Learning Everest

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

"When young people develop basic leadership and collaborative learning skills, they can be a formidable force for change."

Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline

ABOUT LEARNING EVEREST

[Learning Everest Private Limited](#) is a leading learning solutions provider based out of Pune, India. Our clients include corporate customers, universities, training, and eLearning companies. Most of our clients are from the US, UK, Europe, Africa, India, Middle East, and Australia. We are a one-stop solution for all the learning needs and are a committed and seasoned team of learning professionals who have worked for some of the finest companies in the world.
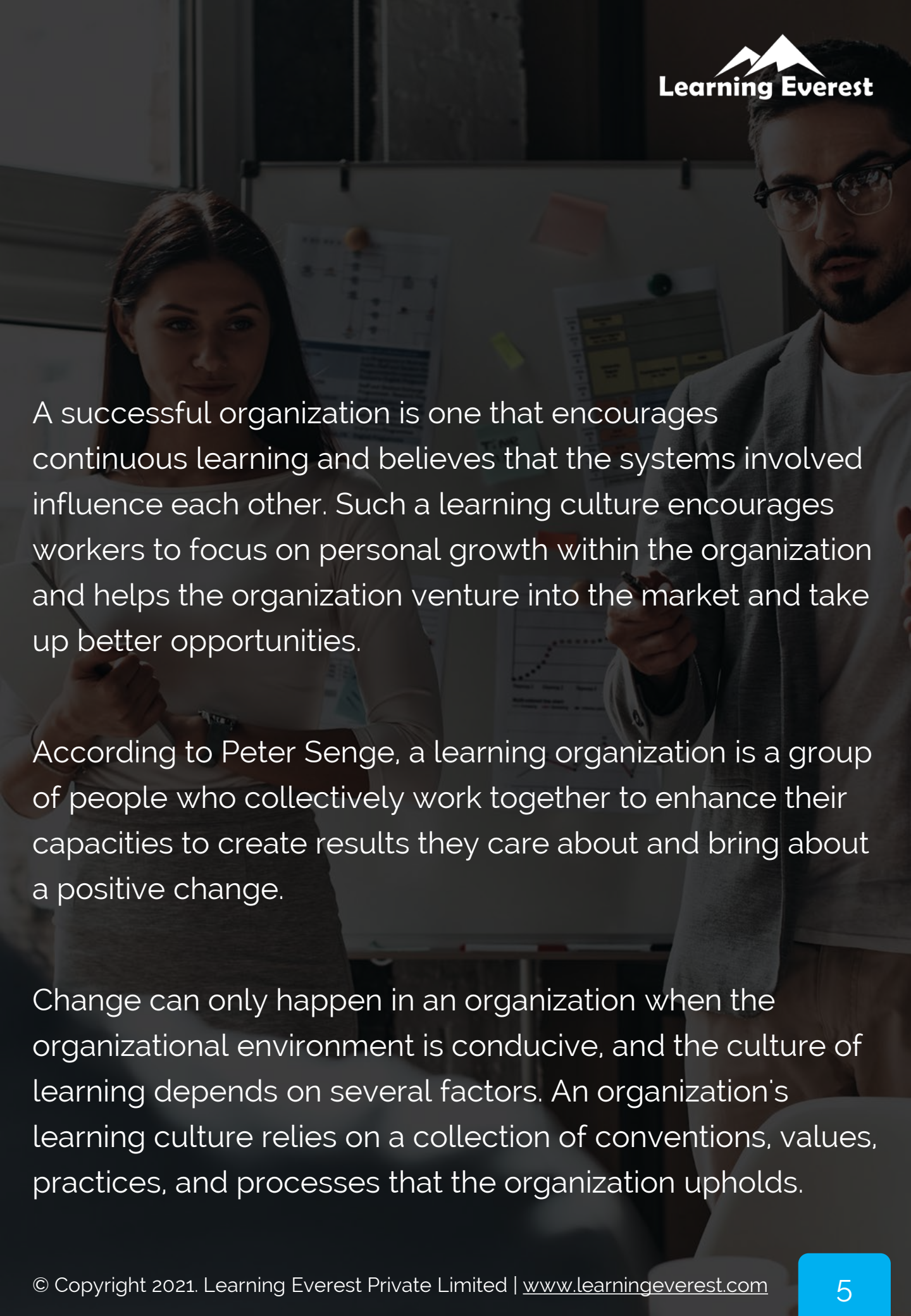
CONTENT

A successful organization is one that encourages continuous learning and believes that the systems involved influence each other. Such a learning culture encourages workers to focus on personal growth within the organization and helps the organization venture into the market and take up better opportunities.

