Instituting a Learning Organization (LO) Architecture in the Acquisition Workplace

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Since DoD Acquisition Organizations depend heavily on learning gains, where do they stand as “Learning Organizations (LOs)”?

This research set out to seek them out and better understand the key components that make them appropriately armed LOs... especially if the DoD expects to fulfill the current Better Buying Power (BBP) initiatives...and future ones like it over the long haul.
Background

What is a Learning Organization?

The Literature says...

Is there a Learning Organization Blueprint the Acquisition Community Can Follow?
$LOs = f \left( \text{Learning Pathway (LP}_i\right), \text{Learning Engine (LE}_i\right), \text{Learning Lubricants (LL}_i\right), \text{Learning Additives (LA}_i\right)$

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<th>Assessment Basis</th>
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<td>Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS)</td>
<td>RQ-4A/B UAS GLOBAL HAWK</td>
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<td>WGS (MILSATCOM, AEHF, FAB-T, GBS)</td>
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<td>National Polar-Orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS)</td>
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<td>Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) – High Satellite</td>
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<td>F-35 Lightening II</td>
<td>Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV)</td>
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<td>C130J - Super Hercules</td>
<td>Global Positioning Systems (GPS) Directorate - GPS IIA and NAVSTAR GPS</td>
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<td>MQ-9 UAS REAPER</td>
<td>Apache Block IIIA (AB3A) Remanufacture</td>
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<td>KC-46 Tanker</td>
<td>Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) and GMLRS Alternate Warhead</td>
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<td>F-22 Raptor</td>
<td>PEO Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence (C41)</td>
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Results

What did the Data Say?

18 PROGRAM OFFICES
N = 4158
n = 2125
51% Response Rate

LO Survey Instrument and Methodology
- 63 questions
- Likert scale: 1-7
- Questions mostly quantitative
- Several open ended questions
- Confidentiality maintained...
- No attribution
- 10 minutes to take...

Age Demographics
- Gen Y 17%
- Gen X 38%
- Boomer 43%
- Other 69%

Rank and Grade Demographics
- GS 12-13 40%
- GS 14-15 21%
- O 4-5 7%
- O6 1%
- Contra 9%
- Enlisted 1%
- Non-Comm 4%

Survey Specifics
Aggregate Learning Gaps

Results

 Aggregate Program Office
Workplace Learning Gaps

- Individual Feedback
- Individual Learning
- Mentorship
- Creative Tension
- Empowerment
- Individual Advancement
- Professional Development
- Leadership Guidance
- Organizational Learning
- Learning Climate
- Increased Responsibility
- Strategic Planning

20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45% 50%

- Organizational Active Implementation
- Individual Learning Dividends Paid

Responses represent “top two box” percentages
LEARNING PATHWAY

How the Learning Elements Scattered for each of the 18 Organizations Queried and Examples of Catalysts

Strategic Plan: integrate it, communicate it, make it more than shelf ware

Organizational Learning: individuals learning should lead to the organization learning. The three critical factors are meaning, management, and measurement

Leadership Guidance: accountability with leaders

Learning Climate: pushing the workforce to think critically and challenge the status quo
LEARNING ENGINE

How the Learning Elements Scattered for each of the 18 Organizations Queried and Examples of Catalysts

**Individual Learning**: put junior people in charge of briefings

**Increased Responsibility**: Innovation doesn’t live in the routine, encouraging persistence to challenge themselves

**Professional Development**: allow junior personnel to assume roles that are developmental and a stretch

**Individual Advancement**: show how to advance, allow competitive individuals to diversify, accession models
How the Learning Elements Scattered for each of the 18 Organizations Queried and Examples of Catalysts

**Empowerment:** widely delegated “the authority” across their organization

**Mentorship:** mentors must be willing to bear the responsibility for their employees' growth...too much formality leads to its death

