

The Secret to Organisational Learning

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Learning is about leveraging information and people's knowledge. Your company's goals are to share information, explore new ideas, and to solve problems creatively.

To make this an on-going part of your company, the secret is to understand the distinction between what you're doing and how you do it. When people are unaware of the difference between what and how, learning tends to be undisciplined. This drains energy and reduces productivity.

Years ago, Henry Ford realized the difference between what and how when he built the Model T. He saw the individual parts of the car as the what. Without a manufacturing process, it took too much money and effort to build the car. When he added an assembly line (the how), he was able to efficiently build a simple car. When the employees' assembly line skills improved, the output was a quality, efficiently produced car.

We have long since moved beyond the Model T. Today, we work in the information economy. To leverage knowledge we need to integrate how people learn into what they do. We must also make this an important part of a company's culture and values.

We don't realize it, but over the years our learning skills have deteriorated. At school, we were taught to study for the one right answer. Now at work, we look for the one answer that the boss wants to hear (whether we feel it's "right" or not).

Our focus is on what we know. The focus must shift to how the organisation learns. Who participates in decision making? Are employees encouraged to share ideas, to take a chance? Is there an entrepreneurial spirit within your company?

A learning organisation helps people understand the nature of problems and use a process to effectively deal with them to make productive, positive change. It encourages employees to take risks.

Invite employees to participate as much as possible for what they can contribute in knowledge and originality. They are there to help find a solution. Your willingness to share and explore new ideas adds excitement and a sense of discovery to our workdays.

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