

E-book: The magic of a Learning Culture



LEARNING CULTURE CHANGE FROM WITHIN

The art and wisdom of creating, implementing and maintaining a learning culture in your organization.

WHITE PAPER

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Introduction

A Learning Culture looks like magic.

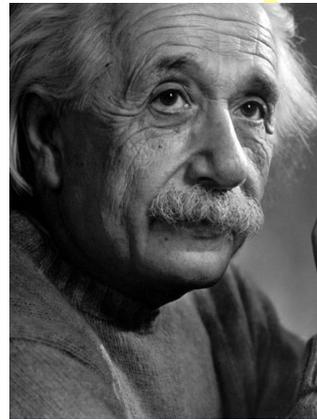
As we evolve from a predictable "Find-it-Out" world to an unpredictable "Figure-it-Out" one, the need to cultivate a learning culture in organizations becomes increasingly acute.

Albert Einstein shows us the way. No focus on teaching but on providing the conditions to learn. How do we do that? What concrete steps do we have to take to create such a learning culture? And what does this actually deliver?

A growing number of organizations adapt to this change. They are like magic! They develop creative and flexible organizations, they are attractive to work for and they are productive and innovative.

The key to this success is the creation of a Learning Culture. And there is nothing magical about how to get there.

It's not difficult, but it takes a systems approach and a long time commitment. This is why only 6% of organizations worldwide have reached this magical state of being.



I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.

-Albert Einstein

In this E-book we show that creating a learning environment where working and learning are one is worth while for employee and organization (WHY).

We use the models and insights of three experts on the matter (HOW).

And we round off with some tips and tricks to develop a change from within action plan (WHAT).

If, by reading, you have questions, insights or critics, please let us know. We are always open to learn.

Haarlem/the Netherlands,
September 2021,

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Definition

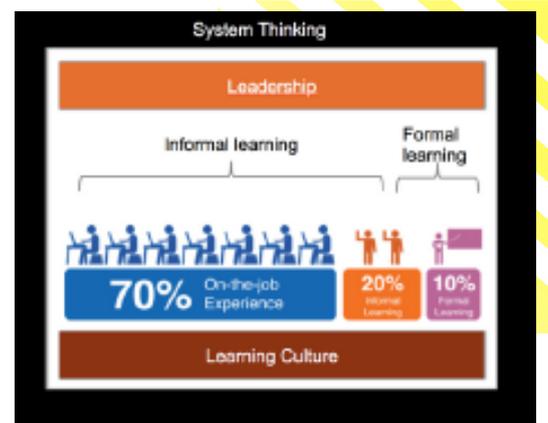
Our definition: LEARNING CULTURE

What do we mean when we talk about a learning culture? We define a learning culture as one that:

1. Supports an organization's desire to improve, adapt and stay relevant in the fast-paced, skills-based world of today.
2. Appreciates knowledge, skills and abilities that is acquired and applied at the working place.
3. Motivates employees to develop themselves in a direction that is positive for themselves but also for the organization.
4. Implement a variety of processes and tools, which stimulate and facilitate better performance through learning.

70% of companies believe their most valuable learning approaches are *informal*, yet only 30% of resources are focused here.

Your challenge: INFORMAL LEARNING



Using this definition means that you create a work culture in which not KPI's but KSA's are central (Knowledge, Skills & Abilities).

This seems like a simple concept. But in practice this is not easy at all. The challenge is in the execution.

For example when it comes to part two of the definition (Appreciates knowledge, skills and abilities). Then we talk about informal learning. This is the big challenge when it comes to the well-known 70:20:10 principle. How can we learn optimally from "on the job experience"?

But also in part 4 (variety of processes and tools) we see that there is a tension between;

- where the development budgets should be deployed (informal learning), and
- where most of the money in practice is still spend on (formal learning).

Why?

1. VUCA World



Our society is becoming increasingly complex and dynamic. There is a lot of talk about a VUCA world: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex & Ambiguous.

Many organizations can no longer cope with the pace of change. The statement to the right by one of the members of the SOL Community makes this clear.

SOL Ambition: SOL Netherlands supports the creation of meaningful learning and working environments in which participants acquire skills "on the job" with which they can participate sustainably in new (working)situations, in order to solve challenging issues in a continuously changing society.

A member of the SOL Development team shares her experiences

In my work at the municipality, we are confronted daily with societal issues with uncertain outcomes. It's our job.

