concentrated response pattern; it was the only question on the survey with no SA or SD responses. With 10 A responses, six D, and two NS, the majority of the sample group was confident that departments within their organization went beyond just finding solutions to problems and made attempts to identify the source and prevent reoccurrence. However, with six respondents disagreeing, this question is one of only five others on the survey to receive a six or seven in the disagreement category (agree under Cultural Barriers). That over 30% of the

respondents felt this practice was non-existent in their organization shows that many companies fail to use the knowledge uncovered through mistakes as leverage for future productivity enhancements. The knowledge of inefficiencies with no action of prevention is knowledge wasted.

Question 19 under Systems Thinking had the same response pattern as the previous question, with one exception. Pulling from SD, there was one respondent who strongly agreed with the following: employees are informed of how their role functions within the overall organizational process, and have open lines of communication to other areas of the organization. These responses, with 11 affirmative and five in disagreement, reflect a sense among survey participants that employees do have an understanding of their role in the organization, yet the disagreements do submit evidence that gaps still exists. A systems thinking viewpoint examines the employee's need to be aware of how his or her actions impact processes, people, and other functional areas within the organization. Organizational learning involves an operation-wide awareness that actions taken in one area lead to obvious or non-obvious consequences elsewhere. These results indicate that two-thirds of the respondents believe this awareness is present in their organizational environment.

The final two questions within this classification had a more diffused pattern of distribution. With a 0.99 and 1.00 standard deviation, questions 23 and 18 respectively, communicated a more confident assessment on the part of the respondents as to the existence of systems thinking practices in their environment. However, this sense of confidence was not reflective of more affirmative responses, but instead, the proportionately higher number of NS responses, which indicates a greater sense of uncertainty rather than disagreement. Question 23, which asks if individuals and teams are encouraged to reflect on actions which lead to successes or failures, revealed by two to one a positive assessment. But responses to this question also showed that one-third of respondents could not definitively state either way if this was a practice

within their organization. So, statistically it cannot be stated that reflection on actions occur in more than 45% of the organizations represented.

A statement on question 18, with 11 responses in the affirmative and only three in disagreement, can be more confidently made. Responses to this question have overall a more positive assessment than all other questions in the Systems Thinking classification. The respondent's impression that employees are encouraged to understand the perspectives of people in other positions, even with four NS responses, proves positive from an organizational learning standpoint. For a systems approach to effectively take hold within a team, department, or organization, the awareness of an individual that he or she impacts others is imperative. Optimal productivity is more easily achieved when all human components of a system realize that their output becomes another's input.

Statistical Inference of Qualitative Survey Questions

Following is a presentation and evaluation of the predominant convergent themes taken from survey questions 28 through 31, along with a brief overview of supplementary comments offered by the respondents.

#28 – In your opinion, what are the primary obstacles within your organization that inhibit building a learning culture?

One topic dominated the responses to this question: time. Time as the obstacle was presented primarily in its relation to two elements: time necessary for development and implementation, and taking time to give change activities the opportunity to work.   Other frequently mentioned obstacles included the speed of business, leadership, cultural norms, and organizational structure.

Related to time, development and implementation obstacles were those associated with encouraging attendance at learning interventions, such as training sessions or meetings. These activities were either "canceled because of project deadlines," or never even scheduled because "sometimes turning involvement into action happens only when time permits and it is

convenient," or because "we get so involved in our day-to-day projects and tasks it is often difficult to do anything else." An additional telling comment was "training and learning are definitely encouraged, but are hard to fit in." Time allocated to allow activities to come to fruition, was mentioned in comments such as "commitment to the amount of time it takes to build this type of organization," and "time required to make change work and sustain the change."

The speed and urgency of daily business activity was often presented as an obstacle, both in reference to culture and its relation to the competition. Culture-related comments included "the urgency of a results-oriented culture" and "a very fast paced culture" lead to "little time for organizational learning experiences." Also, "people are afraid to admit they do not know and/or understand something," and "the existing culture is one that is very knowing." This last comment was used in reference to why difficulties exist in trying to establish learning and development as a routine process within the organizational system. A comment related to the competition revealed that it "drives us to make things happen faster and faster, there is often little tolerance for reviewing lessons learned."

The role of management and leadership as a barrier was obvious and came from two perspectives: commitment and competency. Lack of commitment revealed itself in comments such as "when financial times are tough, learning is always the first thing to be cut," and there is "complacency, desire to maintain the status quo," and that lack of "management support for real change" is an obstacle. Comments including "lack of leadership training across the organization," "outdated management style," and "talk at the top is not walked through the ranks" showed that lack of competency at the leadership level was perceived to be an obstacle. Lastly, "the immense size of the organization," and "too many levels between President and individual contributors," were comments that presented organizational structure as a barrier that inhibits the development of a learning culture.

#29 – Please comment on any solutions you have implemented that have helped to overcome

these obstacles.

This question elicited responses from varying perspectives. These perspectives have been clustered into three specific topic areas: fundamental solutions, nebulous solutions, and training initiatives.

Fundamental solutions are labeled as such because respondents represented them as actual practices occurring within their organizations. They are as follows:

➢ On-going transfer sessions between teams.
➢ National needs assessment.
➢ Virtual teaming through the use of specific software.
➢ Learning plans developed along with a coach who is responsible for an individual achieving the plan goals.
➢ Establishing a share drive (computer network drive) where people can share information.
➢ Project team updates once a month are intended as a way for teams to share lessons learned and solutions they implemented to overcome certain obstacles.
➢ Creating roles/positions of Audience Advocate and Performance Consultant that work directly with key individuals and groups within the organization.

