

A learning organisation is one in which people at all levels (idiosyncratic and collectively) are continuously increasing their capacity to produce results that they really desire and care about. In such an organisation, everyone's opinions are valued and the amount that people can contribute is not determined by position in the organisation, sex, race, age, religious affiliation or ethnicity. Peter Senge argued in his book (*The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation, 1992*) that successful organisations in the 21st Century will be the learning organisations that muster the full commitment of its entire staff, while at the same time developing their capacity to learn. One approach is to get an independent consultant to conduct a *Learning Organization Survey* (David A.Garvin, Amy C.Edmondson and Francesca Gino (2008): *Is Yours A Learning Organization? Harvard Business Review*). The respondents must be candid enough and base their feedback on their own experience. The starting point is to first understand the three building blocks of a learning organisation whose characteristics are summarized below:

Building block	Distinguishing characteristics
A supportive learning environment	<p>Employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel safe disagreeing with others, asking naïve questions, owning up to mistakes, and presenting minority viewpoints • Recognize the value of opposing ideas • Take risks and explore the unknown • Take time to review the organizational processes
Concrete learning processes	<p>A team or company has formal processes for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating, collecting, interpreting, and disseminating information • Experimenting with new offerings • Gathering intelligence on competitors, customers, and technological trends • Identifying and solving problems • Developing employees' skills
Leadership that reinforces learning	<p>The organizations' leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate willingness to entertain alternative view points • Signal the importance of spending time on problem identification, knowledge transfer, and reflection • Engage in active questioning and listening

Source: Harvard Business Review – March 2008

However, the organization should not stall at just the survey level; which is often undertaken once or twice and archived. The biggest hurdle, in my view, is the capacity of the organization to design objective tools to measure and report on the progress of learning. Although staff appraisal systems are a proxy to gauge progress of learning performance, the appraisers may not have skills to isolate performance caused by idiosyncratic learning from that arising from collective effort. The issue gets murky when one asks just a sample of questions like:

1. How much learning has been gained by an employee over say a 10-year period?
2. How much learning has been attained by an employee who has attended 30 hours (as an example) of training/courses/seminars/workshops in the course of a year? and
3. How does one determine the collective commitment of all employees in the organization arising from continuous learning?