According to Peter Senge, a learning organization is a group of people who collectively work together to enhance their capacities to create results they care about and bring about a positive change.

Change can only happen in an organization when the organizational environment is conducive, and the culture of learning depends on several factors. An organization's learning culture relies on a collection of conventions, values, practices, and processes that the organization upholds.

**LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING
CULTURE**

![Learning Everest](Learning Everest logo)

SHARPENING THE AXE

A man hired several woodcutters to source wood for his business. He noticed one of the woodcutters to be very sincere, and on day one, cut down ten trees. Impressed with his dedication, the man appreciated him and decided to keep track of his progress. Feeling encouraged, the woodcutter went into work the next day with enthusiasm; however, he could cut only nine trees by the end of the day.

Over the next several days, the number of trees that the woodcutter could cut declined steadily. Though he was putting in more and more effort every day, he could not bring up the numbers. The man, noticing this downward graph, decided to speak to him. He told the woodcutter that despite putting in his best efforts, his performance declined because he did not spend time sharpening his axe.

"Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

Abraham Lincoln

Disclaimer: This is just a story. We at Learning Everest Private Limited do not encourage cutting of trees. So, please save trees, save environment.

Thus, the <u>employees' skills need to be sharpened from time to time</u>, and that is where the learning culture of the organization comes into play.

The learning culture depends on the leadership of the organization. A leader sets the rest of the workforce on the path of the organization's vision and mission. Given the appropriate leadership style, the organization prospers, and both the employee and the organization's economic growth is ensured. When the leaders reinforce training initiatives, they convey the message to the rest of the workforce that they are supportive of the learning environment.

WAYS OF DEVELOPING A LEARNING CULTURE IN AN ORGANIZATION

1. LEAD BY EXAMPLE

If the leaders are serious about creating a learning culture in the organization, they should lead by example. It starts with the senior leadership in the organization. When the leaders themselves are committed to learning and practicing what they are preaching, it conveys a powerful message to the entire organization. They must be engaged in their continuous learning and set personal learning goals. Just preaching about the culture of learning to the employees will not be received positively.

Once the leaders have actively demonstrated it adequately, they should focus on what is best for the organization, groups, and individuals.

Conducting discussions and being willing to reflect on constructive feedback helps emulate an excellent example to the employees. Moreover, when the leaders are flexible and agile, they learn faster and set the employees' right model. In addition to this, the employees feel they are a part of something bigger than themselves when the leaders themselves take part in the learning initiatives.

2. MAKE LEARNING A PRIORITY

A leader should not only be invested in the learning process of the organization, but they must also be ready to commit to continuous learning for the team. When learning becomes the priority of the organization's core value, the employees feel that the organization supports their development. This also means that the organization is committed to taking all the steps needed for employee learning and development. Thus, each organization must become a learning organization where each employee is provided with adequate learning opportunities.

Many organizations have started continuous learning programs that help employees enhance their skills and knowledge and be personalized. These assist the employees in their performance and enable them to adapt to the industry changes.

3. SHOULD LEARNING BE MANDATORY?

Continuous learning programs often start in organizations; however, they fail to live up to the targets, and the improvement rates in the employee's work remain low. This is because the leadership assumes that setting goals, employee incentives, and a truckload of training for the employees will guarantee success. When learning is a priority, it also has to be effective and must be taken seriously by the employees. This will only happen when the leadership is able to communicate the benefits of training and the employee also sees a value in the training program. Extrinsic motivation is required, but initiatives like Learning & Development can only be sustained if there is intrinsic motivation. Learning is not necessarily boring; gamification can make learning fun.

When the leader believes in the 70:20:10 model that learning doesn't only happen in the classroom, it helps increase enthusiasm in the employees to learn the job's practicalities.

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CASE STUDY

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

An automobile giant had a very successful Learning & Development initiative in the organization. The leadership was extremely passionate about training. Many facilitators were developed on various topics, and they conducted several training programs internally through these certified facilitators for all the new joiners as well as other employees. The employees also attended these programs.

Every year, the facilitators were rewarded based on the number of programs they conducted, the number of participants they trained, the number of post-training engagements they conducted and other predefined criteria. The awards included recognition from the senior leadership in events specially organized to felicitate the facilitators. Gift vouchers were also awarded to the facilitators based on the defined parameters.

