

The Learning Organization

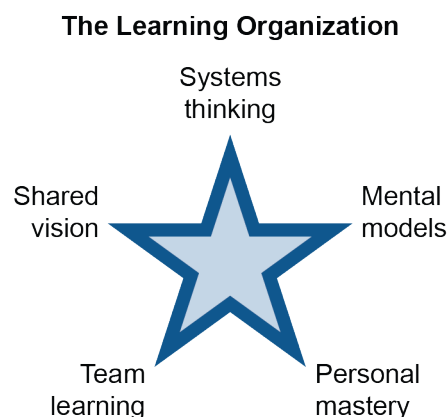
The **learning organization** is a systems-level concept in which an organization is characterized by its ability to adapt to changes in its environment and respond quickly to lessons of experience by altering organizational behavior. In a learning organization:

- Learning is accomplished by the organizational system as a whole.
- Systems thinking is practiced.
- Employees network inside and outside the organization.
- Change is embraced, risk is tolerated, and failures are viewed as opportunities to learn.
- The organization adapts and changes as the environment changes.

Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* discusses five disciplines that interface and support one another in order to create an environment where learning can occur, as shown in Exhibit 64.

- **Systems thinking** is a conceptual framework that makes patterns clearer and helps one see how things interrelate and how to change them.
- **Mental models** are our deeply ingrained assumptions that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.
- **Personal mastery** is the high level of proficiency in a subject or skill area.
- **Team learning** is aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members desire.
- **Shared vision** is a look into the future that fosters genuine commitment and is shared by all who need to possess it.

Exhibit 64: Five Disciplines of a Learning Organization



If these five disciplines are adopted, an organization has a learning climate in which:

- Learning is competency-based and tied to business objectives.
- Importance is placed on how to learn, not just what to learn.
- The organization continues to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- People take responsibility for their own learning.
- Learning is matched to people's learning preferences.
- Learning is both a part of work and a part of everyone's job description.
- Leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers.

HR professionals wishing to assist their organization in becoming a true learning organization need to ensure that the five disciplines identified by Senge are present and working at all organizational levels through effective HR development programming.



A learning organization is a type of organization that has “learned” to react and adapt to its environment. A learning organization provides the environment for organizational learning.

Organizational Learning Techniques

Organizational learning describes certain types of learning activities or processes that may occur at any one of several levels within an organization—individual, group, or organization:

- Individual learning occurs mainly through experience and what is learned from others and training such as self-study, classes/seminars, and technology-based instruction.
- Group learning occurs through the increase in skills, knowledge, and abilities accomplished within groups or teams.
- Organizational learning begins through the shared insights and knowledge of individuals and groups and then builds on past organizational memory such as policies, strategies, and models.