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Organisational Learning: Keeping pace with change through action learning

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Organisational Learning: Keeping pace with change through action learning

In the current climate of economic ‘austerity’, organisational learning has increasingly gained importance, with a need for new ways of transferring learning now required.
This presentation...

- ...addresses the issue of organisational learning and how organisations have difficulties in learning from their employees
- ...draws upon data gathered from three groups of managers on three different academic programmes
- ...discusses the challenges and solutions to organisational diffusion following thematic analysis of the data examples
Traditionally organisational learning occurs in the following ways:

• On the job
• Training courses
• Harvard method... didactic and case based
Barriers to Organisational Learning

- Perpetuation of the same approach and thinking...
- Fixed mental models
- Encourages one right way... Based on hierarchy and possession of power
- Questioning signals descent
Action Learning is based upon small groups of colleagues meeting regularly over time to address, via specific questioning techniques, real problems and issues in order to get things done; reflecting and learning with and from their experiences, and from each other, as they attempt to change things.
Questioning Techniques
(Revans, 1982)

- What am I trying to do?
- What is stopping me from doing it?
- What can I do about it?
- Who knows what I am trying to do?
- Who cares about what I am trying to do?
- Who else can do anything to help?
Insightful Questions
(McGill & Brockbank, 2006)

- Questions to help find or make meaning
- Questions that cause others to reflect and learn from the past
- Caring and supporting questions
- Questions seeking examples or practical illustrations what sort of things are you talking about?
- Questions that cause people to think about the future and the consequences of action
- Questions about initiating Action
- Balancing, integrating, summarising and moving on questions
Data gathered over the last two years from various managers on academic programmes, which included:

- DBA
- MBA
- MSc Healthcare Management
Data Collection

• DBA
  – Focus groups
  – Impact statements
• MBA
  – Questionnaires
• MSc
  – Organisational reports

Thematic Analysis & Content Analysis
Findings – Challenges for Diffusion

• Hierarchy: ceiling on decision making and involvement
• Culture: discouraging questions
• Fear of sharing knowledge: knowledge is power and control
• Avoidance of knowledge dissemination
Findings - Solutions

- Building a culture that values reflection
- Building an enquiry based culture that looks for right questions as well as right answers
- Seeing both failure and success as learning opportunities... No fear of repercussion
- Modelling positive behaviour... To support the above interventions
The process of Action Learning assists in challenging the status quo... whereby promoting change through knowledge transfer.