



# Develop a Learning Organisation

**Jayne Noble**

The increased service and educational demands on doctors in both the primary and secondary care sectors, along with the added impact of Clinical Governance and the EU Working Time Directive, will require NHS Trusts, Deaneries and General Practices to seek innovative approaches to allow them to respond positively to the challenges ahead.

The medical profession of the 21st Century continues in its attempts to align postgraduate education with service requirements and changes in training structures, working patterns and political, media and public pressures mean that increasingly this becomes strategically important.

*There is a need to address the ever present problem of maintaining a learning culture within your environment, when service pressures increasingly tend to dominate. The views that are expressed have been developed as a result of substantial research that I have undertaken in this area.*

## How can this be achieved?

Organisations are increasingly looking towards adopting the Learning Organisation (LO) Concept, especially during times to change and this paper puts forward the LO Concept as a tool to assist in creating an environment where education can be seen not as compromising or taking time from service delivery, but rather as a means by which clinical practice and patient care can be enhanced and supported. The Underlying Principles for this have been identified by Watkins and Marsick (1993) who define six action imperatives as the framework to creating and supporting the Learning Organisation model.

There needs to be a commitment within a practice or a firm to;

- ▶ Create continuous learning opportunities
- ▶ Promote inquiry and dialogue
- ▶ Encourage collaboration and team learning
- ▶ Establish systems to capture and share learning
- ▶ Empower people toward to collective vision
- ▶ Connect the organisation to its environment.

Many proponents of the Learning Organisation can be found in all arenas of postgraduate medical and dental education. But it is also necessary to find synergy with the disciplines of Clinical Governance, which aims to encourage the pursuit of excellence in clinical care. In comparing the main characteristics below with the LO concept, four common themes are identified as areas of focus: leadership, learning, teamwork & culture.

## Integrating training & work

Interviews with health care professionals working together led Watkins and Marsick (1993) to conclude that the factors influencing the quality of training are based upon these four themes.

### 1. Leadership

Within the organisation there is the need for a clear commitment to education from the top.

- ▶ The overload of service demands can often restrict educational activities and events which may be seen as an 'easy option to put off'.
- ▶ There is a need to breakdown communication barriers and for colleagues, senior and junior, to be able to discuss and reflect upon their work in an open and supportive way.

### 2. Learning

This needs to be resourced and supported within each setting and should include;

- ▶ Up to date IT facilities that can offer ready access to library and data bases.
- ▶ A clearly structured and well planned education programme to assist and facilitate the CPD of all members of the team. Activities using a variety of teaching methods and a range of different material and modes should be actively encouraged.
- ▶ The quality rather than the quantity of educational opportunities is vital and there needs to be a firm commitment to enable individuals to improve their teaching skills as appropriate.

### 3. Teamwork

- ▶ Good teamwork & a collaborative working clearly promote an open and enquiring environment and will support education.
- ▶ Good teams require effective leaders and efforts need to be made to enhance leadership skills and create opportunities for personal development.
- ▶ Multidisciplinary working enhances both clinical effectiveness and educational opportunities.

### 4. Culture

- ▶ It is vital to ensure that there is a supportive and well-planned environment which can facilitate learning.
- ▶ Efforts need to be made to ensure that there is an appropriate time balance between service & training, educational opportunities both planned and unplanned need to be capitalised upon to maximise learning provision for all team members.
- ▶ Empowering individual team members.
- ▶ Ensuring protected teaching time for trainees and for Interprofessional activities.
- ▶ Develop an environment that encourages trainees to actively seek out learning opportunities and to be creative in identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

## Further Information

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## Proposals for change

These can be delineated into both short and longer term goals.

### Short term:

- ▶ Design and formalise teaching programmes that incorporate and maximise all educational opportunities – an easy tool with which to introduce newcomers to the setting and outside bodies.
- ▶ Develop induction programmes to include formalised educational opportunities and identify specific educational responsibilities for all team members to allow the educational function of the practice to be very overt – remember patterns are set early on and it is clearly good practice to create a dynamic learning environment.
- ▶ Review all job plans to provide protected teaching times and opportunities.
- ▶ Ensure the availability of and access to a wide range of educational courses for trainers to ensure that they remain well informed about current educational trends.
- ▶ Identify an educational co-ordinator within the practice or speciality to liaise with the PGMDE Department and other support groups – good planning will improve protected teaching time.
- ▶ Develop a two-way informal discussion group to erode barriers towards communication and feedback – regular feedback will go a long way towards improving morale and commitment within the team.
- ▶ Involve the multi-disciplinary team in weekly educational meetings – the wider team can provide a wealth of knowledge and experience.
- ▶ Remember that your local medical educators within the Deanery can be a valuable resource.
- ▶ Develop strategies to help prioritise and improve time management.

### Longer term:

- ▶ Review workloads and supervising and training of trainees
- ▶ Review job plans to allow the freedom for trainers to pursue different career activities and CPD aims.

## ... and Finally

Current systems can be greatly improved with just a little creative thinking, but integrating education with service commitments is as much to do with changing attitudes as simply training individuals to better teachers.

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