

knowledge about learning organisations

Organisational structure (b)

Learning organisations have managerial hierarchies that enhance opportunities for employee, carer and user involvement in the organisation. All are empowered to make relevant decisions. Structures support teamwork and strong lateral relations (not just vertical). Networking is enabled across organisational and hierarchical boundaries both internally and externally.

Team working and learning – questions

- What and where are the opportunities for sharing practice issues e.g. team/staff meetings, group supervision, practice forums?
- How is knowledge accumulated and disseminated in the team?
- How does the tacit knowledge of the team get communicated?
- Does the team ever do a skills audit of all members?
- Does the organisation encourage groups of similar graded staff to work together to develop their learning, e.g. a frontline managers group, or specialist practice groups?

Illustrative examples

- One large voluntary organisation ensures that at its monthly managers' meeting there is always at least one item on good practice.
- Another large voluntary organisation has regular forums for development groups, special interest groups and cluster groups to consider specific practice issues. Individuals are then charged with the task of ensuring that the learning is taken back into teams, thus completing the feedback loop.
- In some places there are examples of pockets of continuous learning, which may or may not be in organisations that have an overall culture of learning. Team members routinely discuss training and the implications for their work. One team in a local authority has ensured the learning from post-qualifying training is regularly shared at team meetings.
- Many agencies rely on 'champions' and 'beacons' to keep abreast of and then disseminate new research etc.

Useful references

- Rosen, G. (ed) (1999) 'Managing team development', London: National Institute for Social Work.
- Eraut, M., Alderton, J., and Cole, G. (1998) 'Development of knowledge and skills in employment', Brighton: Institute of Education, University of Sussex.

Use the information and questions on the cards to think about a place of work as a learning organisation.