

# KNOWLEAD

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»» CREATING THE KNOWLEDGE ADVANTAGE ►

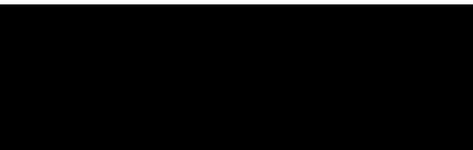
## CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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# Outline of Presentation

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## What we will address:

- ❑ **Concepts, definitions and critical success sectors, e.g. knowledge, organisational learning and creating a culture of learning in organisations – notably public sector organisations;**
- ❑ **Features (characteristics) of learning organisations**
- ❑ **Creating a culture of *learning* and *innovation* in organisations – these aspects go hand in hand**
- ❑ **What we (Knowlead) have learnt through research, training and interaction with private and public sector organisations about knowledge management, organisational learning and innovation during the past, nearly two decades.**

# Some Definitions: What is Learning?

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- ***“Learning is the process of turning information into knowledge” (Hubert Saint-Onge, 1995)***
- ***“Effective information management, together with embedding the best learning processes and culture throughout the organisation will inevitable lead to better creation of organisational knowledge”***
- ***“People must want to learn and share knowledge. This depends on mutual trust. They cannot be forced to share their intellectual “capital” – hence knowledge is power. “What’s in it for me to share my intellectual capital?” A conducive organisational culture is of the essence for organisational culture***
- ***“Deliberate capturing of new ideas transforms an organisation from an environment of “episodic learning” to one of “continuous learning and innovation”***

# What is a “Learning Culture?”

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- **The importance of learning was emphasised by the Chinese philosopher Confucius ( 551 – 479 BC). He said *“Without learning the wise become foolish; by learning the foolish become wise.....Learn as if you could never have enough of learning...”***
- ***“In today’s highly globalised world the organisations that most need to adapt to changing times are the large organisations in national and local governments” (M S Bin Mohd Yusoff, 2005) Peter Senge (1990) defines learning organisations as “organisations where people continuously expand their capacity to create results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together”***
- ***Hence, a learning organisation is built around people, their know-how, and their ability to innovate***

# Defining a learning Organisation

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- **A learning organisation recognises the need to move on from the *bureaucratic* management model inherited from the industrial age of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to a model that is better suited to the “*knowledge age*”, based on *people and skills* and driven by *innovation*.**
- **Hence, *organisational learning* is a collective undertaking involving the exchange of knowledge and ideas among knowledge workers collaborating in teams and networks to improve their core competencies through knowledge management in order to achieve the ultimate result of total customer satisfaction.”**
- **In simple terms, a learning organisation is one that is able to effectively tap into peoples commitment and capacity to learn, at every level of its hierarchy.**
- ***It is of critical importance for management to prioritise the coordination of the institutional memory and growing the knowledge pool of the public service and its institutions***

# Creating a Culture of Learning within the Public Sector: *The Public Service as a Learning Organisation*

***“Because public sector organisations are more sheltered & isolated from the changing environment, there is a pressing need for them to seek more innovative ways & means to anticipate & respond to change more quickly & effectively. They need to enhance their capacity to learn, unlearn & relearn so as to become more effective learning organisations” (Dir. Nat Inst of Public Administration, Malaysia) (Is this true?)***

- **Traditionally public sector organisations have been thought of as conservative, bureaucratic, slow and difficult to change.**
- **However, they need to enhance their capacity to learn, unlearn and relearn (innovate?) in order to become “more effective learning organisations”**
  - **Are these statements valid? Personally I do not agree that public sector organisations & especially cities are more sheltered or isolated. Our cities are at the forefront of pro-active response to the needs of citizens in the global knowledge economy**

# Building Blocks for a Learning Organisation (1)

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- **For a public sector organisation to develop a learning culture and become a learning organisation, a solid foundation must be laid in the form of *awareness, a shared vision, a learning culture, environment, leadership, empowerment and continuous learning***
- **To succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the public service must be knowledge-driven and innovative**
- **According to Peter Senge, “*a learning organisation is an organisation where people continuously expand their capacity to create results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.*”**

