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Learn and Grow Together: What is a learning organization?



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According to Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, learning organizations are continually adapting and improving to respond to the system around them. To truly be classified as a learning organization, two elements must be present: the ability to design the organization to match the intended or desired outcomes; and second, the ability to course correct if the initial direction is not in line with the desired outcome.

Some of the key characteristics necessary to maintain these two elements:

- a culture of leadership at all levels;
- recognition of the importance of relationships, team work and team learning;
- experimentation with tools and methods;
- proper talent management; and
- the opportunity for employees to develop new skills as they work with colleagues.

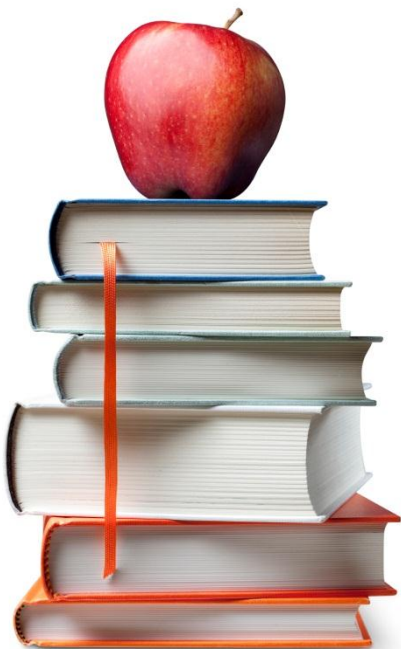
Within a learning organization people are paramount and the organization invests in them by providing space to think, create and experiment beyond themselves with the goal of the collective in mind.

Elements of a Learning Organization

- respect for diversity and diverse perspectives
- organization that matches the desired outcomes
- ability to course correct
- leadership at all levels
- supporting and fostering relationships
- team work
- team learning
- experimenting with new tools
- experimenting with new methods
- maximizes individual talent
- employees developing new skills
- provide a safe space for thinking, creating and experimenting

Living the Change: Policy Horizons Canada

Policy Horizons Canada was established in 2011 as it transitioned from the Policy Research Initiative to become a foresight organization with a mandate to anticipate emerging issues, explore new ideas and experiment with new tools and methods. The new organization is very flat, empowering Horizons employees to assume new roles and learn new tools and techniques to help them flourish within the organization, including becoming practitioners in the learning organization community of practice (LOCoP). We understood that we needed different tools to help people think in a 'futures' space and were also very conscious of the fatigue many people have with the 'talking heads' approach to meetings and conferences, where there is little opportunity for meaningful exchange or shared learning about new ideas.



Communities of practice are groups of individuals who share a common passion or goal and who learn from and with each other through regular interactions of the group.

LOCoP training, provided by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), is helping employees have the confidence and creativity to design and facilitate meaningful and productive engagement of diverse groups of people across the public service and beyond, to help them think outside the box, challenge assumptions and explore what the future might bring. These methods are also used to facilitate discussions within the organization, to support strategic planning and team building. The methods used - such as the courtyard café, ritual dissent/assent, interview matrix, open space, and fireside chats - are designed based on the ultimate objective of the engagement, and support greater involvement of all participants, and a stronger sense of ownership and support of the outcomes. Policy Horizons Canada has received positive feedback from our project participants. They greatly appreciated being given the space to think and work differently.

The larger LOCoP community has initiated a dialogue allowing practitioners to continue their learning together through best practices and mentorship opportunities. In addition, they also coordinate regular face-to-face sessions on special topics.

These newly acquired techniques have given employees the confidence and the tool box to take on new initiatives and roles within the organization – from leading meetings, developing team charters and running organizational retreats, to engaging in the larger community of practice to plan and facilitate events like Collaborative Management Day. Each experience is used as a learning opportunity to



enhance and refine the tools and expose others to these new ways of working. Horizons staff now get requests for advice on how to "LOCoP" their meetings from people in other departments and organizations outside the federal government!

Policy Horizons Canada is a dynamic foresight organization within the Government of Canada whose mandate is to help anticipate emerging policy challenges and opportunities, explore new knowledge and ideas and experiment with methods and technologies to support resilient policy development. The views contained in Policy Horizons Canada documents do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada or participating departments and agencies.

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