

## A Learning Organization isn't just about Training

A learning organization is not just about training, however they all have one unique characteristic where each employee feels empowered to impact their work life. This characteristic needs to be nurtured within organizational cultures where employees are not limited by their job description or lack of authority, but rely on the power to influence.



The invitation to influence requires creating an environment where employees can question the status quo, encourage innovation, or promote creative thought.

Employees know how to do their job, however, unless they have a 360-degree perspective and know how they fit into the organization, their input will be quickly challenged, indefensible, and dismissed.

However, when employees have a basic understanding of how their responsibilities fit within the goals and objectives of the organization, and are provided opportunities to gain perspectives from within and outside the organization, their insights and opinions will have a broader foundation.

Within most organizations this untapped resource of employee influence is lost, because they do not have the interpersonal skills, realistic boundaries, or perseverance to impact their work life.

Herein lies the opportunity for independent consultants to engage a learning organization:

- clarify roles, responsibilities, and perspectives of how each employee fits into the organization
- empower individuals with the interpersonal skills to influence without authority
- provide opportunities and boundaries for employees on when to exercise their influence
- treat every engagement as a learning cycle

For many organizations an interim effort might require a consultant to interview individuals and teams to harvest their input and insights that contribute to organizational improvement. This accomplishes many things. Management sees the value of employee perspectives, and employees experience the power of influence.

In a learning organization, employees need to know how to effectively debate and dialogue on challenges, change, and opportunities. Consultants have many tools at their disposal, but one that I've often used comes from Edward De Bono's book the *Six Thinking Hats*, where every suggested improvement requires a team to support a process that jointly clarifies, defines value, quantifies concerns, and investigates alternatives.

Small and medium size businesses that do not have an internal human resource department need consultants to work with leadership and management to create a learning environment where communication and influence can be open and honest, within boundaries.