# Building Blocks for a Learning Organisation (2)

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- **For a public sector organisation to develop a *learning culture* and to become a “learning organisation” requires attributes such as**
  - ▣ **Leadership and a shared vision – constant communication between management and the workforce**
  - ▣ **Awareness – ongoing environmental scanning**
  - ▣ **Empowerment and support of knowledge workers – e.g. through training and effective knowledge management**
  - ▣ **A culture and processes of continuous learning – knowledge rather than money is now widely recognised as the key resource for development and success – we live in the global knowledge economy**
  - ▣ **Constant communication between management and the workforce is imperative – bureaucratic management approaches are on the decline**

# Building Blocks for a Learning Organisation (3)

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- **Systems thinking – the uncertainties brought about by the ever changing external environment cannot be managed anymore by conventional (bureaucratic) management processes – a more flexible, flatter, organic structure that encourages knowledge sharing and innovation is necessary**
- **Thus, it is necessary for public sector managers to adopt a philosophy that encourages openness, transparency, accountability, reflectivity and acceptance of uncertainty**
- **Constant communication between management and the workforce is imperative (Source: Malaysia quality management system)**

# Building Blocks for a Learning Organisation (4)

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- ❑ **Red tape and bureaucracy should not stifle progress – however, *this does not imply a lack of management***
- ❑ **Centralised mechanistic structures are not conducive to effective government – *people may disagree on this statement because the circumstances of different types of organisations vary – e.g. military organisations vs public service departments and private sector companies***
- ❑ **A more flexible, flatter structure encourages innovation and promotes knowledge transfer and a more informed workforce – *would you agree?***
- ❑ **This requires that public sector senior managers should encourage openness, transparency, accountability, reflectivity and coping with uncertainty**

# Five Learning Disciplines described by Peter Senge – founder of the Society for Organisational Learning

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- ***Personal mastery*** – Learning to expand our personal capacity to create the results we most desire and creating an organisational environment that encourages all its members to strive towards the goals and purposes they choose
- ***Mental models*** – Reflecting upon, continually clarifying and improving our internal pictures (perceptions) of the world, and how our perceptions shape our actions and decisions
- ***Shared vision*** – Building a sense of commitment in a group by developing shared images of the future we seek and the principles and guiding practices by which we hope to get there

# Five Learning Disciplines described by Peter Senge (continued)

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- ***Team learning*** – Transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of the individual members' talents
- ***Definition of Systems thinking*** - A way of thinking about the forces and inter-relationships that shape the behaviour of systems, including human systems like work teams. This insight help us to see how to change systems more effectively and to act in tune with the larger processes of the natural world and our organisations

# So, what is Learning?

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- **The KM specialist Hubert Saint-Onge put it simply but profoundly by saying “*learning is the process of turning information into knowledge*”.**
- **So, effective *information management*, together with embedding the *best learning processes* as well as a *culture conducive to organisational learning* throughout the organisation, should lead to better creation and application of organisational knowledge**
- **Finally, trust is the lifeblood of any organisation; when sufficient trust is developed people will naturally want to communicate, collaborate and learn together**
- ***The role of senior management in creating and sustaining such an organisational culture is crucial***

# Proposals For Key Focus Areas: Critical Success Factors for Learning

- **Leadership and empowerment – top management must provide commitment for long-term learning by providing the necessary resource and appraisal systems. “What gets measured gets done”**
- **Stakeholder buy in: Obtain agreement and support for an integrated approach across all spheres of government and with all relevant role players;**
- **Resources: Sufficient resources to plan and implement the various interventions.**
- **Risk Management: The adoption of a proactive risk management strategy to ensure successful achievement of the objectives contained herein.**
- **Roles and Responsibilities: Clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders that will be involved during implementation; and**
- **Integration: Ensuring that the consideration is given to other processes that are currently underway or are envisaged within local government and in government in general that may be similar or may impact on what has been proposed in this strategy**

# Relating Organisational Learning, Learning Organisation, & Organisational Memory

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## Organisational Learning

*Cognitive & learning processes & activities* which are:

- Greater than the sum of individual learning
- Include single & double loop or meta learning resulting from organisational activities
- *Experiential (informal) learning e.g. CoPs*

## Learning Organisation

*Characterised by:*

- Environmental monitoring mechanisms - awareness
- Organic decentralised structures – teams and work gr
- Learning cultures

**Organisational memory** is created when *tacit* knowledge is turned into *explicit* knowledge and therefore again becomes *information* that should be utilised during the acquisition phase of organisational learning.