We are part of the Regional Energy Strategy, the regional deal, the development towards a new economy. What we run into is the question: what do we need to do to cope with these changes?

- How do we get out of this chaos?
- How do we ensure that we do not keep running behind the facts?
- How do we get rid of the feeling that we have ended up in a continuous crisis?

Because that's where organizations now run into. We are constantly putting out fires and we don't know where the exit is. All around me I hear; "the basics must be in order".

This is the way boards / directors try to deal with this (coping strategy). But that will never happen again!

Eline Faber



Why?

2. Attract Talent



Perhaps the most important reason to get started with a learning culture is attracting and retaining talented staff.

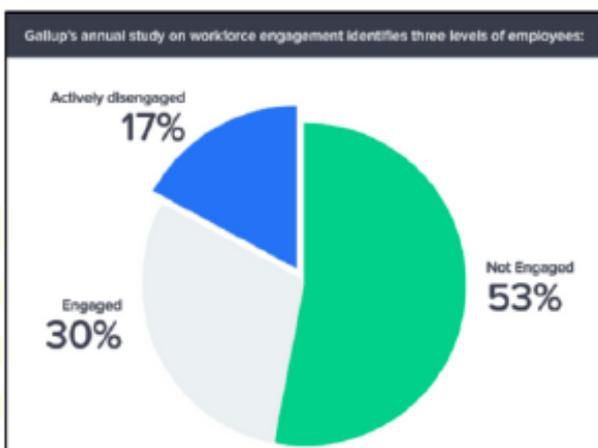
Deloitte survey in 2016 shows that *“training and development opportunities are the most popular benefits an employer can offer to Millennials”*. An attractive learning environment challenges and brings out the best in people

Gallup shows the importance of empowerment in their annual survey on employee motivation.

In the USA, an average percentage of only 30% is “Engaged”. About half of the employees do their job *“because they have to make a living”*.

And 17% is *“Actively disengaged”*, in other words, regularly *“put a spoke in the wheels”* to slow down the organizational process.

According to a study done by USC, millennials are the least engaged segment of the workforce. Millennials also make up the largest portion of the modern workforce.



Why?

3. Better Results

Organizations with a Strong Learning Culture Significantly Outperform their peers...

- 46% more likely to be first to market (*innovation*)
- 37% greater employee productivity (*productivity*)
- 34% better response to customer needs (*time to market*)
- 26% greater ability to deliver “quality products” (*quality*)
- 58% more likely to have skills to meet future demand
- 17% more likely to be market share leader (*profitability*)

Research by Bersin shows that organizations that succeed in developing a learning culture are not only agile but also attractive to work in!

In addition, shaping a learning culture makes spectacular improvements possible.

Only 6% of all organizations have developed a learning culture!

Research Bersin

Customer Satisfaction: In a learning culture we want to learn most of our customers.

Employees, Leadership and Culture: It's fun to work in a learning culture.

Financial results: In a learning culture we achieve compelling results.

Markets: A learning culture improves the innovative capacity

Employees, Leadership and Culture

Speed to Opportunity

- Customer Orientation Index: 81%
- Speed/Decisiveness Index: 77%
- Employee Engagement Index: 81%
- Risk Taking Index: 70%

How?

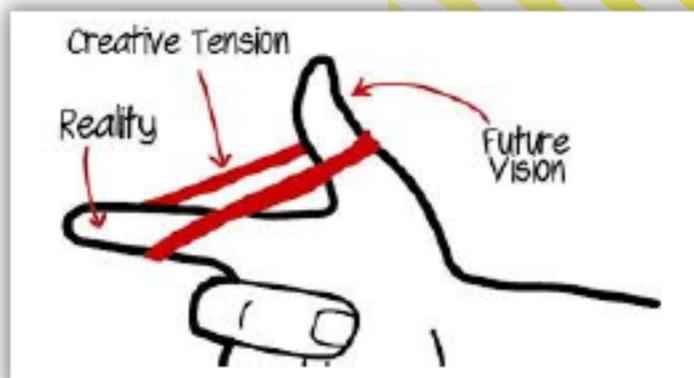
Josh Bersin, Nigel Paine & Peter Senge

The potential for creating a learning culture is enormous. But only 4% of all organizations have developed such a culture.

What can we learn from these organizations? How can they handle this creative tension between current reality and their vision of the future?

We discuss three experts on this subject: Bersin, Paine and Senge.