Nebulous solutions are those comments that suggested these activities or practices occurred, rather than direct examples of perceptible practices. They are as follows:

➢ Instilling the disciplines of questioning and sharing within small groups, and encouraging the practices within that small team of people. "You cannot boil the ocean, but you can boil a cup of water."
➢ Positive role modeling and reinforcement for leaders demonstrating good team behaviors.
➢ Trying to interest employees in the learning they didn't think they wanted.
➢ Creating dialogue, trust, and showing value for solutions offered. Then using past experience as a proof-source to leverage organizational learning going forward.
➢ Making an effort on an individual basis to find out what others are doing.
➢ Showing how one solution is not better than another, but emphasizing that it is different.
➢ Presenting managers with business cases that support alternatives to traditional, single event training sessions.

The last topic area within the breakdown of solutions, training initiatives, specifically deals with ideas or practices around training and development that the respondents used to address the challenges faced in developing and implementing development programs. They are:

➢ We asked what the customer needed and wanted, and when they needed it. We considered them the content experts, so from the start, they were part of the training solutions.

- We insist that our customers tell us "what finished looks like" and then design a program specific to their needs.
- On-line learning.
- Training priorities are established by our customers (parent organization).
- My training organization is implementing consistent leadership training, supporting change management, training managers in new approaches, implementing knowledge management systems, conducting communication exchanges.

There were also comments which admitted outright that nothing was being done to address previously stated obstacles. These comments, such as "have not found a solution within the learning organization," and "so far no long term solutions to overcome obstacles," or, "still trying to sell a proposal," may highlight challenges faced by the Performance Improvement Professionals, or perhaps are a reflection of personal or functional area priorities.

#30 – If there were intended solutions that were <u>unable</u> to overcome these obstacles, please share your thoughts on why.

It was at this point that the response rate for questions decreased dramatically – from 94.4 to 50.0%. This became understandable after viewing the comments of those who did respond. The comments consisted primarily of general reasons for the challenges they continually faced as facilitators of the learning process, with statements, or restatements in some cases, that focused more on the obvious obstacles rather than the failed solutions.

Specifics on the failings of intended solutions were minimal. With the exception of time and priorities, there were really no central themes. One respondent reiterated that they were concentrating on what does work within their realm of influence, saying "our solutions have been very focused on leadership training and best practices, which have been successful so far, however there are some infrastructure changes that are beyond our control." Another commented on employees and the problem that those who most needed some type of learning intervention were the least likely to receive it; stating that "classroom training is offered, but it is attended by unutilized consultants, those who are doing most of the work are available for the least amount of training." One respondent referred back to an issue from question 28 about the difficulties involved in trying to enhance employee knowledge in an environment of strict

regulations, commenting that "the two issues enforcement and learning are polar opposites, they are diametrically opposed." The subject of marketing the ideas surrounding development programs surfaced a couple of times. One respondent said, "I am still hopeful that a small group of individuals will be able to sell the vision," while another was a little more specific, saying "great programs and interventions may work, but they do not sell themselves. It is imperative that key stakeholders…have a person who is available for consultation who can motivate [them] to take action." The last statement is profound in its direct contrast to the beliefs and principles espoused in organizational learning: "People [are] not willing to try a new way of looking at things; [they] settle back into old ways, what they are comfortable with and used to. It is hard to change their mindset if what they have used in the past has worked for them."

The time and priorities theme was evident in several comments, which again were stating the reasons why obstacles existed rather than why solutions failed. The first was direct but empathetic towards the sales professional: "It is always challenging to find enough time to train well. Brief training sessions often result in retraining sooner rather than later, but as a trainer, I must keep in mind that the primary job of field sales is selling…it is crucial the time [in training] be of immediate and clear value to our customer." Another respondent commented that "time is a high commodity…without truly valuing a learning organization, because one doesn't understand what it is, it becomes a low priority on the list of agenda items." This final comment reveals a respondent's perspective of the link between time and change: "When people are busy they revert to what has worked in the past and can save them some time, [they] don't have time to learn or use anything new."

#31 – Have you implemented any models that have successfully inspired organizational learning within your organization? And if so, please describe.

The last question, with a response rate of 55.6%, asked respondents to share models they have successfully used to inspire organizational learning. Responses referred to only three models, with a brief description of just one. However, there were comments that spoke to

development programs and business practices focused on end-state fundamentals that encouraged

principles of organizational learning, as well as commentary that expanded on the impetus behind

obstacles. First, a look at the references to models.

The first was a continuous learning model, a component of a virtual university being

implemented in this particular organization. Unfortunately, the respondent provided no specifics

on its content. The second model was called Change Cycle, which this respondent claimed "was

our most successful model introduced to employees" because it dealt with skills for managing

change at both work and home. Again, no details were provided. The third model, which

supplied details, though minimal, was the Performance Needs Assessment (PNA). The

respondent said that it looked at four quadrants, including Current State, Desired State, Root

Cause Analysis, and Intervention. Though used as an assessment for building development

programs, the respondent stated "it is very useful for looking at an organization." While none of

these models are organizational learning specific, all three are intended to uncover information,

connect it with specific business concerns, and distribute it in a manner that will enhance

employee knowledge in an effort to increase productivity; this is the foundation of organizational

learning.