When the organization's senior leadership changed, they overnight decided to scrap this structure. They believed in building a learning culture in the organization through intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation of rewards and recognition was not perceived as the right step in this direction. The rewards were considered as an added cost to the organization. They believed, recognizing the facilitators on a much toned down scale would still motivate the facilitators.

The result was that the training came to a standstill. Facilitators had got used to the culture of rewards. When the rewards stopped, there was no motivation for the facilitators to conduct the training programs. As a result, employees started complaining that training programs are not happening. The organization started engaging external consultants for imparting training, and the L&D Budgets started soaring up.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Was the earlier system correct?

2. Was the approach taken by the second leadership correct?

3. The earlier management approach was extreme and should have been mellowed down to develop intrinsic motivation amongst the facilitators and the employees.

Well, everything is situational. So, when implementing your strategy, do be pragmatic.

4. CREATE A CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

There are several ways in which an organization can [make its environment learning-friendly and fun](). Let us look at a few of them:

- An organization should be a haven of learning for an employee. Fear of being mocked for knowing little or asking naive questions must be removed. The learning environment must be such that the employees feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts about their work.

- Humans differ in opinions, thinking capabilities, views, and abilities. Respecting these differences and appreciating their diverse thought processes encourages employees to think innovatively and motivates them to work instead of setting in lethargy.

- Learning is about creating new experiences, and these new experiences may involve risks and untested waters. Employees should be encouraged to take these risks and go into the unknown.

- [Organizations often become so focused on results that employees do not have time to pause and reflect on their actions and decisions](). Also, the constant workload may affect the decision-making capacity and result in losses or mistakes. Employees must thus be allowed time to think about their actions and be encouraged to review the organization's processes that they are involved in.

Many learning platforms provide options that facilitate learning, and they must be easy to use, keeping in mind the diverse workforce of the organization. They must also be provided with the right resources necessary to set the conditions for learning to occur. The resources could be related to budget, talent support, technology, and time. Also, opportunities for knowledge sharing and interaction between the learners will help in making the learning effective.

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CASE STUDY
FOOD INDUSTRY

A fast-food chain decided to shift gears in terms of business expansion—this required induction of a new workforce into their retail outlets. Through a series of interactions with all the concerned stakeholders, the leadership identified that training the existing employees and the new employees through the existing paper-manuals would pose a challenge in time, cost and effectiveness.

They conducted several brainstorming sessions. The team came out with the solution that instead of conventional paper-manuals, video-based microlearning modules can be done, coupled with the digital manuals, the training time can be reduced, and the training effectiveness can be increased.

The idea was evaluated, a pilot run was conducted, and the team could see a substantial improvement. The improvised system enabled the learners to take the modules as per their convenience. Since it was video-based courses, it was much easier to visualize and understand for the learners.

To keep the cost low, the organization opted for open-source LMS and a paid video hosting services. This ensured that the company data remained safe, and at the same time, the training was quite effective, and the learners could access courses at their convenience. This saved the company tons of money on printing and transporting the manuals. Doubts that remained after attending the courses were addressed through a one on training session.

5. ENCOURAGE SHARING AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Learning cannot be only an instructor teaching and a learner learning. This becomes a tedious process and leaves no room for collaboration and learning from one another. When employees are encouraged to share knowledge among themselves, it helps in building a collaborative learning experience. Organizations can have individual sharing sessions with teammates, group sessions, or even sessions where the entire organization is involved. There could be discussion forums set up between clients and the stakeholders involved that facilitate sharing of information. This broadens the employee's perspectives in all areas. Learning happens from multiple facets, and developing other behavioral competencies is as vital as developing work-related ones.

Many companies are now adopting the After-Action Review (AAR) process wherein the team studies the goals they had set out to accomplish, what happened during the process and why, and what should be improved the next time. Employees will engage more in such activities when they are rewarded and appreciated for communicating with their peers.

6. PERSONALIZED TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

New hires in an organization will not stay for long if they feel that the organization has left them to fend for themselves. Just offering webinars and instructor-led training may not always work. As each individual is different and differs in the speed of learning, learning style, retention, and attention span, personalizing the learning process becomes crucial. When personalized training plans are developed, they make the learning more relevant to the employees and promote a learning culture. The organization then needs to collect relevant information on how an individual employee learns, the speed of learning, the area of employee's interest, and what other employees in the same position have learned. Setting realistic learning goals and developing a strategy that focuses on training's long-term effects sends a message supporting the employees' career goals. Also, identifying the employees' career opportunities and directing them towards those opportunities can prove useful as this closes the skill gap and helps the organization retain top talent.