Josh Bersin has done extensive research on this subject. He has found 40 so-called "high impact practices" that determine the creation of a learning culture.



These 40 high impact practices have been categorized by Bersin in 6 "building blocks" with which a learning culture can be built within an organization.

1. Building trust
2. Empowering employees
3. Encouraging reflection
4. Formalizing learning as a process
5. Demonstrate learning's value
6. Enabling knowledge sharing

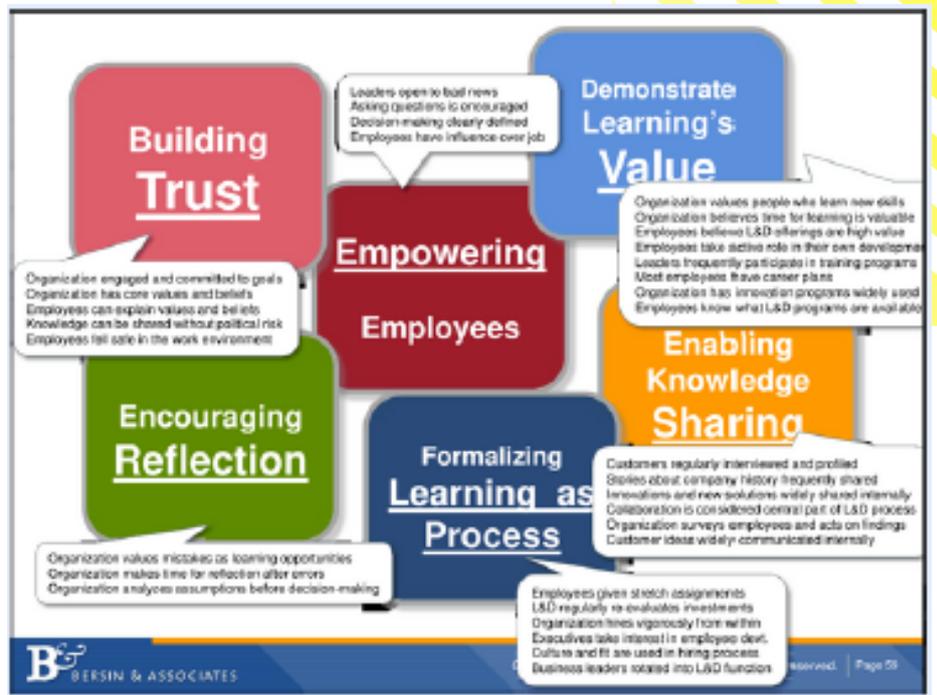
As SOL, we have added two more building blocks:

7. Quality leadership (Nigel Paine)
8. System thinking (Peter Senge)



How?

1 - 6: Josh Bersin



1. Building Trust



Building Trust: One of the most important "building blocks" for the creation of a learning culture is building trust. The moment you, as a leader, succeed in creating a trust worthy environment, the non-negotiable can be discussed, the invisible becomes visible and there is room for making mistakes.

2. Empowering Employees



Empowering employees: Another important building block is empowering employees. To create intrinsic motivated staff you need purpose (meaningful jobs), mastery (within one's capabilities) and autonomy (the feeling of control).

How?

3. Encouraging Reflection



Encouraging reflection: There is no learning without reflection. It is therefore important that time is regularly set aside for reflection in the work. Practice shows that this is not automatic. What helps is to build this as fixed moments in, for example, regular progress meetings, peer2peer meetings, team meetings or project meetings.

5. Demonstrate Learning's Value



Demonstrate learning's value: It is important that "valuing learning" is given a prominent place within the organization. This can be done, for example, by working with learning objectives in addition to formulating performance goals

4. Formalizing Learning As A Progress



Formalizing learning as a proces: This is about realizing that learning is not a one-time period (school / university) but a continuous ongoing process. There is a lot of talk about the Lifelong Development Principle. This is one of the major challenges organizations currently face.

