

Madison Area - Meeting of those Interested in Learning Organizations
Host: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Engineering Professional Development Dept.
Summary of January 9th, 2003 Meeting

LOGISTICS

Date: Thursday, January 9, 2003

Time: 9 am – 12 noon

Where: Room 1047, Engineering Centers Building

Attendees:

Name	Phone	Email
Rebecca Cors,* UW Engineering Professional Development	263-1085	cors@epd.engr.wisc.edu
Sandy Courter, UW Engineering Learning Center	265-9767	courter@engr.wisc.edu
Anne Forbes, Partners in Place	257-3485	aforbes@mailbag.com
Pat Lund, Madison Area Quality Improvement Network	277-7800	info@maqin.org
Dawn Mahony, Certegy & American Society of Training and Development	836-2648	Dawn.j.Mahoney@certegy.com
Michael Millis, Soulstice Training	438-4680	soulsticetraining@yahoo.com
Wayne Pferdehirt, UW Engineering Professional Development	265-2361	pferdehi@epd.engr.wisc.edu
Dean Pribbenow, UW Office of Quality Improvement	265-5122	dpribbenow@bascom.wisc.edu
Boyd Rossing, UW School of Human Ecology		
Bob Shaver, UW School of Business, Extension Education	441-7774	bschaver@bus.wisc.edu
Tricia Tooman,* UW CAVE Dept and Soulstice Training	438-4680	trtooman@wisc.edu

* facilitators

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DISCUSSION

The discussion began with participants introducing themselves and briefly describing their interests in organizational learning. Rebecca described how she is working to learn more about organizational learning for her thesis project. Because no UW-Madison courses have a primary focus on organizational learning, she began to interact with experts in organizational learning about the possibility of holding a dialogue, perhaps a workshop, about the topic. Her focus has been primarily on assessment because, while she has read a lot about organizational learning, she has not found many resources that help organizations relate desired outcomes to learning. A second reason for Rebecca's focus on assessment is that some of the articles she read show that an organizational learning assessment is a great way to introduce and improve organizational learning.

The ensuing discussion covered these main topics:

- How do participants define organizational learning/ learning organizations?2
- How are the concepts *Organizational Learning* and *Learning Organization* perceived?3
- Who might have an interest in dialogue about organizational learning?3
- Looking forward - how would gatherings add value?4
- Parking Lot & Significant Comments.....4

How do participants define organizational learning/ learning organizations?

Participants jotted down two or three characteristics that define organizational learning and then shared them with the group. Group sharing inspired some to expand the list with additional thoughts about characteristics that built on each others' ideas. Some commented that this list of organizational learning characteristics is how we define learning organizations.

- Applying Senge's Disciplines
- Inquiry permeates all levels of communication; pace of work allows this
- Shared passion about the best possible team effort
- Participatory needs assessment/improvement/evaluation to empower learners
- Learning before, while, after doing (Harvard Tapes)
- Reflection and continuous improvement
- Mission- and values- centered
- Lateral inter- and intra-organizational learning
- Systemic, conscious, purposeful learning and sharing
- Learning with an organization/ dynamic and ongoing/ individual and collective
- Includes multiple perspectives and stakeholders
- Varying paces/ speeds
- Learners can teach
- Ownership for learning is essential for sustaining learning
- "and" - learn from successes and "accidents"
- Organizations embrace mistakes and conflict for future learning
- Encourages experimentation

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How are the concepts *Organizational Learning* and *Learning Organization* perceived?

Participants offered their perspectives.

- Learning organizations are considered "cutting edge" in the business world.
- Organizational learning seems more *academic* and learning organizations are a kind of organization that you develop in *practice*.
- Organizational learning addresses *how* - means; learning organizations describe *what* it is - end.
- The terms have become "contaminated" by ineffective programs in the past.

Who might have an interest in dialogue about organizational learning?

Participants reviewed and added to this list of organizations that would have an interest in a dialogue about organizational learning. Dawn suggested that we share the kick-off meeting summary with this list.

Government

- Department of Workforce Development
- Department of Public Instruction
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
 - Tim Mulholland
 - Darin Harris
 - Carolyn Garber
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation
- Janet Nordorft and others

Non-Profit

- Friends of Troy Gardens - Sharon Lezberg is contact
- Community Action Coalition - Joe Mathers is contact
- Wisconsin Forward Award - Bundy Trinz is contact

Private Organizations/ Professional Associations

- Cuna - Sue Racine, Cynthia Venden are contacts
- Consultants, Professional Associations
- Anne Forbes, Partners in Place
- Michael Millis, Soulstice Training
- American Society for Training and Development
- Madison Area Quality Improvement Network
- Society for Human Resources Management

University of Wisconsin

- Dr. Rick Brooks, Social Change Expert
- Dr. Aaron Brower, UW Social Work
- UW School of Business Faculty
- Continuing and Vocational Education Faculty and Students(?)
- UW Office of Quality
- Dr. Seema Kapani, Equity and Diversity Resource Center

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Looking forward - how would gatherings add value?

Participants shared their ideas about how future gatherings could be valuable to participants.

- Activities to try or model
 - Don Schutt (UW) attended the World Trade Center "Guided Dialogue."
 - There are many café models for small group conversation where you don't need to target an audience; you just need to develop good focus questions.
 - Appreciative inquiry, conversation.
 - A sharing conversation that creates a learning community - "bring your best practices."
 - Small groups then debriefing then reporting.
 - Gil Styles and Associates - large-scale organizational change.
 - Identify energy spots in first dialogue - figure out what people want through dialogue or perhaps a needs assessment.
 - "Mastermind" group - Dawn.
 - Guided Dialogue.
 - Focused Conversation.
 - Demonstrate a facilitation method/ learning activity people can take back to work.
- Organizations who could be potential partners
 - Link an organizational learning meeting to the Midwest Facilitator's network meetings (they usually have additional funding).
 - April 14th - UW Office of Quality Showcase of improvement - "doing good work during challenging times."
 - April ASTD session about related topics (?).
- What people (potential attendees) want?
 - People want a "how to."
 - Take-aways like tools, information about a model in practice, an example of how to facilitate learning circles, other practical applications.
 - It is rare in today's society to slow down and to be heard and to listen - this in itself may appeal to some.
 - People want to know how to recognize a learning organization when they see it.
 - Tools that encourage reflection.
 - Enough lead-time to plan to attend.
 - People want to know how to get into a position in their organization to "sell" organizational learning.
 - People want to understand how organizational culture can support the use of organizational learning tools and vice versa.
 - MAQIN's members will be most interested in practical applications and tools
- If this becomes on-going, a website should be developed

Parking Lot & Significant Comments

Two comments that were either in the "parking lot" or were general enough to mention here.

- We are in a "pressure-cooker" society that reduces people's ability, interest, and time to learn.
- Senge's 5 disciplines - from a conceptual framework to tools, skills, "rubber meets the road."