Source: Beeby & Booth  
(2000:75-88)

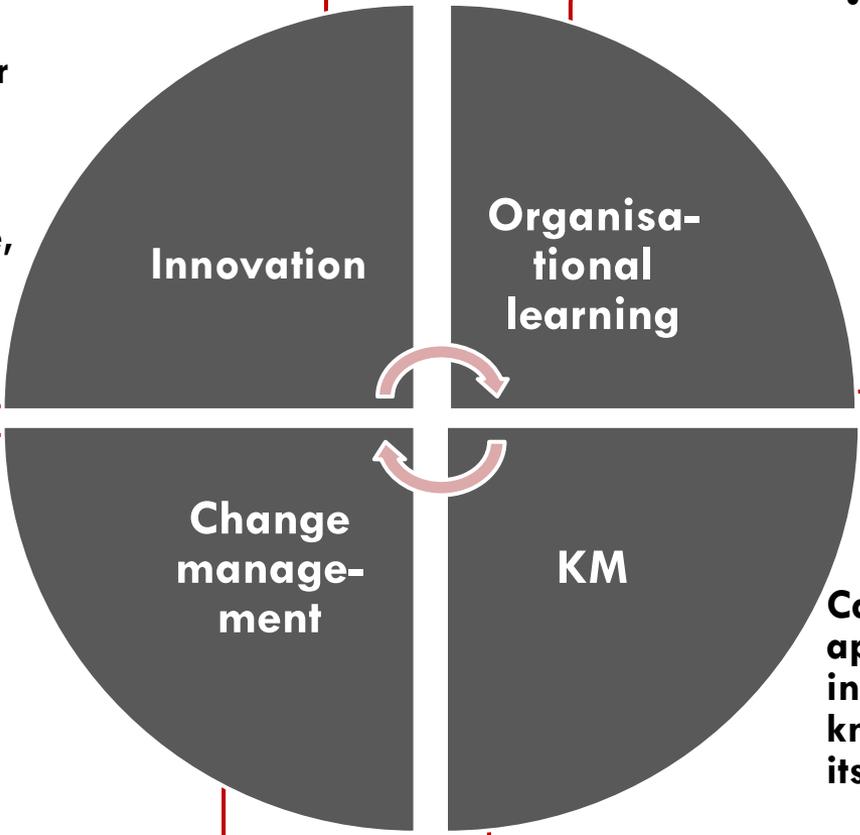
# Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management are two sides of the same coin

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- ❑ **Organisational learning (OL) is predominantly about enabling individuals and teams to learn. It is primarily a people-centred approach**
- ❑ **KM is predominantly about categorising, storing, sharing and applying organisational knowledge in a collective and systematic way. Although information technology is involved it is primarily a people-centred approach**
- ❑ **OL and KM complement one another; they are highly synergistic**
- ❑ **When you see a mature and successful learning organisation you will find that the principles of KM and talent management is embedded throughout the organisation – whether they use the terminology or not.**

# In summary: Inter-relationship of Innovation, Organisational learning, KM & Change management

- Capacity of the organisation to develop new products, services or business processes through incremental improvement or radical (often disruptive) change, and thus improve performance or service delivery



- Capacity of the organisation to acquire, internalise, organise, utilise, retain and renew its knowledge and skills in a fast changing global technological, economic, legislative and business environment

- Capacity of the organisation to perceive, motivate, develop and institutionalise new products, services or business processes

Capacity of the organisation to apply, retain, improve its intellectual capital and other knowledge assets in support of its business strategy

# In summary (2)

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- ❑ **The case for becoming a learning organisation must be based on realistic goals, value creation and measurable results**
- ❑ **Organisations will always be as good as their knowledge and their ability to transform that knowledge into valuable and successful competencies, products and services**
- ❑ **Learning is about the acquisition of knowledge. Hence, KM should be about the wise application of that knowledge. Both these disciplines complement each other and are synergetic**

# The Way Forward

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- **Public sector organisations must think of themselves as 21st century organisations**
- **Public sector employees are better educated, well travelled and more ambitious than ever before**
- **Hierarchies are being flattened and unnecessary formalities are being discarded. The public service of the future will thrive on change**
- **According to Tom Peters *“In a fast-paced, continually shifting environment, resilience to change is often the most important factor that distinguishes those who succeed from those who fail”***
- ***For example the vision to develop eThekweni as a learning city (organisation) must be welcomed and lauded. It should provide support for other cities to also develop in this direction***
- ***Question for discussion if time permits. How would you track, assess and evaluate the progress of eThekweni as a learning city?***