6. Enabling Knowledge Sharing

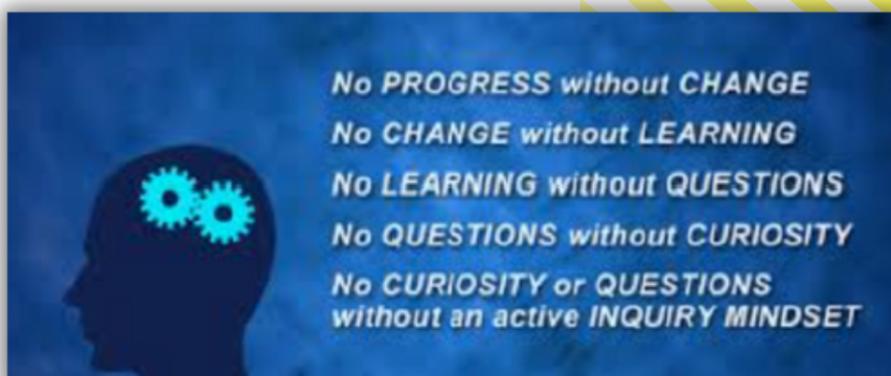


Enabling knowledge sharing: In order to function optimally as a team, it is important to learn from each other. This learning is promoted through the use of the right technology and tools. But it also helps if people within your team experience sufficient space / trust to want to share learning experiences with each other. Even if these are less pleasant experiences.

How?

Nigel Paine

7. Leadership



Nigel Paine is a specialist in the field of learning culture. He indicates that, for the creation of a learning culture, you as a leader should focus on three aspects; "*Mindset, skillset and toolset*".

Mindsets are powerful and often have a huge impact on behavior, often unconsciously.

Two mindsets stand out that can serve as particularly powerful fuel for anyone who is consciously involved in his or her own learning process:

- **A growth mindset:** the thought that you can grow, expand, evolve and change. Intelligence and ability are not fixed points, but instead traits that you cultivate.
- **Curiosity** is awareness, openness to ideas and the ability to make connections between diverse concepts.

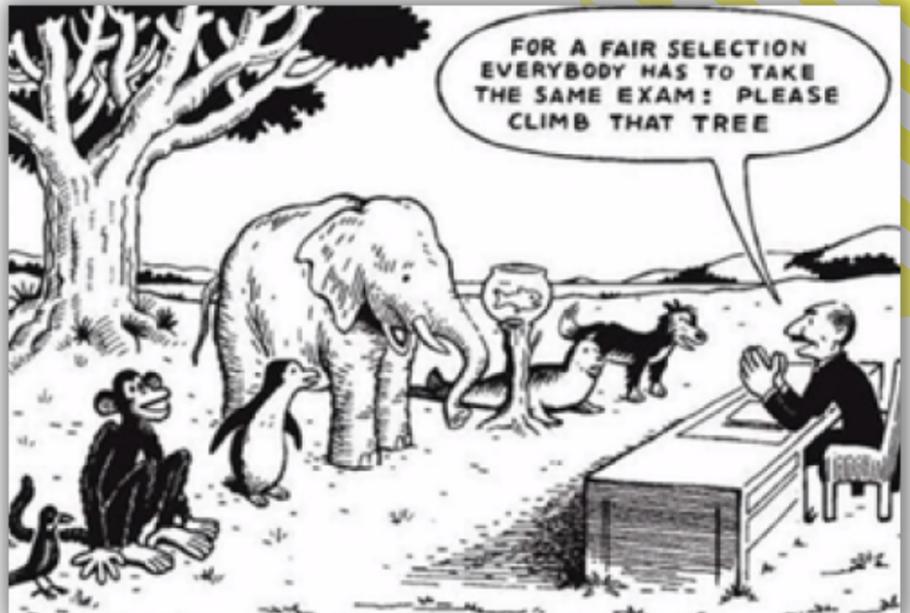
Intentional Learning

Everyday experiences and interactions offer great learning opportunities, but only if you deliberately view each moment as a learning opportunity.

Learning is not extra work or effort for intentional learners. Instead, it is an almost unconscious, reflexive behavior.

Learning is the mode and mindset in which intentional learners work all the time. While they all experience the same daily moments as someone else, they get more out of those opportunities because everything - every experience, conversation, meeting and product to be delivered - presents an opportunity to develop and grow.

How?



Talents are our innate skills, what we do without even thinking about it and what we enjoy doing. What is naturally part of us, such as an inner urge to pursue the maximum result, sensitivity to the needs of others, or a tendency to do whatever it takes to keep an appointment.

When we consciously apply our talents, this gives us confidence, we become happier, more self-assured, more energetic and we will achieve our goals more easily and with more pleasure.

