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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

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In the current climate of economic 'austerity', organisational learning has increasingly gained importance, with a need for new ways of transferring learning now required

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Aims

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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

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Organisational Learning

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Traditionally organisational learning occurs in the following ways:

- On the job
- Training courses
- Harvard method... didactic and case based

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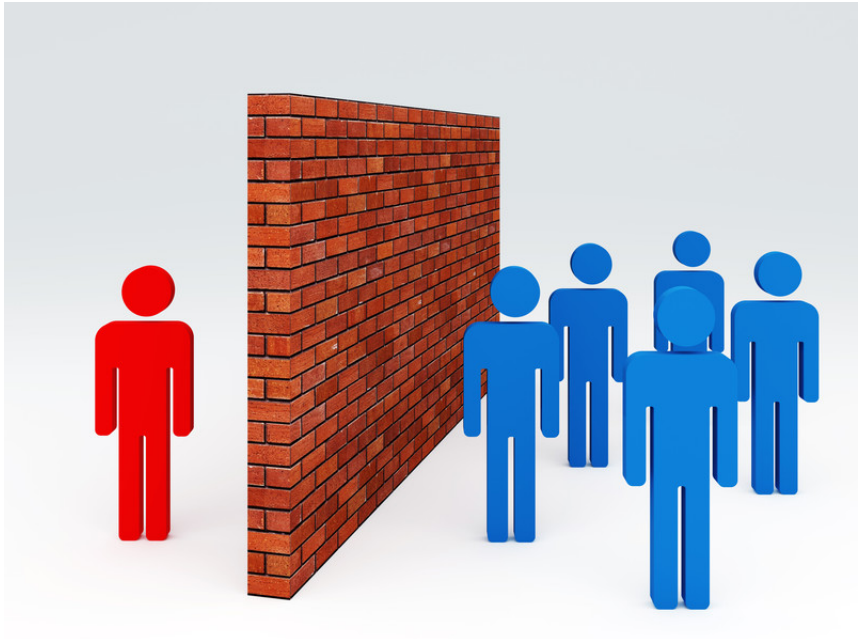
Barriers to Organisational Learning



- 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

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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

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Questioning Techniques (Revans, 1982)

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- 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?

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Insightful Questions
(McGill & Brockbank, 2006)

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- 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

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Research Sample

Data gathered over the last two years from various managers on academic programmes, which included:

- DBA
- MBA
- MSc Healthcare Management

Data Collection

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- DBA
  - Focus groups
  - Impact statements
- MBA
  - Questionnaires
- MSc
  - Organisational reports

Thematic Analysis & Content Analysis

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Findings – Challenges for Diffusion

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

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Findings - Solutions

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- 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

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Conclusion

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The process of Action Learning assists in challenging the status quo… whereby promoting change through knowledge transfer

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