

ARE YOU UNLEASHING THE REAL PEOPLE POTENTIAL IN YOUR ORGANISATION ?

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It was Peter Senge, in his 1990 book, *The Fifth Discipline* who coined the phrase, 'The Learning Organisation'. His goal was to use systems thinking as the basis for looking at organisations as holistic entities, gaining insights into the whole by understanding the linkages and interactions between the elements that comprise the entire 'system'. Amongst other benefits, this helps avoid the silo effect, where lack of internal communication and interaction can cause a change that occurs in one area of the system to adversely affect another of the system.

Senge, founder and director of the Centre for Organisational Learning at MIT's Sloan School of Management, has gone on to pioneer the international Society for Organisational Learning (SoL, see www.solonline.org). SoL was created to extend the concepts of a learning organisation to groups of companies that would connect together to form learning communities across different companies and industries.

These initiatives all have one goal in common: to enhance learning – be it in a department, an organisation, a community or the world as a whole. As Senge wrote in his book: "In the long run, the only sustainable source of competitive advantage is your organisation's ability to learn faster than its competition". Creating a learning organisation remains a critical objective for competitive advantage in the 21st century.

Implicit in the learning organisation concept is the need to attract and retain talented staff. This is because organisations cannot learn. Only people can learn. Machines can store data and facts, but until the advent of true Artificial Intelligence (AI), they can't learn either. Only people can learn. The ability to learn faster than the competition implies a human capability built into the heart of company processes and values.

Talent and learning synonymous

The wonderful thing about truly talented people is that they want to learn. They want to develop and grow. In fact, that desire and drive for growth and learning is part of the definition of what it means to be talented. Companies can tap into this desire of their talented staff by providing learning opportunities, and gain the benefits in return, by creating systems and structures that extract knowledge and wisdom and make it accessible to others in usable formats.

But what type of learning do people need? What type of learning should companies provide?

Unleashing people potential

Traditionally, training has revolved around imparting and honing job specific skills, and instilling function-related competencies – hard and soft requirements for outputs-driven performance improvement. While this is always necessary, it is no longer sufficient as the basis for a true learning organisation. Training, learning, mentoring, coaching and all other developmental processes in organisations must do more than just prepare people for task-specific outputs. They must be structured to unleash the full potential of the person within the company.

The type of learning that needs to happen these days should encompass not only the organisation as an integrated system, but also should take into account that the individual is a system as well. The individual exists within a complex system of relationships, interactions, desires and pressures. Only if all of these are taken into account, will the true learning capability of the individual be unlocked.

Individual Learning = Organisational Learning

To put it simply, companies should create learning opportunities that encompass the whole of the individual's life, including such possibilities as marriage enrichment, parenting support, health and balanced lifestyle programmes, cultural enrichment and much more. The goal is to unlock the individual's creativity and awareness, and then harness that energy for use within the organisation. This will often happen in unforeseen and serendipitous ways. But that can only happen if the company understands that organisational learning flows out of individual learning.

In the manifesto for his book, Senge wrote that his goal was to create "organisations where people extend their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to work together". To my ears, that sounds a lot like the type of company that will attract and retain the talented people it needs in order to keep learning and stay ahead of its competitors.

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TomorrowToday.biz, a dynamic organisation that helps companies identify the mega trends that will impact the people connected to their business – employees, customers and partners. Graeme Codrington, Head of Intellectual Capital at TomorrowToday.biz, is a sought-after local and international speaker, best-selling author and generational expert, with a passion for helping companies choose their futures, get the best out of their 'bright young things' and effectively plan for leadership succession.

Graeme is the co-founder of TomorrowToday, a global consulting firm with a successful track record of helping companies connect with their most valuable customers and talented staff in a manner that drives down costs and increases sales. The team comprises of some of the world's top thought leaders, utilising innovative frameworks and methodologies. Graeme has five degrees, with a doctorate in business administration and is on the international faculty of three business schools.

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