

Team Learning: A corporate perspective

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Abstract

In order to maintain efficiency and productivity in an organization, it has to be ensured that the workers are constantly upgrading their knowledge and skills. It is a common myth that the employees in an organization learn their new skill set through the internet, books or corporate training programs. The reality is that the workers at every level of the organization first consult their peer members and try to understand their logic and later resort to various other sources.

In this article we will be discussing the concept of team learning in detail as juxtaposed to various real-life case studies that support the concept of team learning. This article will also talk about the methods in which team learning can be encouraged and promoted in an organization without causing any disturbance to the normal functioning of the organization.

INTRODUCTION:

“Team learning is essential because teams and not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern Organizations. Unless teams can learn, the Organization cannot learn.” – Peter Senge

In order to remain competitive and constantly cope with the ever changing and increasing complexity in the global world, organizations tend to rely on teams to adapt to these changes and learn continuously. Team learning can be defined as a system that helps in obtaining a relatively permanent change in the team’s level of knowledge and skills. This can be done by the shared experience of the team members. As opposed to individual learning, team learning gives an opportunity to the members to learn from the experiences of their peers. This can be facilitated by socio cognitive or interpersonal discussion sessions that ensure coordination and cooperation.

Team learning comprises of several functions for example, exploring new ideas and developments, discussion of the changes and variations from the past and resolving any disputes or confusions that help in building understanding of the concept in the minds of the workers. Team mates contribute their thoughts, discuss and brainstorm over important issues. In addition to the discussion, the team members also get an opportunity to explore various different perspectives of their team mates. Through this method, flaws in the understanding of different team mates can be ascertained and unexpected outcomes can be examined. After examining these flaws and differences, and carefully integrating them together, team members are able to come to a mutual agreement or understanding.

In order to be competitive and remain in par with the latest developments, organizations depend heavily on the learning capabilities of the team. For this reason, there have been tremendous efforts that have been put in to understand and successfully implement the concept of team learning. A team essentially comprises of individuals who are interdependent on each other in order to achieve a shared goal and organizations tend to rely on these teams in order to be successful. When team learning fails then there are high chances of the organization facing losses or being unsuccessful.

However, in a study it was found that managers are generally reluctant to encourage and establish the concept of peer learning or team learning because of the perception that the experts outside the company are more knowledgeable and valuable than the members in the company. For this reason, one day orientations and training programs are given immense importance in organizations.

Peer to peer learning helps in identifying the expertise that already exists in an organization. Employees are hired based on the different skill set that each one of them possess. If these skills are shared with everyone in the organization then it will result in extreme efficiency and development of the employees.

Peer to peer learning or team learning helps in encompassing all the stages of the learning loop i.e. Gain knowledge, practice by applying the knowledge gained, get feedback and reflect and revise on what was learnt. Team learning helps in creating a safe space where the learner can take risks, make mistakes without the sense that their boss is evaluating them at every step. In this system of learning, the hierarchy of learning disappears. It is not necessary that learning has to take place from the higher authorities. It can also move from lower to higher levels in the organization depending upon the depth of learning required.

Team learning is an efficient method that helps employees develop leadership and management skills. This is because, peer learning provides employees with an experience in leadership, handling different points of view and developing different skills.

INITIATING TEAM LEARNING IN CORPORATE OFFICES:

The concept of team learning can be initiated and encouraged in various ways in an organization. Few of the steps that the organization can follow are as follows:

- 1) Establishing a peer learning program –
The peer to peer learning programs can take several forms. These programs can be conducted online or offline. The participants can be paired in teams or asked to remain single and given tasks based on real work problems. The participants can be asked to share their latest learnings with each other or prepare a presentation to convey their knowledge. This can be later discussed amongst the employees in the form of a healthy discussion.

- 2) Appoint a facilitator –
The structure or system of team learning is a horizontal structure rather than a hierarchical structure. In such a situation it is advisable to appoint a neutral party who can help in facilitating the program and maintaining decorum. The facilitator

should ideally organize sessions on topics of common interest, ensure that healthy communication is encouraged and maintain a positive environment for the participants to learn and develop.