Employees can be encouraged to join various platforms for learning like open-source platforms, paid platforms, or internal resources.

7. GIVE RECOGNITION FOR MILESTONES ACHIEVED

Employees who have learned new abilities and have completed updating their skills must be recognized. Other employees must be encouraged to follow suit and be provided with ample opportunities to do so. Failing to provide them with an environment with no appreciation or recognition can result in low employee morale, and they will not view the work as exciting or challenging.

Several learning management systems (LMS) offer badges and virtual certificates that employees can share within the organization and social media. Formal platforms like Coursera and Lynda provide the employees with certification, which can be useful in their careers. They can also be encouraged to take informal learning courses in their own time to keep in touch with the industrial standards.

8. INCLUDE LEARNING IN THE HIRING PROCESS

When the organizational leaders have discussions with the prospective employees during the hiring process, there are more chances of attracting the right candidates that are proactive in taking part in the learning process in the long run. This also gives out the message that the organization cares about the personal career goals of the employees.

One way to do this is by introducing case studies to prospective employees to gauge the reading speed, how they base their decisions and the employees' comprehension level regarding the complex scenarios and situations.

9. MOTIVATING SELF & OTHERS

Learning is a lot about motivation. As mentioned earlier, motivation can be extrinsic or intrinsic. In a team, if people can motivate themselves for training and at the same time, they can motivate their team (others), then that is an ideal situation. Probably, this would not happen over-night. But if continuous and focused efforts are laid in this direction, gradually, the results start reaping in. Though motivating self and others can be applicable in several other forms in an organization, this is just one of the use cases. To emphasize this parameter, organizations include this as one of the behavioral competency parameters as part of the KRA. This ensures regular focus and desired outcomes.

"Don't wait until everything is just right. It will never be perfect. There will always be challenges, obstacles, and less than perfect conditions. So what? Get started now. With each step you take, you will grow stronger and stronger, more and more skilled, more and more self-confident, and more and more successful."

Mark Victor Hansen

10. STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a critical skill that leaders should possess or develop. Data indeed influence our opinions, but stories reinforce them. In an organizational context, stories should be factual, supported with data but at the same time conveyed with passion.

We would have heard a lot of stories in our childhood. But which one do we remember? Indeed, the ones that would have been told to us with emotions.

If we look around, any of the successful leaders globally, they would surely be a good storyteller. They would narrate stories by stating the facts, but as the story is told with passion and feelings, the facts conveyed in the story get retained for a longer time. To create a culture of learning, stories related to past experiences and learnings would be quite compelling. To many people, this art of storytelling comes naturally, but others might have to learn it. It's worth investing the efforts in this direction.

As a leader, if you have to build a learning culture in the organization, you have to communicate effectively with the team to believe in you. And storytelling is one such effective tool to achieve the objective.

11. FEEDBACK AND CONTINUOUS UPDATES

Feedback facilitates learning. Taking regular feedback from the employees enables the organization to keep track of the learning process. It also informs the employees that the leadership is invested in their learning process and monitors the progress. The training modules in an organization must be up to date, and the learning gaps must be identified. Also, sometimes the current learning content or processes may be renewed to include updated content. If this requires restructuring the entire learning process, the learning and development team can do the needful.

Leaders can take one-on-one feedback from the employees, or group feedback can be shared with the leadership. Various Learning Management Systems (LMS) allow the leaders to look at the employees' progress in the learning modules. Based on this, they can provide the employees with relevant feedback.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There are definite advantages of cultivating a [learning culture in an organization](). When leaders are involved in the employees' learning, productivity and profit increase, but they also feel satisfied and develop ownership and accountability. It also enhances a culture of inquiry, sharing, and adaptability.

Thus, learning impacts business and future technologies that the organization would be involved in. So, it becomes vital for the leadership to keep up with the times and resolve issues about the future of work. So, lead the way, and the rest will follow.

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OUR SERVICES

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Learning Everest provides a complete range of learning solutions required to become a World-Class Organization. We specialize in the creation of:

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- eLearning Courses

- Mobile Learning Courses

- Instructor-Led Training and VILT Courses

- Flash to HTML5 Conversion

- eLearning Course Localization

- Video-Based Courses

- Microlearning Courses

- Gamification / Gamified Learning

- Learning Consultancy and

- Learning Management System (LMS) Management