Two comments dealt with internal development programs. The first stated the

respondent's company was "using technical skills training as vehicle to create empowered

employees." It is interesting to consider the use of skills training to achieve an empowered

workforce. This forward thinking approach can be viewed as utilizing employment development

programs not as an end-state, but rather as one component of a larger system encouraging

productivity improvement.

The second response, relating to development programs, spoke of an Academy designed

by the Performance Improvement Professional, and was described as "an educational program for

our changing market place." It was intended to provide internal customers "with the skills they

need to leverage [what they already] know." The program was developed based on data from a

national needs assessment and a "continual feedback loop." Participants progressed through the Academy as they achieved certification at subsequent subject matter levels. Managers completed the program ahead of their direct reports "so they can encourage and support" them as they pursued completion. Based on comments received, it is precisely this type of program that other survey participants felt was out of their reach. One commented that "we attempted (for over two years) to institute a standard instructional development process within T & D (training and development), this attempt was met with substantial resistance." Another stated that "almost everyone understands and promotes organizational learning, the problem is that (as Steven Covey puts it) 'urgent' needs are given priority over 'important' long-term goals." This respondent continued by stating "in the 'double speak' of today's fast paced business environment, organizational learning is often promoted from the lecterns of the CxO [sic], but is seen as nice to have by pressured underlings."

One respondent gave specifics, which were presented more as business practices than models for organizational learning. She wrote "we have implemented an internal website for sharing best practices, information, processes, tools, and feedback…monthly development sessions which the individual contributors 'own,'" of which "highly successful sessions are shared with other teams." She continued, "my department has also implemented organizational change and assessment task forces…they are empowered to create and implement policy and procedure without first having to obtain management approval." And finally, a comment that displayed the optimism necessary to create positive change: "not yet (implemented any successful models), but I am working on an overall performance improvement model that just might work."

Summary

Examination of data, both numerical and written, revealed that this sample group of experienced professionals overall perceived their working environment as conducive to building cultures of learning. The most negative responses on the quantitative questions came essentially from just two respondents. Feedback provided, informed that the proportionately high number of

NS responses on some questions was an indication of a mid-point between A and D rather than an uncertainty. The analysis showed that respondents: had high personal opinions on their individual understanding of organizational learning; felt strongly that learning solutions were encouraged in their company; believed that managers took an active role in endorsing the learning process; thought there existed an awareness of the holistic nature of an organization; and were moderately confident that the flow of information was good and the evidence of cultural barriers was minimal. A detailed interpretation however, brought forth a more complete representation.

Quantitative responses showed overwhelming confidence on behalf of the respondents in their perceived understanding of organizational learning, yet the qualitative comments reveal that many view it as relating primarily to training related issues. Learning Solutions, though highly encouraged in the organizations represented, are often difficult to implement because of time constraints, prioritization issues, organizational structure, and leadership support at the implementation level. The Manager's Role, which had the most positive statistical assessment of the five core classifications, came under fire in the open-ended comments where respondents revealed managers' commitments and abilities were actually obstacles to the learning process. Cultural Barriers and Information Flow were listed as the two principal obstacles to building an organizational learning environment. Development initiatives could not be implemented because of barriers, visible and hidden, which nurtured resistance. Components relating to these two classifications are those which are most closely tied to an individual's adaptability, perceptibility, and capability within the work environment. Respondent's comprehension of these in their workplace is certainly conjectural and based on individual perception, experience, and attitude. However, honest communications and the flow of knowledge are the basics of an effectual organizational climate. They enable the execution of the more perceptible management initiatives, learning solutions, and process application.

Though there were few specific models uncovered used in overcoming learning obstacles, solutions given that work for the individual organizations were numerous. Most

solutions were dependent primarily upon internal commitment and disciplined application, and were often relative to individual and cultural factors that would need to evolve into organizational norms in order to be impactful. All demonstrated that the creation of an organizational learning environment is not a comprehensive plan applicable to all companies, but rather a journey of discovery dependent on the individual make-up of the organization.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The fundamental ideology of organizational learning is that it is a tenet of business intended to work collaboratively with other organizational practices, to ultimately improve productivity and increase profitability. This project has revealed this is an accepted premise. However, it has also revealed that the view of the application process varies widely. From scholars to practicing improvement professionals, the theoretical, consultative, and pragmatic perspectives on the implementation of concepts take into account differing elements of consideration.

The four research chapters leading to this discovery started with the introduction of the problem in chapter one, and its significance as a research problem. The review of literature in chapter two built the foundation of understanding for pursuing research around organizational learning. Chapter three outlined the research design, data sources, collection techniques, and methodology used for conducting the research. And finally, chapter four separated the quantitative and qualitative survey data, analyzed the content, and interpreted the findings. This final chapter will briefly summarize significant details from each of the previous four, comment on inferences that correlate to each research objective, and provide recommendations for further research around the applicability of organizational learning in the workplace.

Summation of Critical Content in Chapters One through Four

Chapter one made known the importance of expanded knowledge in the workplace among employees at all levels of an organization, and divulged the increase in the amount of money being spent on formal employee development programs within North American

corporations. It supported the significance of the study by quoting respected practitioners in the field who reinforced the importance of preparedness and flexibility in an organizational culture. The stated objectives provided focus for the research and served as the foundation upon which all subsequent activities grew.

The Review of Literature for chapter two was the most challenging, but also the most rewarding aspect of the research. For the researcher, it served as a learning tool into the process of academic research and provided the intellectual nucleus necessary to carry out the project. It brought to light the existing points of view and served as a frame of reference. It created familiarity with subject matter experts, distinguished their niches, and revealed contradictory and parochial views. For the reader, it supplied insight into the conceptual, practical, and cultural topics that accompany the study of organizational learning.

