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**CHRONIC DISEASE DIRECTORS**  
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**Article/Publication:**

Is Yours a Learning Organization?

**Source:**

Garvin DA, Edmondson, AC, Gino F. Is Yours a Learning Organization? Harvard Business Review. 2008.  
<https://hbr.org/2008/03/is-yours-a-learning-organization>

**Theme(s) and/or STAR Framework Component(s):**

- Workforce Development
- Organizational Climate and Culture

**Relevant NACDD Chronic Disease Competencies:**

1. Support professional and personal development for chronic disease program staff.
2. Promote team and organizational learning and collaboration.
3. Apply organizational theory to professional practice.

**Introduction/Purpose:**

This article describes what it means and takes to be a learning organization, a concept of an ideal learning environment first introduced by Peter M. Senge decades ago. The article provides an online Organizational Learning Tool individuals and groups can use to assess their proficiency; compare it with benchmark scores of others; and identify areas for growth, along with practice examples and recommendations for organizations to move forward as a learning organization.

**Summary:**

The authors suggest that all organizations should become a learning organization, where employees can create, acquire, and transfer knowledge to ultimately help their workplaces foster better discussion, think systemically, and enhance their adaptability for when they encounter the unpredictable. This article offers an online Organizational Learning Tool that organizations can use to move beyond the challenges that can impede progress, such as lack of specificity of how to get to a specific outcome and often a lack of recognition that all levels of the organization need to be engaged in the learning process. The survey instrument is structured to measure three building blocks (including subcategories and subcomponents thereof) identified through organizational research that are essential to organizational learning and adaptability: 1) a supportive learning environment, 2) concrete learning processes and practices, and 3) leadership that reinforces learning. Individuals and groups that complete the assessment may compare their self-evaluations to others' benchmark scores in order to determine strengths and areas for improvement. The article also highlights a case study of a company that completed the survey to assess its readiness and progress regarding becoming a learning organization; through this process, the firm's managers learned of different than anticipated benchmark scores prompting follow-up discussions focused on how to improve the elements of learning present in their organization and on planning future actions. The authors conclude with four



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principles for managers to consider in cultivating learning organizations: 1) leadership alone is insufficient, 2) organizations are not monolithic, 3) comparative performance is the critical scorecard, and 4) learning is multidimensional.

**Application to Chronic Disease Leadership and Practice:**

One constant in state health agencies is change; as such, the chronic disease workforce needs to become skilled in working with a dynamic and unpredictable environment. The Organizational Learning Tool is a resource to encourage self-reflection and dialogue in fostering capabilities as a learning organization. The article applies organizational research and aligns with several NACDD chronic disease competencies.

**Reflection Questions** (to consider upon reading the full article):

1. With respect to the three building blocks detailed within the article, what are some strategies your organizations have tried in becoming a learning organization? What has gone well, and what are the challenges?
2. Since the article was written with a lens to the for-profit private sector, what else is important to consider in being a learning organization from the perspective of public health?
3. What does this article make you want to think about or act on in your own unit or team?

**Additional Notes:**

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