

# CHAPTER 26

## CONTINUOUS LEARNING

### CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. What is a Learning Organisation?
3. The Learning Cycle
4. Levels of Learning
5. Characteristics of a Learning Organisation
6. Kaizen
7. Further Resources



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The animal protection environment is a fast-changing one, where we are faced with a complex range of problems and opportunities. Because our opponents are better resourced in many ways, it is vital that we continue to make the most of our most valuable asset – our staff. Continuous learning and Kaizen are ways of achieving this. Both of these concepts are elaborated upon in the sections that follow.

## 2 WHAT IS A LEARNING ORGANISATION?

A Learning Organisation is an organisation that learns and encourages learning among its people. It promotes exchange of information between employees, thereby creating a more knowledgeable workforce. This produces a very flexible organisation where people will accept and adapt to new ideas and changes through a shared vision.

**“A LEARNING ORGANISATION IS ONE IN WHICH PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS, INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVELY, ARE CONTINUALLY INCREASING THEIR CAPACITY TO PRODUCE RESULTS THEY REALLY CARE ABOUT.” ~ Senge**

A Learning Organisation establishes procedures to:

- Apply techniques to measure the organisation's strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures
- Identify areas for improvement within the organisation
- Set organisational policies and approaches to all aspects of management
- Implement techniques to improve organisational effectiveness.

The importance of learning was first put forward by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC). He believed that everyone should benefit from learning:

**“WITHOUT LEARNING, THE WISE BECOME FOOLISH; BY LEARNING, THE FOOLISH BECOME WISE.”**

**“LEARN AS IF YOU COULD NEVER HAVE ENOUGH OF LEARNING, AS IF YOU MIGHT MISS SOMETHING.”**

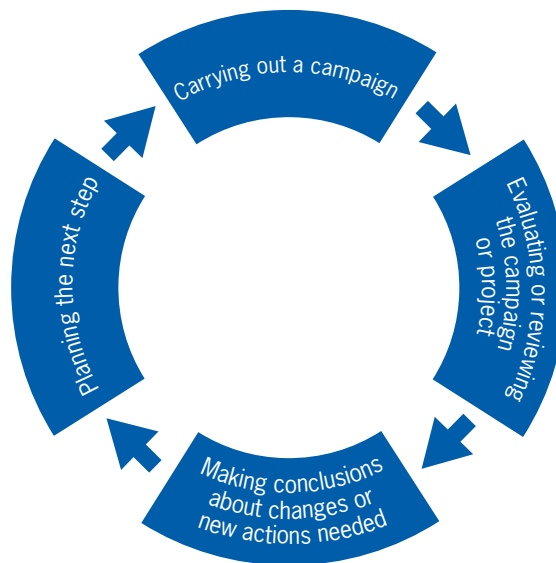
The growing emphasis on organisational learning can be attributed to the increased pace of change in the workplace. Classically, work has been thought of as being conservative and difficult to change. Now, there is such a fast-changing environment that business as usual is no longer an option. With the pace of change ever quickening, the need to develop mechanisms for continuous learning and innovation is greater than ever.

## 3 THE LEARNING CYCLE

Evaluation is necessary for an organisation to learn from its mistakes and also to appreciate its successes. Discussion and contribution in a team framework is vital, followed by assessment and planning. Each team member should be encouraged to assess his or her own performance. This requires continuous feedback and assessment, which is commonly depicted using the Learning



Cycle model below:



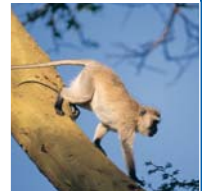
Animal protection organisations can be very poor at evaluation, dashing from campaign to campaign, or project to project. This may give the feeling of constant activity, but it completely misses the important chance to learn and improve upon experiences.

An organisation that learns and wants its people to learn, should try to follow certain concepts in learning techniques and mould itself to accommodate for a number of specific attributes.

These include:

- Thrive on Change
- Encourage Experimentation
- Communicate Success and Failure
- Facilitate Learning from the Surrounding Environment
- Facilitate Learning from Employees
- Reward Learning
- A Sense of Caring and Mutual Support.

If the changeover to a Learning Organisation happened overnight, the environment around the workers would be complex and dynamic. This would cause fear, uncertainty and confusion, which would hamper learning and openness to change. So it can only be introduced into a company that is prepared to reach a balance between change and stability, – a balance between the old and the new.



## LEVELS OF LEARNING

# 4

A Learning Organisation is not simply about more training. While training does help develop certain types of skills, a Learning Organisation involves the development of higher levels of knowledge and skills. This includes four levels of learning:

1. Learning facts, knowledge, processes and procedures. This applies to known situations where changes are minor.
2. Learning new job skills that are transferable to other situations. This applies to new situations where existing responses need to be changed. Bringing in outside expertise is a useful tool here.

3. Learning to adapt. This applies to more dynamic situations where the solutions need developing. Experimentation and deriving lessons from success and failure is important here.
4. Learning to learn. This is about innovation and creativity – designing the future rather than merely adapting to it. This is where assumptions are challenged and knowledge is reframed.

This model (or an adaptation of it) can be applied at three levels – to the learning of individuals, of teams and of organisations.