Broken into three sections, the structure of the chapter was intended to provide a broad panorama of the research topic. Section one, the conceptual framework of organizational learning, identified theoretical perspectives and was intended to bring substance to the intangible nature of the subject matter. Section two described and summarized current research that attempted to identify practices and conditions, which encourage or suppress the implementation of organizational learning concepts. The final section of chapter two looked at working models that help advance influential factors of learning and adaptability into an organizational environment.

Chapter three, Research Methods, was a breakdown of the process followed that made it possible to accumulate the data necessary to achieve the research objectives. It identified the research design, data sources, means of data collection, and the methodology of interpretive research.

The focus of the research design was to gain insight into both the limiting and supporting factors of organizational learning that currently exist within for-profit organizations. This was in response to a question on the viability of organizational learning principles complementing

contemporary business practices. The population chosen was done so because their role within most organizational structures is in the functional area most closely aligned with the facilitation organizational learning practices: performance improvement. The data collection instrument and completion process were developed and utilized as a way to assist the respondents, help ensure a higher than customary response ratio, and affirm reliability. The instrument was designed around the primary themes of organizational learning uncovered in the review of literature, and was an attempt to gain statistical data around specific subject matter while allowing respondents the opportunity for open-comment on others. The delivery system (e-mail) was used in an attempt to connect with the sample group in a communication method prevalent in today's corporate environment. The interpretive research methodology was intended to provide validity to the process of data collection and statistical analysis. Done systematically, it ensured that all data received was separated and documented in a uniform manner.

The analysis of results from chapter four found several factors as influential to the presence of organizational learning practices within organizations. Some factors were found to be supportive, while others were revealed as barriers to the realization of these practices.

Supportive elements of an organizational learning culture were the encouragement of learning solutions, an awareness of the interconnected nature of organizations, management's role in endorsing the development process, and an advocate in the in-house role of performance improvement professional. Obstacles to the implementation of organizational learning practices proved to be: frontline management's commitment to implementing what they endorse, as well as their ability to execute the positional responsibilities; cultural barriers which make resistance to change or challenge endemic; organizational structure that does not allow for or encourage interaction, communication, and understanding of functional areas outside one's own; and time constraints, which result both from multiple priorities and the lack of time commitment necessary to allow learning and development activities to germinate.

<u>Conclusions</u>

The supportive and prohibitive components previously identified serve as the premise for inferences made around the research objectives. As a basis for discussion, these inferences are unproven theory and findings extracted from data supplied by the sample group and based on individual's perspectives. Following is a look at each objective and commentary related to the findings.

Identify common obstacles to successfully integrating organizational learning concepts into an organizational system.

The obstacles that were uncovered – management commitment and ability, organizational structure, multiple priorities and demands on time, and workforce adaptability – collectively involve many aspects of organizational functionality. Leaders of today's organizations, especially those at the senior executive level, are results-oriented. This orientation stems not only from individual style, but also from an outgrowth of market expectations. Their breadth of responsibility is such that the willingness to concentrate on elements outside their comfort zone is limited. Furthermore, those to whom they delegate have a similar orientation based on comparable responsibilities and expectations.

Several issues listed above as inhibitive to the advancement of organizational learning cannot be viewed as executive negligence. They may exist because of the necessity to sustain other elements of organizational operations and stakeholder demands. However, recognizing the speed of business, sense of urgency, and competitive pressures identified by the survey respondents, several obstacles are not only restrictive to organizational learning, but will in the long-term limit organizational growth.

Priorities that do not take into account issues related to long-term competitiveness are misplaced priorities. Organizational learning addresses the causes of why front-line management lacks the commitment or ability to implement an agenda intended to improve productivity. It attempts to catalog the reasons for such demands on time, looks for ways to overcome them, and

recognizes activities that are effective and differentiates them from those that are merely efficient. Organizational learning is a state of mind that works to uncover the reasons employees are resistant to new ideas, methodologies, and perspectives. The obstacles identified in this research are frustrating not only to those striving to improve organizational and employee performance, but also to those encountering them within any functional area.

While criticism, such as lack of vision from senior leadership due to their inability to see beyond the need for immediate results, may be justifiable, it must also be acknowledged that leaders, regardless of their ideologies, will always have pressures and priorities not known or understood by the masses. For proponents of organizational learning to have any success at overcoming these obstacles, they must be willing to endure certain challenges. They need to accept these obstacles as part of doing business, and do what is necessary to overcome them. They must be committed to and understand what impact they want to have within the organization. And finally, they must realize that the organizational institution has been in place much longer than the concept of organizational learning, and should therefore applaud gradual integration into the realm of acceptance and celebrate the small successes that make profound differences within their companies. Proponents of organizational learning need to view their mission the same way in which Drucker says an organization should view its people, by making "the strengths of the people effective and their weaknesses irrelevant" (Druker, 1997, p. 5). *Discover solutions that have successfully addressed obstacles to integration.*

Built around the premise of capturing and transferring knowledge within the organizational system, organizational learning is in an attempt to improve productivity and profitability. Solutions provided by the respondents to overcoming the above stated obstacles focused primarily on ways to transfer or share information and knowledge, while also reinforcing it at the individual level. Interestingly, Chapter Four revealed that elements within the classification theme of Information Flow, were viewed by respondents as the least applied of practices that could contribute to building an organizational learning culture. That they are the

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mainstays of solutions to overcoming barriers suggests that individuals are aware of methods contributing to improved performance, but lack the discipline or commitment to consistently execute their implementation. These solutions are discussed below**.**

Virtual teaming was used as a method to overcoming the spatial barriers associated with a large organization. In an attempt to bring a sense of team to functional area associates who are geographically separated, conference calls and a specific software program allow real time collective participation and communication on project work. This practice was cited as a method of combining intellectual capital in an organization whose greatest challenge is its "immense" size. The next solution provided to ensure the sharing of knowledge and information across a large organizational structure was the creation of a "share drive." This drive was established to encourage employees to post information they felt would benefit others, such as best practices, process enhancement, and performance tools.   In addition, it was used to provide feedback and view information as a method of gaining broader insight into the activities of others.