**Individual Feedback:** timely, respectful, accurate, carefully communicated, and void of negative undertones

**Creative Tension:** for the good of the product, healthy and respectful debate
# LEARNING ADDITIVES

## Results

### How the Learning Elements Scattered for each of the 18 Organizations Queried and Examples of Catalysts

**Learning Technology**
- email as a learning tool is paying dividends, build email protocol and processes

**Challenging Work**
- organizations achieve challenging work with a clear understanding of the sum of its parts

**Time for Learning**
- blended “just-in-time” learning, “ojt”, contests

**Generational Learning**
- give more attention to the development of your junior workforce

### Learning Additives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Technology (LA1)</th>
<th>Challenging Work (LA2)</th>
<th>Time for Learning (LA3)</th>
<th>Generational Learning (LA4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMAIL</td>
<td>EFFECTIVENESS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTCS, ONLINE MEETINGS</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ONLINE LEARNING</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBILE DEVICES</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRANET/KNOWLEDGE PORTAL</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KNOWLEDGE DATABASES</td>
<td>79%</td>
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<td>INSTANT MESSAGING</td>
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<td>SHAREPOINT</td>
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<td></td>
<td>EFFECTIVENESS</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Effectiveness

- **Learning Technology (LA1)**
  - Effectiveness: 65%

- **Challenging Work (LA2)**
  - Effectiveness: 65%

### Time for Learning (LA3)

- **Program Office Count**
  - 23% 32% 41% 51% 60%

- **Accommodated**: 41%

### Generational Learning (LA4)

- **Program Office Count**
  - 12% 19% 26% 34% 41%

- **Accommodated**: 26%
### Observations

#### Learning Pathway $L_P$
- **Strategic Planning**
  - Not clear
  - Outdated
  - Ill-defined
  - No measures

#### Learning Engine $L_E$
- **Leadership Guidance**
  - Too tactical
  - Needs structured opportunities to fill knowledge gaps

- **Organizational Learning**
  - We don’t implement what we learn.

- **Increased Responsibility**
  - In some cases, Program responsibility resides with the PM only

#### Learning Lubricants $L_L$
- **Empowerment**
  - Restricted by processes
  - Not encouraged to take risks in all cases

- **Mentorship**
  - Need mentorship at the start of the job
  - Employees must seek out mentoring

#### Learning Additives $L_A$
- **Learning Technology**
  - VTCs and on-line meetings less valuable...

- **Challenging Work**
  - Leaders seem very focused on tactical level challenges

- **Time For Learning**
  - Time for learning is always in conflict with time for doing
  - Too busy working daily issues

- **Creative Tension**
  - Creative Tension is not always pervasive

- **Generational Variables**
  - Entrance level personnel expect more focused support
Acquisition Workforce Qualification initiative (AWQi)

AWQi Task Statements Standards
Address 5 Questions:
1. Performs what action? (verb)
2. To whom or what? (object of the verb)
3. To produce what? or Why is it necessary? (expected output)
4. Using what tools, equipment, work aids, processes?
5. Under what direction or guidelines?

1. Competency
   Defined behaviors that provide a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviors in individual employees.

2. Products
   Product & Task inventory provides:
   - Employees with a clearly-defined set of personal development objectives; tasks.
   - Managers with a consistent measurement and tools that can cross geographical work boundaries.

3. Task List

4. Amplifying Steps
   Steps employees need to complete any task.
Acquisition Workforce Qualification initiative (AWQi)
Connection to Learning Organizations (LOs)

\[ \text{LOs} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left( (L_{Pi} + \text{Quali}) (L_{Ai}) + (L_{Ei} + \text{Quali}) (L_{Ai}) + (L_{Li} + \text{Quali}) (L_{Ai}) \right) \]
Many organizations didn’t fully appreciate the importance of workplace learning in general or understand the essence of “Learning Organizations”

Data confirms presence of LO attributes and the contributions they make to workplace learning in acquisition organizations

Identified high performing LOs and how they achieved it

Established an LO benchmark for the acquisition community

Debriefings to Program Offices amplified the areas that deserved more attention and subsequent action—several programs acted on findings

Strong connection exists between LOs and AWQi—stronger LOs will more easily accommodate implementation of AWQi imperatives

Potential for Further Research: Establish same benchmark for Industry