

Learning – Setting the Scene

Learning - Setting the Scene

- **Learning features high on the DGFII agenda**
- **Learning is key to DGF “being larger than the sum of its parts”**
- **Learning is key to “smarter grant making”**

Two initial questions guiding Setting the Scene:

- **What is learning – theory and practice?**
- **What is organisational learning – theory and practice?**

Learning - Setting the Scene

What is learning?

For all the talk of learning amongst policymakers and practitioners, there is a **surprising lack of attention to what it entails.**

It is almost as if it is **something unproblematic that can be taken for granted. In other words if the instructions/procedures to development is right learning will follow by itself. The DGF does not believe that. The DGF takes an active and adaptive approach to learning.**

Definition of learning....

1. It has been suggested that the term learning defies precise definition because it is put to multiple uses. Learning is used to refer to (1) the acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something, (2) the extension and clarification of meaning of one's experience, or (3) an organized, intentional process of testing ideas relevant to problems. In other words, it is used to describe a product, a process, or a function.

Learning – Setting the scene – Definition(s)

2. “A process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential of improved performance and future learning”. From *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* by Susan Ambrose, et al.
3. “Learning is the relatively permanent change in a person’s knowledge or behavior due to experience. This definition has three components: 1) the duration of the change is long-term rather than short-term; 2) the locus of the change is the content and structure of knowledge in memory or the behavior of the learner; 3) the cause of the change is the learner’s experience in the environment rather than fatigue, motivation, physical condition....” – From *Learning in Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, Richard E. Mayer

Learning - Setting the Scene – Product and/or Process

In order to start thinking about learning we could make **the simple distinction between learning as a product and as a process, well knowing that the two are often much intertwined.**

The latter often takes us into the arena of competing learning theories – ideas about how we might gain understandings. The former takes us to learning as either a change in behaviour or a change in our mental state – **or a change in the DGF – the Organisation.**

Learning - Setting the Scene

Four different **orientations** to learning theory:

- **The behaviourist orientation.** The behaviourist movement in psychology has looked to the use of experimental procedures to study behaviour in relation to the environment.
- **The cognitive orientation.** Where behaviourists looked to the environment, those drawing on cognition turned to the individual's mental processes. In other words, they were concerned with cognition – the act or process of knowing.
- **The humanist orientation.** In this orientation the basic concern is for human growth.
- **The social/situational orientation.** It is not so much that learners acquire structures or models to understand the world, but they participate in frameworks that have structure. **Learning involves participation in a community of practice. The PMU / DGF is a community of practice**

Learning - Setting the Scene

In organisational learning there is often dividing views of learning 1) as a **technical or learning 2) as social process:**

The technical (view) assumes that organisational learning is about the effective processing, interpretation of, and response to, information both inside and outside the organisation. This information may be quantitative or qualitative, but is generally explicit and in the public domain....(“get the regime right and learning will follow”)

The social perspective focuses on the way people make sense of their experiences at work. From this view, learning is something that can emerge from social interactions, normally in the natural work setting,

If there is a divide? Where is the DGF is this divide? Ask yourself?

Many operating within the social process may view organisational learning as a social construction, and/or as a political process.

Learning – Setting the Scene

Three more learning concepts to go – before slowly entering into the DGF with organisational learning:

1. Experiential learning: In the processes of organisational learning we encounter “learning from experience” as a genuine component of almost all approaches.... Exploration of thinking and reflection, and the notions of feedback and action learning;

2. Single-loop learning emphasises on the detection and correction of errors within a given set of governing variables is linked to incremental change in organisations.

3. Double-loop learning involves interrogating the governing variables themselves and often involves radical changes such as the wholesale revision of systems, alterations in strategy and so on.

Learning – Setting the Scene

4. Communities of Practice: Communities of practice have become an important focus within organisational development and have considerable value when thinking about working with groups.

- Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain
- Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do better as they interact regularly.
- Communities of practice are key for learning organisations to gain high impact of their work.