Two knowledge-sharing solutions, on-going transfer sessions between teams and project team updates, were also used to help employees working in closer proximity to one another. Both were closely connected and involved similar objectives, specifically, sharing the process of how teams are completing project work, addressing issues, and overcoming problems that could potentially lead to failure. These solutions, in addition to influencing the flow of information, could also be considered beneficial to the development of learning solutions. Learning solutions result from shared information being used to improve processes and strengthen the employee's ability to enhance productivity.

The last two solutions focused on group or individual activities attempting to create learning outcomes, which lead to improved performances, and ultimately added value to products and services. The first was the development of an employee learning plan with the assistance of a coach or mentor who was responsible for ensuring that the plan goals are achieved. By assigning

this coaching role to an immediate supervisor who was responsible for the outcome, the obstacle of management commitment (on the micro level) in the development process was addressed.

The final solution concentrated on learning by designating advocates or internal consultants to specific employee groups or individuals. This role, which parallels that of the survey respondent's, concentrated the responsibility of improved performance outside of the group's or individual's department. This helps assuage two of the above stated obstacles, management commitment and demands on time. A supervisor who is not supportive of change activities is not likely to extend the effort necessary to prepare and implement learning and development plans. Additionally, even with supervisory support, time and priority constraints can interfere with the ability to take steps towards a development program. Using an internal advocate or consultant not only removes pressure from the supervisors, but also entitles the group or individual to receive capable consultative applications, i.e. assessment, planning, design, and evaluation. One of the survey respondents even went so far as to say that upper management should " have a person available for consultation who can motivate them to take action" on performance issues. If the performance consultant is able to form alliances with managers and supervisors, opportunities for more solutions to integrate organizational learning practices will present themselves.

Identify behaviors and practices in use that support attempts to build organizational learning cultures.

In addition to the above solutions for overcoming obstacles, the survey respondents shared several well-founded behavioral and process ideas, objectives, and practices. These behaviors and practices encompassed all rudiments of the organizational learning process as uncovered in the review of literature.

They were:

➢ A coaching model to help front-line supervision work through everyday situations effectively.

➢ Using change from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

➢ Offering a variety of media to encourage learning practices, i.e. CBT (computer-based training), self-study, intranet, and on-the-job training.

➢ Implementing knowledge management systems and communication exchanges.

➢ Presenting managers with business cases that support alternatives to traditional, single event training sessions.

➢ Useing each past experience as a proof-source to leverage future learning.

➢ Positive role modeling and reinforcement for leaders demonstrating good team behaviors.

➢ Instilling the disciplines of questioning and sharing within small groups.

Expanding on this theme, comments were given that stressed what is needed to support practices and behaviors that in turn bolstered attempts to build a learning culture. The final question on the survey asked the participants to share any additional comments pertaining to organizational learning. Two views became evident - one of culture, and one of technology. A respondent stressing the cultural aspect stated "the culture has to be right to support a learning environment," and that culture is dependent on "hiring the best employees, as they continually influence that culture. It is a cycle that truly requires a focus on hiring the best employees to create the culture that can sustain and inspire organizational learning." This approach is addresses the issue of resistance before it has the chance to play itself out. If the hiring process is able to assess an individuals predisposition toward behaviors and practices essential to organizational learning, it becomes not only a mechanism for building a learning culture, but also a method for eliminating inflexibility or opposition to change among the workforce.

Another respondent confidently viewed technology as the key to building an environment of organizational learning. This professional maintained that "organizational learning needs to be easy, specifically, technology needs to be used to make searching for information…easy enough for people to make an effort to learn from others. Also, the technology for submitting information, making connections with others, etc…needs to be straightforward."

These and other behaviors and practices may be rudimentary for some organizations and beyond reach for others. Depending on which viewpoint towards organizational learning is adopted - the normative, developmental, or capability (DiBella and Nevis, 1998), these applications may or may not even apply to organizational learning. They could be organizational learning in practice; they may be serving as preparatory work that will help facilitate the learning process in the future; or perhaps they are just elements with a significance that is dependent on the maturity of the organization. Whatever their identity, if they and similar activities positively impact organizational performance, corporations should embrace them as fundamental business practices.

Recommendations

Future research around organizational learning should:

➢ Look at the success of companies, which have cultures that share information and encourage open feedback, versus those that do not.

➢ Solicit data that will make known to corporate leadership the importance of vision, time, and commitment on the evolution of development programs, along with the need to see beyond the compulsion of immediate results.

➢ Focus on ways to move it from a concept, to a process element that performs a practical role within organizational operations.

➢ Encourage leadership development that incorporates organizational learning principals.

➢ Identify the significance of organizational structures on the facilitation of its concepts.

➢ Provide solutions for how its philosophy can become an organizational priority and withstand the pressures of time and demands.

