The Learning Organization

This statement from **Unlearning The Organization** I believe states the foundation for creating a culture of learning leading to a Learning Organization. "We believe that *several core behaviors* are evident in learning organizations; *openness, systemic thinking, creativity, personal efficacy, and empathy*. These behaviors occur not simply because the organization believes learning is desirable, and not because it has adopted a learning mission/vision. Rather, *these behaviors are part of the conscientious and consistent implementation and integration of management practices* that promote learning; they are the result of the organization's culture, strategy, structure, information technology, reward systems, employee selection, and leadership."

So what does it take?

Learning organizations and therefore the foundation for them, organizational learning, is mandatory in a fast paced business environment.

- The CEO of Trilogy Software states: Talk the Talk, Work Hard, Play Hard, Play Well with others, and Get used to criticism. I equate this to integrity, dedication, have fun, teamwork and open to criticism and all of this driven by leadership.

- An article in Fast Company "Change" provided some new insights from change driven businesses. "It's not that the business environment is changing. Change is the business environment ….Creating change, managing it, mastering it, and surviving it is the agenda for anyone in the business who aims to make a difference." The authors believe that organizations need well trained and developed change agents to be catalysts to change within the organization. Here are some thoughts. **1.** For change to take hold in an organization it must be linked explicitly and tightly to real performance goals and in the hands of those who understand business first. **2.** People will surprise you. The assessment process and ranking is critical to get people used to a culture where you can have differences on teams and learn from those differences. **3.** Everything is data. When someone is negative, if you listen carefully you can hear what's really going on. If you can find out why there is resistance, you can learn a lot about your project and your chances for success. **4.** You are a leader by having followers. People have to be able to trust you, and networking becomes the way you build that trust. **5.** According to successful change agents, the key to making change happen is to create an environment where people gravitate to the direction you want them to go. **6.** The most important thing for change agents to remember is: it's just business. **7.** Create tension: The organization and the individual must always be in two places at once, where the organization is and where it's going. **8.** Learn what to fight for. A dead change agent does the

organization no good. Ethics are worth drawing the line in the sand. **9.** Personal change must precede organizational change. **10.** Change and growth are linked. Even if the organization does not change, people will.

Much of this discussion is based on what it takes to create change leaders within the organization. So as the successful organizational leader, having a cadre of seasoned and well trained leaders of change within the organization can be a critical step in modeling to the rest of the organization the learning necessary to be successful at change. Maximizing the number of people in the organization that exhibit leadership competencies for change is necessary to create a learning organization.

Putting it Together

Someone sets the pace. Management practice at the highest levels creates the behaviors. Giving away the competence of change to change agents is critical. The higher in the organization, the more universally the impact the leader has. Management practice creates the space (environment/culture) where people can fulfill their true potential. People will rise to the challenge given the communication and technological infrastructure, integrity based environment, the direction, and the license to experiment, the authority to act, and the trust needed to excel. Once this is done, leadership's role is to provide resources, remove roadblocks, and then get the heck out of the way!

I believe there are many management styles that will support the development of a learning organization, but regardless of the style, they must foster the above before a learning organization can develop.

Prologue

Just maybe, with the right training, the right attitude, and with the right setting, adult educators might emerge as the change agents that will help drive the development of their own learning organizations. They may need to practice where they have industry expertise to go beyond the traditional role of training and development. The need for outside knowledge in the form of an internal or external T&D consultant probably will be at a premium for those who wish to take a different path.