- 3) Develop a safe environment –
Team learning can be successfully implemented only when participants feel extremely safe enough to share their thoughts and experiences. The participants should be comfortable and open and vulnerable to accept inputs from the co learners. A positive environment should be set up to ensure that honest feedback is given rather than the regular sugarcoated words. Certain ground rules should be set up in order to ensure that a safe environment is encouraged. For example, the confidentiality must be respected and honored, feedback should be looked upon as an important factor and empathy must be practiced.
- 4) Focus on the real work situations –
These sessions should primarily focus on genuine work-related problems. This will ensure that the participants get a wider knowledge about the concepts that they focus on in their daily work. There are high chances of the employees participating, learning, and remembering new skills if they are focused on their daily work.
- 5) Networking should be encouraged –
Events where people discuss their area of expertise and establish learning groups must be organized. This will help in building networking and in turn help in growth and development of the employees.

ADVANTAGES OF TEAM LEARNING:

- 1) Team learning helps in inculcating a deeper sense of the topic in the mind of the person who is teaching. It helps in creating clarity of the concept. This is beneficial to both; the learner and the speaker and ideas can be exchanged more freely.
- 2) Peers feel more comfortable amongst themselves and the chances of them opening up and participating in the discussion are high when compared to an interactive session between a trainer and employee.
- 3) It boosts confidence in learning and a deeper understanding of the subject for both the learner and the speaker.
- 4) Peers develop the skill of planning as they work in association with their co workers and this helps them evaluate their work and ascertain the position that they stand in when compared to their peers.
- 5) Team learning encourages social skills and the ability to interact with one another and exchange ideas which is not limited to only academics but also emotionally.
- 6) Team learning proves to be cost effective to many organizations as they do not have to spend on an external trainer or a guest resource person.

CASE STUDY:

1) LinkedIn –

LinkedIn created a peer to peer learning environment that was designed around the company's primary corporate values. The participants were asked to discuss one real time conversation that they usually find difficult to discuss. These conversations were supposing to be based on their work life. One of the employees discussed how he did not like the fact that his peers missed deadlines. This helped in inculcating conversation and the employees became more aware. They also discussed new skills that were learnt in the form of presentations as it is widely believed that pictures teach better than words.

2) Optoro –

Optoro encourages its employees to participate in discussions and seminars that are conducted by their fellow team mates in order to ensure that every employee working in the team is on the same level of knowledge and expertise. The managers ensure that all the learning takes place inside the organization and no resource person is hired from outside for training their employees.

3) Accenture –

Accenture believes in the policy that the employees working in the organization have a deeper understanding of the work rather than any expert who is hired from outside. Accenture ensures that all the training that is given to the employees is always conducted by a person within the organization. This also helps them maintain confidentiality.

4) Airbnb –

Airbnb conducts several fireside chats between the employees to ensure smooth informal communication. This creates a positive environment that helps every employee participate in the discussion and learn through the process. This helps Airbnb in two ways – they can attain employee satisfaction as their employees are content and happy with such refreshing set ups and it also helps in increasing the knowledge and efficiency of the workers.

CONCLUSION:

Team learning is of absolute importance to the performance and working of the organization. Without a team that is willing to learn constantly from each other, the organization cannot achieve its potential. Improvements in an organization will be short lived if the principles of team learning are not encouraged. The organizational success can be determined by how well the team learns. Team learning is not just an additional benefit to enhance the learning process but it is necessary for optimal active and participative learning. Team learning must be encouraged in the organizations to improve critical thinking and skills of problem solving.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) Encourage continuous learning – Continuous learning must be rewarded and encouraged. It is difficult to bring in new changes and implement them unless a formal reward system is put in place.
- 2) Constructive feedback should be given value in the organization – An honest feedback regarding these team learning sessions must be given to the organization. This will help in ascertaining the areas where maximum changes and alterations need to be made. These feedbacks can help the management in implementing new strategies in team learning sessions. Negative feedback should be given equal value and the changes recommended must be implemented so as to ensure maximum efficiency in these sessions.
- 3) Hiring more curious candidates – Proper selection of candidates is more important than the training and development that takes place later in the organization. When candidates who are open to learning are chosen, it will help the organization as training these employees will be an easier task when compared to those who are not very interested in learning new things. These candidates will efficiently contribute to the team learning process as they will share quality information and help build a stronger team.

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