➢ Study the impact of Performance Improvement Professionals driving organizational change.

➢ Identify ways to combine and distribute the knowledge resident in all employees.

➢ Determine the best technology for submitting information and making connections with others.

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Appendix A

SURVEY

Survey on Organizational Learning

1. What is your current job title? _____

2. Please list your primary responsibilities? _____
    _____

3. Years of experience in a corporate Training and Development position:
    ___0 – 2   ___2 – 6   ___6 – 10   ___10 – 14   ___Over 14 years

Directions: Please **x** the response that most closely relates to your position on the issue.
       Choices are: 1= Strongly Agree (**SA**)   4= Disagree (**D**)
                     2= Agree (**A**)   5= Strongly Disagree (**SD**)
                     3= Not Sure (**NS**)

Questions	SA	A	NS	D	SD
4. I have a basic understanding of the concepts of O.L.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
5. My organization encourages and supports its employees to not only become better workers, but also improve themselves individually.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
6. Organizational leaders openly encourage learning by employees at all levels.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
7. When organizational changes are occurring, employees are informed as to why and what to expect.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
8. Front-line management is encouraged to develop employees through on-the-job training and coaching.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
9. Knowledge gained through learning is shared with other teams and departments.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
10. In a meeting environment, employees do not have reservations about openly expressing their opinions on an issue or point of view.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
11. I would feel comfortable discussing the concepts of O.L. with other Training and Development professionals.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
12. Employees are reprimanded for not openly agreeing to management's directives.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__
13. When mistakes are made, employees are not criticized, but are encouraged to learn from them.	1__	2__	3__	4__	5__

	SA	A	NS	D	SD

14. Problem solving in most departments involves not only finding a solution, but also identifying what led to the problem and how it can be prevented from happening again. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

15. During meetings and dialogue, most managers encourage employees to think through issues, rather than always supplying the answers themselves. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

16. Employee empowerment is not only talked about, but actually practiced. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

17. I am a champion for the concepts and practices of organizational learning. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

18. Employees are encouraged to understand the perspectives of people in other positions. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

19. Employees are informed of how their role functions within the overall organizational process, and have open lines of communication to other areas in the organization. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

20. People in my organization tend to keep knowledge and information to themselves because they believe it increases their power base. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

21. Many people in my organization portray themselves in one manner, but take actions and make decisions which go against this portrayal. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

22. Employees are encouraged to provide feedback on decisions made, and actions taken, by those at the leadership level. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

23. Individuals and teams are encouraged to reflect on actions which led to successes or failures. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

24. Most employees have some influence in the process of creating the company vision and mission. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

25. Within my organization, only T & D personnel are responsible for learning interventions. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

26. Managers and non-managers presently work together, to solve problems. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

27. I handle myself in a manner that is supportive of the principles and practices of organizational learning. 1__ 2__ 3__ 4__ 5__

28. In your opinion, what are the primary obstacles within your organization that inhibit building a learning culture.

29. Please comment on any solutions you have implemented that have helped to overcome these obstacles.

30. If there were intended solutions that were <u>unable</u> to overcome these obstacles, please share your thoughts on why.

31. Have you implemented any models that have successfully inspired organizational learning within your organization? If so, please describe.

32. Please share any additional comments pertaining to organizational learning:

Appendix B

SURVEY SOLICITATION and NON-RESPONDENT MESSAGE

(Receiver's name)

I am a fellow ISPI member and a graduate student doing research on Organizational Learning. My research consists of a survey on corporate learning environments, and is soliciting feedback from Training, Development, and Performance Improvement Professionals.

The survey will be sent via e-mail, can be completed on-line, and returned via e-mail. Total time to complete is approximately 10-20 minutes. Neither individual or company names will be documented. As a respondent, you can also receive a finalized copy of the research, if you so desire.

Would you be willing to participate?

If yes, I will send a copy of the survey upon receiving your reply. If you are unsure and would like some questions answered, please let me know. (wessmj@hotmail.com)

Thank you for your time (receiver's name),

Mark

Appendix C

FOLLOW-UP MESSAGE TO INITIAL AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSE TO SURVEY

SOLICITATION

(Receiver's name)

You had responded affirmatively on March ( ) to a request to participate in my graduate survey. This is just a reminder in case it had been overlooked. A copy of the survey is attached for your convenience.

Thank you,

Mark

Appendix D

RESPONSES FROM QUESTIONS 28-32

#28 *In your opinion, what are the primary obstacles within your organization that inhibit building a learning culture?*

➢ The immense size of the organization, and within my practice we are all mobile employees. The consultants are expected to bill 75% of their time at the client site, add travel to that, and there is little time for organized learning experiences.

➢ A lack of confidence in most of the Training and Professional Development Department Trainers—it is believed they have not held field sales jobs and therefore cannot design or implement real-world training. Most previous training experiences have not proved useful to the customer (field sales).

➢ Management support for real change. Union support for real change. Cost. Time required to make change work and to sustain the change. Right leaders in the right positions.

➢ The primary barrier is TIME. We get so involved in our day-to-day projects and tasks it is often difficult to do anything else. Often people sign-up for training and then cancel because of project deadlines. Training and learning is definitely encouraged, but it is hard to fit in.

➢ Stringent regulations and guidelines often require tough action and less support in learning. Tremendous amount of change and a very fast paced culture also create obstacles to more involvement in decision-making; sometimes turning involvement into action only when time permits and it is convenient. Some employees often openly state they don't wish to be involved, empowered, and even learn anything more than they know right now.