## 5

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

Some of the key characteristics of a Learning Organisation include:

**A Learning Culture** : an organisational climate that nurtures learning.

- Future, external orientation – these organisations develop an understanding of their environment; senior teams take time out to think about the future. External sources and advisors (such as consultants) are widely used
- Free exchange and flow of information – systems are in place to ensure that expertise is available where it is needed; individuals network extensively, crossing organisational boundaries to develop their knowledge and expertise.
- Commitment to learning, personal development – support from top management; people at all levels are encouraged to learn and learning is rewarded
- Valuing people – ideas and creativity are stimulated, made use of and developed. Diversity is recognised as a strength. Views can be challenged
- Climate of openness and trust – individuals are encouraged to develop ideas, to speak out, to challenge actions
- Learning from experience – learning from mistakes is often more powerful than learning from success. Failure is tolerated, provided lessons are learnt.

**Key Management Processes** are in place to encourage interaction across boundaries.

These are infrastructure, development and management processes, for example:

- Strategic and Scenario Planning – approaches to planning that go beyond the numbers, encourage challenging assumptions, thinking 'outside of the box'. They also allocate a proportion of resources for new challenges
- Competitor Analysis – as part of a process of continuous monitoring and analysis of all key factors in the external environment, including political factors
- Information and Knowledge Management – using techniques to identify, audit, value (cost/benefit), develop and exploit information as a resource
- Capability Planning – profiling both qualitatively and quantitatively the competencies of the organisation
- Team and Organisation Development – the use of facilitators to help groups with work, job and organisation design and team development – reinforcing values, developing vision, cohesiveness and a climate of stretching goals, sharing and support
- Reward and Recognition Systems – processes and systems that recognise acquisition of new skills, team work as well as individual effort, celebrate successes and accomplishments and encourage continuous personal development.



## KAIZEN

Another very similar concept to a Learning Organisation is Kaizen.

### KAIZEN IS A KEY JAPANESE MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY THAT MEANS IMPROVEMENT.

Kaizen strategy calls for never-ending efforts for improvement involving everyone in the organisation – managers and workers alike.

In practice, Kaizen can be implemented in organisations by improving every aspect of the work process in a step-by-step approach, while gradually developing employee skills through training, education and increased involvement.

#### The principles of Kaizen implementation are:

- Human resources are the most important company asset.
- Processes must evolve by gradual improvement rather than radical changes.
- Improvement must be based on statistical or quantitative evaluation of performance (quite difficult to apply in the animal protection environment).

Support throughout the entire structure is necessary to become successful at developing a strong Kaizen approach. Management as well as workers need to believe in the Kaizen idea and strive toward obtaining the small goals in order to reach overall success. Therefore, all members of an organisation need to be trained in a manner to support this. Resources, measurements, rewards and incentives all need to be aligned to and working with the Kaizen structure of ideas.

Improvement can be broken down between innovation and Kaizen. Innovation involves a drastic improvement in the existing process and requires large investments. Kaizen signifies small improvements as a result of coordinated continuous efforts by all employees.

#### The Kaizen mindset

- Not a day should go by without some kind of improvement being made somewhere in the company.
- Mission-driven strategy for improvement – any management activity should eventually lead to increased mission achievement.
- Quality first: professionalism and quality as goals.
- Recognition that any organisation has problems and establishing culture where everyone can freely admit these problems and suggest improvement.
- Problem solving is seen as cross-functional systemic and collaborative approach.
- Emphasis on process – establishing a way of thinking oriented at improving processes and a management system that supports and acknowledges people's process-oriented efforts for improvement.
- A positive, win-win attitude, not a blame culture.



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**FURTHER RESOURCES**

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**Websites****Continuous Improvement**

[www.managementhelp.org/quality/cont\\_imp/cont\\_imp.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/quality/cont_imp/cont_imp.htm)

**Kaizen**

[www.1000ventures.com/business\\_guide/mgmt\\_kaizen\\_main.html](http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/mgmt_kaizen_main.html)

**Kaizen Institute**

[www.kaizen-institute.com](http://www.kaizen-institute.com)

**Learning Organisations**

[www.see.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/MENG/MEAB/lo\\_index.html](http://www.see.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/MENG/MEAB/lo_index.html)

**The Learning Organisation**

[www.skyrme.com/insights/3lrnorg.htm](http://www.skyrme.com/insights/3lrnorg.htm)

**Books****50 Ways Towards a Learning Organisation**

Andrew Forrest

Publisher: Spiro Press

ISBN: 1858355990

**The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation**

Peter M. Senge

Publisher: Bantam Doubleday

ISBN: 0385260954

**The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement**

Eliyahu M. Goldratt, Jeff Cox

Publisher: North River Press

ISBN: 0884271781

**The Kaizen Blitz**

Anthony C. Laraia

Publisher: John Wiley

ISBN: 0471246484

**Kaizen and You: Personal Success Through Continuous Improvement**

Igor Popovich

Publisher: Management Books 2000

ISBN: 1852522615

**Kick Down the Door of Complacency:****Seize the Power of Continuous Improvement**

Charles C. Harwood

Publisher: St Lucie Press

ISBN: 157444168X

**Office Kaizen: Transforming Office Operations into a Strategic Competitive Advantage**

William Lareau

Publisher: American Society for Quality

ISBN: 0873895568

**Ten Steps to a Learning Organisation**

Peter Kline, Bernhard Saunders

Publisher: Great Ocean Publishers

ISBN: 0915556324