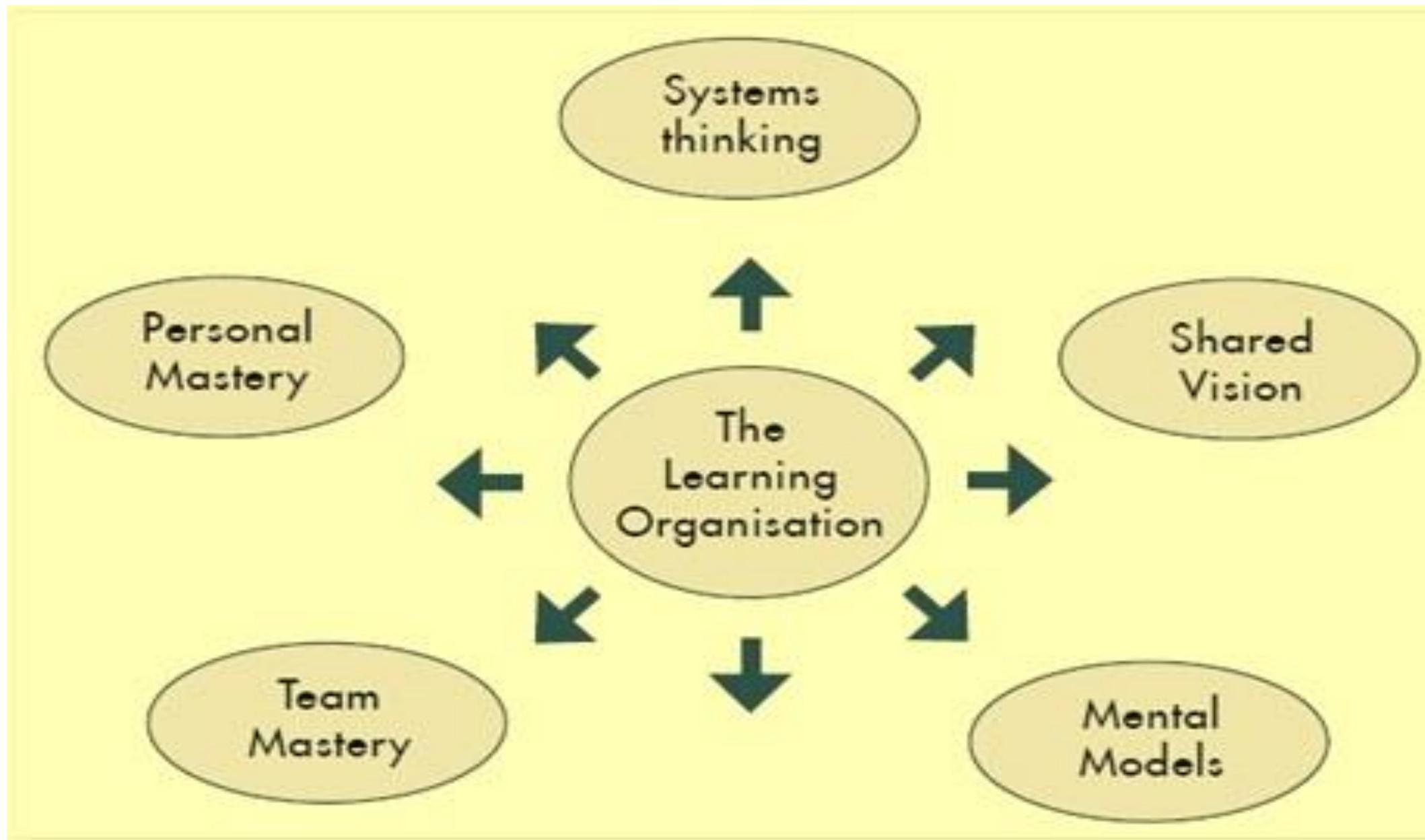
The Learning Organisation

- A **learning organisation** is one that facilitates the **learning** of its members and continuously transforms itself (Peter Senge).
- A **learning organisation** learns from the experiences rather than being bound by its past experiences.
- In a **learning organisation**, the ability of the organisation and its managers is not measured by what it knows but rather by how it learns — the process of learning.
- **Management in a learning organisation** practices encourage, recognize, and reward with openness, systemic thinking, creativity, a sense of efficacy, and empathy.

The Learning Organisation - Characteristics

1. Systems thinking,
2. Personal mastery,
3. Mental models,
4. Building shared vision, and
5. Team learning.

These characteristics were developed by Peter Senge and reflected in the following diagram:



The Learning Organisation – The Benefits

- A learning organisation does not rely on passive or ad hoc process in the hope that organisational learning will take place as a by-product of normal work.
- A learning organisation actively promotes, facilitates, and rewards collective learning. The main benefits of a learning organisation are as follows:

The Learning Organisation - Benefits continued

- Maintaining levels of innovation and remaining competitive and relevant
- Being better placed to respond to external pressures
- Having the knowledge to better link resources to citizen needs and relevance and thereby improving quality of interventions at all the levels
- Improving the corporate image of the organisation by becoming more people oriented
- Increasing the pace of change within the organisation; and
- Making a deliberate effort to promote a culture of learning in the organisation by institutionalising particular steps for learning.

The Learning Organisation – Benefits continued 2

- Increased efficiency;
- Increased employee satisfaction that could lead to decreased turnover of staff
- An improved mindset among employees
- A strengthened sense of ownership and accountability – doing the right thing
- Active learning encourage a culture of knowledge inquiry and sharing; and
- An enhanced ability for adaptation for individuals

The Learning Organisation - Examples of Learning Steps

- **Learning should be mandatory for all in the organisation.**

For a learning culture to be ingrained, it should be mandatory for all individuals and levels (partners, PMU, development partners, board) in the organisation. Training and development plans should be formalized up to a level which still promotes the process of learning.

- **Give recognition to learning.**

Successfully learned new skills and abilities should be recognized and encouraged to be shared with others in the organisation.

- **Develop knowledge and information sharing into a recognised process.**

Learners will be more encouraged to share knowledge and information if they are both encouraged and required to do so. Recognising the process makes sure that everyone who needs the information gets it.

The Learning Organisation - How to Create a Learning Culture

It is important to have agreed strategies to supporting a culture of learning in your organisation. These include:

- **Promote research on issues or problems identified (Political Economy Analysis),** and encourage sharing of knowledge;
- **Shared learning (communities of practice)** solve problems more efficiently, and promotes adaptive approaches to solving problems.

This leads us to the next presentation on Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation – the how to – the tool

PDIA