

Based on several publications appearing on ManagementSite Netherlands in 2015;
mainly inspired by an article by Willem Mastenbroek

Key messages

A rapidly changing environment demands a great deal of agility.

This means that learning and development becomes even more crucial than ever before.

To learn and apply skills effectively, environment has to be incorporated or involved.

This is often the problem with more classical forms of external training. One or a few people learn new knowledge or skills but if the environment is not directly involved they are often reluctant to collaborate or to accept what they have learned.

This slows down the process of learning hugely.

At the moment, change is progressing at a much faster speed than learning (watch the inspiring movie by Eddie Obeng on TED Talks).

That's why the trend of creating learning organizations is becoming more and more focused on learning together in context, as a team, on the floor.

Research by Dutch consultant Jochem Westerhof has explored all the factors that create a learning climate, namely:

- A clear link between the learned and the strategy/purpose of the company.
- Opportunities to learn.
- Support from colleagues.
- Support from the boss.
- Accountability (being asked to account for the deliverables of a learning experience).

He found that, overall, people reported that learning was linked with strategy and that there were enough opportunities to learn. However, all the other factors were found to be absent.

The key is to connect learning and development with working together on the floor to get better results in a more effective and efficient way. So, development of all kinds of skills (professional, communication, leadership) is directly connected to improving day-to-day work processes.

The 70/20/10 model (Morgan McCall): 70% of what people learn is learned in their daily work (stimulated by giving them challenges), 20% is learned through networking and conversations (mostly with bosses!), and only 10% is learned in classroom settings and by reading. It is important here to encourage people toward training, to create a curiosity and an interest, e.g. by giving them challenging projects or tasks. Then let them ask themselves for the necessary support and learning opportunities. A push approach that makes learning obligatory is not very effective.

The role of the leader is crucial: s/he has to initiate, stimulate, and facilitate the learning process by looking at how to improve the results of their team. At the same time, a leader must also ensure that enough reflection and learning is taking place to improve individual and team collaboration skills and knowledge. The role of HR and external consultants is a supportive one where needed; it is up to the leader/manager to get learning going and to keep it going!

Some key tips and tools

Institute bottom-up improvement of existing processes and practices.

Working in a more clever way = working together.

Focus on learning skills (again with your team altogether on the floor or at least with all your team in the same training) to create constructive dialogue and debate and to encourage self-expression and feedback.

Reduce complexity: act fast, fail fast, learn fast.

Consider applying the principals of solution driven interaction (do what works) and agile project management to learning and improving the way your team works.

Watch: Agile project management, see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvBKevrltcc>

The speed of change has overtaken the speed of learning:

https://www.ted.com/talks/eddie_obeng_smart_failure_for_a_fast_changing_world