➢ The lack of understanding of what a learning organization is, valuing a learning organization, and time.

➢ Time and distance (better with on-line learning techniques).

➢ When financial times are tough, learning is always the first thing to be cut.

➢ 1. The urgency of a results-oriented culture. 2. The size of the organization (in my case very large). 3. Great programs and interventions, but very few people to consult with key stakeholders about proper use of these tools.

➢ People are afraid to take risks…could jeopardize chances for promotion etc. People are afraid to admit they do not know and/or understand something. We don't know what others know…don't have to time to find out either.

➢ Complacency, desire to maintain the status quo.

➢ Lack of leadership training across the organization. Lack of consistency across the organization in the application of best practices. A compensation system that does not treat individual contributors (versus managers) equitably. Too many levels between President and individual contributors. Outdated management style.

➢ Competition. Competition drives us to make things happen faster and faster. There is often little tolerance for reviewing lessons learned etc…However, if we did more to create a learning culture, our competitive advantage would be our collective learning and knowledge base. It's an age-old struggle.

➢ The talk at the top is not walked through the ranks. The talk is not completely understood, and the word "Learning" Organization is intimidating to most people.

➢ Commitment to the amount of time it takes to build this type of organization.

➢ Middle management does not want to pay the price for training.

#29 *Please comment on any solutions you have implemented that have helped to overcome these obstacles.*

➢ Use of Lotus Notes for virtual teaming, conference calls, are methods of storing intellectual capital.

➢ My department conducted a national needs assessment and actually asked the customer what they needed and wanted, and when they needed it. So from the start, our customers were part of the training solutions. Also, we considered our customers the content experts. And finally, we insist that our customers tell us "what finished looks like" and then we design a

program specific to their needs. I support a relatively small group in the field (approximately 200) so change and communication is much easier.

> OD design for new 12 pocket Will Sheeter. "Supervisorless" wood yard. OD redesign of Bleach Plant workforce. Employee led technical skills training system.
> Each person in my division has a coach. Together with the coach we develop learning plans. It is the responsibility of the coach and coachee to work together to ensure that these plans are met.
> We've had a difficult time finding solutions for the first one (tough action around regulations and guidelines). Continuous coaching when opportunities for involvement were there and they were overlooked. Positive role modeling and reinforcement for leaders demonstrating good "team behaviors." Trying to interest the employees in the learning they didn't think they wanted. Help bridge the application to their job and even to their life in general ("life skills").
> So far no long-term successes on solutions to overcome obstacles.
> On-line learning.
> Have not found a solution within the learning organization. Training priorities are established by our customers (parent organization).
> Create roles/positions (Audience Advocate, Performance Consultant) that work directly with key individuals and groups within the organization. 2. Create dialogue, trust, and show value for solutions offered. Then use each past experience as a proof-source to leverage O.L. going forward.
> Making an effort on an individual basis to find out what others are doing. Establishing a share drive where people can share/post information. Showing how one solution not better than another…but emphasizing that it is different.
> Present managers with business cases that support alternatives to traditional, single event training sessions.
> My training organization is implementing consistent leadership training, supporting change management, training managers in new approaches, implementing knowledge management systems and communication exchanges.
> We've shared lessons learned through brief project team updates once a month. This gives others a glimpse of how project teams are dealing with issues, overcoming them, or running into obstacles. Occasionally people make a connection that helps them with their project.
> Still trying to sell a proposal.
> Ongoing knowledge transfer sessions between teams.
> Try to offer training that will impact the employees and the corporation. Try to give a variety of media for learners to obtain training – CBT, Web, self-study, training completed at work area…

#30 *If there were intended solutions that were <u>unable</u> to overcome these obstacles, please share your thoughts on why.*
> Classroom training is offered but attended by bench (unutilized) consultants. Those who are doing the most work are available for the least amount of training.
> It is always a challenge to find enough time to train well. Brief training sessions often result in retraining sooner rather than later. But as a trainer, I must keep in mind the fact that the primary job of field sales is selling; selling is how they are rewarded. So time off territory at training is time away from selling. That is why it is crucial the time be of immediate and clear value to our customer.
> On the first issue (regulations and guidelines) we haven't been able to come up with good solutions to overcome that obstacle. Why? The two issues (enforcement and learning) are very polar from each other-diametrically opposed.

- Time is a high commodity In our environment and all obstacles described above (no valuing or understanding a L.O., and time) are inter-twined. Without truly valuing a learning organization, because one doesn't understand what it is, it becomes a low priority on the list of agenda items. Therefore, time is not devoted to it as if it were a high priority item.
- Great programs and interventions may work, but they do NOT sell themselves. It is imperative that key stakeholders, concerned about the health of the organization, have a person who is available for consultation and who can motivate those stakeholders to take action.

- People not willing to try a new way of looking at things…settle back into old ways, what they are comfortable with and used to. It is hard to change their mindset if what they've used in the past has worked for them. When people are busy, they revert to what has worked in the past and can save them some time…don't have time to learn/use anything new.
- Our solutions have been very focused on leadership training and best practices, which have been successful so far. However there are some infrastructure changes that are beyond our control.
- I am still hopeful that a small group of individuals will be able to sell the vision.
- We have a culture that did not value training.

#31 *Have you implemented any models that have successfully inspired organizational learning within your organization? If so, please describe.*
- I have recently designed HSAcademy- an educational program for our changing market place. It will, in a sequential manner, provide my field sales customers and managers with the skills they need to leverage the pharmaceutical science they know. The training program is built on a national needs assessment and continual feedback loop. It is the customer's program, with my promise that it will be both useful and fun. It is a week-long on-site program that will certify each participant and allow them to enter a higher level of HSAcademy. We will train the managers first so they can encourage and support their direct reports in their level of training.
- Using technical skills training as a vehicle to create empowered employees. Using change from the bottom up rather than from the top down.
- The Change Cycle on managing change was our most successful model introduced to employees because they saw the value in the skills for work and home (life skills concept).
- Almost everyone understands and promotes organizational learning. The problem in a results-oriented culture is that (as Steven Covey puts it), "urgent" needs are given priority over "important" longer-tem goals. In the "double speak" of today's fast paced business environment, Organizational Learning often is promoted from the lecterns of the CxO, but is treated as a nice-to-have by pressured underlings.
- Yes, a process called the PNA…Performance Needs Assessment…which looks at four quadrants: Current state, Desired state, Root Cause Analysis, and Intervention. Although we use this for audience assessments, it is very useful for looking at an organization.
- We are in the process of implementing a virtual corporate university approach to learning, one that incorporates a continuous learning model.
- We have implemented an internal website for sharing best practices, information, processes, tools, and feedback within my department. My team holds monthly developmental sessions which the individual contributors "own." Highly successful sessions are shared with other teams. My department has also implemented organizational change and assessment task forces, which individual contributors "own." They are empowered to create and implement policy and procedure without first having to obtain management approval.
- We attempted (for over 2 years) to institute a standard instructional development process with T & D. This attempt was met with substantial resistance at first. Now, it is loosely embraced. The tools created (lessons learned templates, proposal templates, etc.) are being used on a regular basis.
- Not yet, but I am working on an overall performance improvement model that just might work.
- A coaching model to help front-line supervision work through everyday situations effectively.

#32 *Please share any additional comments pertaining to organizational learning.*

- Obvious thoughts: The culture has to be right to support a learning environment and equally as important are the employees who are hired as they continually influence that culture. It is a cycle that truly requires a focus on hiring the best employees to create the culture that can sustain and inspire organizational learning.
- Some of your questions about Organizational Learning can be interpreted several ways. So the section with the continuum of SA to SD was difficult to answer. In a very large organization, blanket statements are almost never accurate.
- Organizational Learning needs to be easy. Specifically, technology needs to be used to make searching for information, contacts, etc…easy enough for people to make an effort to learn from others. Also, the technology for submitting information, making connections with others, etc…needs to be straightforward. Organizational Learning is more than just creating a culture of people who love to learn. It is about harnessing the tremendous amount of knowledge resident in all employees.
- Organizational Learning is a concept that has not yet been implemented in our company. However, there is a thrust toward budgetary support for training, but it is just thrown over the fence and nobody knows what its real impact could be.
- We need it to come from the top down rather than try to filter learning from the bottom up.

Appendix E

FREQUENCY RESPONSE CHARTS FOR QUESTIONS 4-27

FREQUENCY RESPONSE CHARTS PLACED HERE

Appendix F

STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS OF SURVEY

QUESTIONS #4 - 27

➤ Most positive individual Mean (1.53). Question #5 - My organization encourages and supports its employees to not only become better workers, but also improve themselves individually.
➤ Most positive Mean for all classifications (1.87), Self-Evaluation.
➤ Most positive group Mean for all classifications focused on concepts and practices (excludes Self-Evaluation) (2.34), Manager's Role.
➤ Least positive individual Mean (3.41). Question #24 - Most employees have some influence in the process of creating the company vision and mission.
➤ Least positive group mean for all classifications (2.71), Information Flow.
➤ Rank of group Means, most positive to least positive: * Self –Evaluation   * Manager's Role   * Learning Solutions   * Systems Thinking   * Cultural Barriers   * Information Flow
➤ Rank of individual question Mean, most positive to least positive (excluding the Self-Evaluation grouping):   Question # : 5- 1.53   Question # : 7- 2.65   6- 1.88   25- 2.70 (converted from negative value)   8- 2.06   9- 2.71   12- 2.18 (converted from negative value)   10- 2.71   26- 2.24   23- 2.71   18- 2.41   14- 2.71   15- 2.47   22- 2.76   19- 2.53   20- 2.88 (converted from negative value)   16- 2.59   21- 2.94 (converted from negative value)   13- 2.59   24- 3.41
➤ Questions with the most standard degree of response distribution (1.00) – #7, 18, 24.
➤ Classification with the most standard degree of distribution (0.99) – Learning Solutions.
➤ Question (without omissions) with the broadest degree of response distribution (1.45) - #25 - Within my organization, only T&D personnel are responsible for learning interventions.
➤ Question (with omissions) with the broadest degree of response distribution (1.50) - #17 – I am a champion for the concepts and practices of organizational learning.
➤ Classification with the broadest degree of distribution (1.22) – Cultural Barriers.
➤ Question with the most concentrated level of distribution (0.78) - #6 – Organizational leaders openly encourage learning by employees at all levels of the organization.
➤ Mode for response options - Agree (includes disagree for Cultural Barriers questions). 185 responses out of a possible 432 (42.8%).
➤ Mode of individual question Means – (2.71).
➤ Median of individual question Means – (2.59).
➤ Median of individual question Standard Deviations – (1.01).
➤ Total number of response omitted (3), one each for questions #4, 17, 20.

** Note: the term positive correlates to being supportive of an organizational learning culture.