Focus on Talents

How do you know what your talents are? There are five clues to the presence of talent:

- **Desire:** What types of activities are you attracted to?
- **Easy learning:** which activities do you seem to pick up quickly?
- **Flow:** for which activities did you automatically seem to know which steps were required?
- **Flashes of excellence:** in what activities did you have moments where you thought, "how did I do that?"
- **Satisfaction:** What activities give you a kick, not only when you do them, but also right after doing them and thinking, "When can I do that again?"



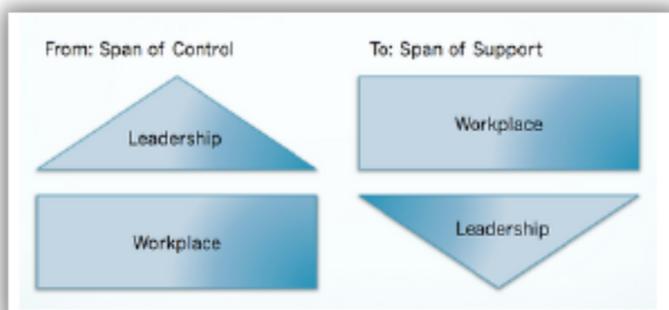
How?



Of the 40 practices / tools Bersin identified to be of importance to create a learning culture, 25 are owned by line management.

So the key for developing a learning culture is in the hands of middle management.

The biggest challenge for middle management is the switch from span of control to span of support. How to create a meaningful work- and learning environment for their employees.



Leadership Challenge

What does it take, from middle management, to create, implement and maintain a learning culture.

For some managers it is a small step. For others a giant leap.

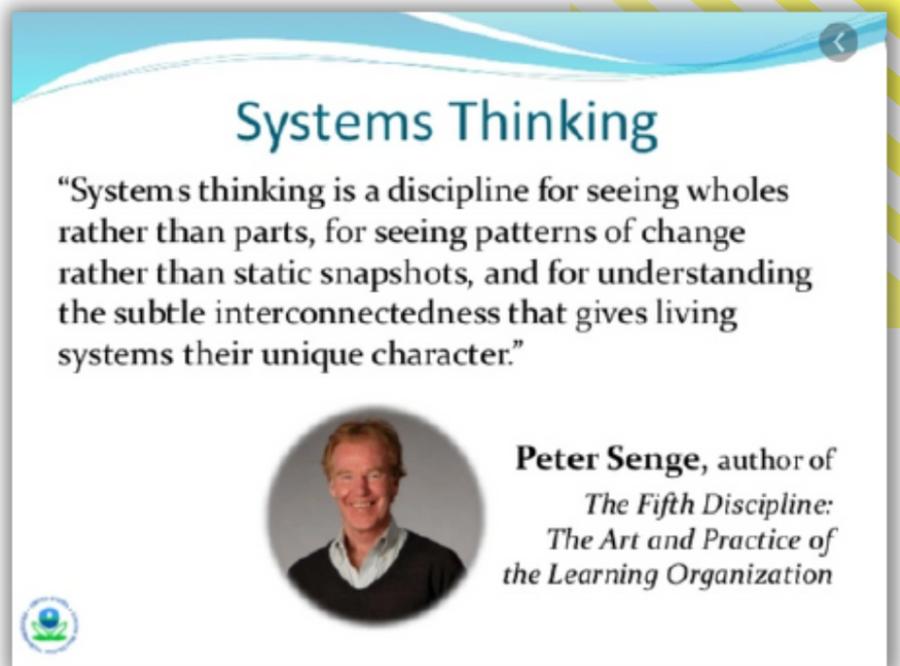
Some examples. We talk about the shift:

- From power (control) to strength
- (support).
- From giving instructions to asking questions.
- From 20% leadership (investing in your team) and 80% management (writing reports) to the opposite.
- From the focus on results to the focus on learning.
- From distrust to trust.
- From closed talks to open communication.

How?

Peter Senge

8. System Thinking

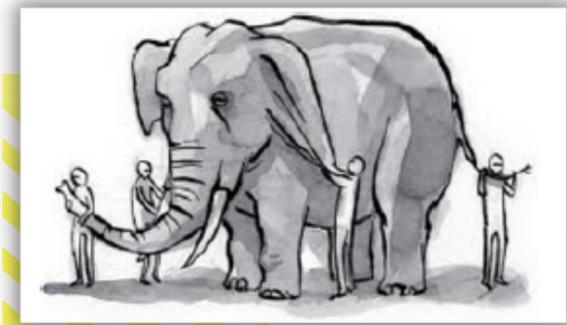


Systems Thinking

“Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes rather than parts, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots, and for understanding the subtle interconnectedness that gives living systems their unique character.”



Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*



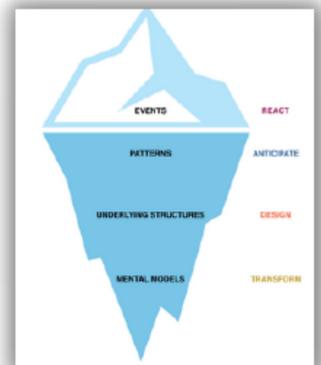
Systems thinking expands the range of choices available for solving a problem by broadening our thinking and helping us articulate problems in new and different ways.

At the same time, the principles of systems thinking make us aware that there are no perfect solutions; the choices we make will have an impact on other parts of the system.

By anticipating the impact of each tradeoff, we can minimize its severity or even use it to our own advantage. Systems thinking therefore allows us to make informed choices.

Leadership Challenge

Systems thinking is also valuable for telling compelling stories that describe how a system works.



Systems thinking is also valuable for telling compelling stories that describe how a system works. For example, the practice of drawing causal loop diagrams forces a team to develop shared pictures, or stories, of a situation.

The tools are effective vehicles for identifying, describing, and communicating your understanding of systems, particularly in groups ([source](#)).

What?

The magic is in the doing

Change from Within: Your action plan should not be a top down (supply driven) plan, nor a bottom up (demand driven) plan. It has to come from within. [See this video of Eckhard Tolle.](#)

Action learning: Focus on the process, not on the end results. Learn by doing. In teams. [See this example of action learning.](#)

System thinking: Keep looking at [the bigger picture.](#) Focus on doing the right things instead of doing things right.

Leadership: No management but leadership! Be the example you want to be. Create the supporting and learning environment your team needs to perform optimally. [See this video of Simon Sinek.](#)

Learning goals: Focus on learning goals instead (or besides) performance goals.

Trust the process: If you have organized it all, than let go! Don't manage the process to death. [See this video of Peter Senge.](#)

KISS: Your job as a L&D professional is to Keep It Super Simple. Use easy to use methods, based on the intrinsic desire of every human being to learn.



Change from within

No Change without Learning and No learning without Change!

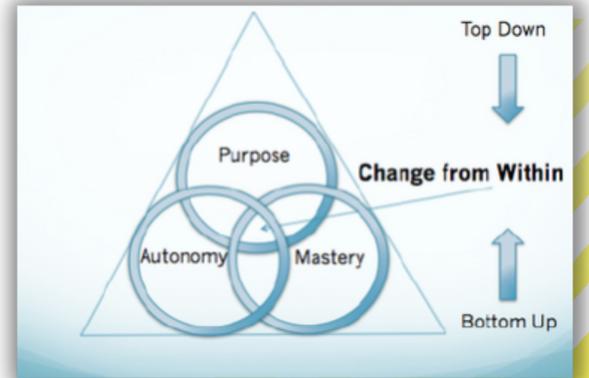
NO CHANGE WITHOUT LEARNING NO LEARNING WITHOUT CHANGE



We end this white paper with our vision on "Change from Within". This vision is based on the [ideas of Daniel Pink](#) on intrinsic motivation. It is the fundament of our thinking and doing when it comes to creating a Learning Culture.

Rule # 1: There is no change without learning. This learning is sustainable if it *'comes from within'*:

- If you experience this change / learning as meaningful (purpose).
- If you feel you are in control over this change / learning (autonomy).
- And if you have sufficient talents, skills and tools to master this change / learning (mastery).



Rule # 2: There is no learning without change!

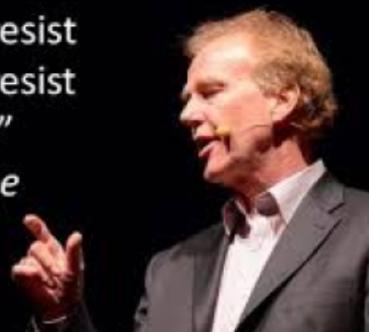
The real learning is on the edge of our comfort zone. By confronting ourselves we will discover the answers to the basic questions of life:

- Who am I?
- What am I good at?
- What do I want in live?

Through this learning process we eventually develop new attitude and behavior that fits us as a person and as a professional.

And it is this new attitude and behavior that forms the base for a learning culture!

"People don't resist change. They resist being changed."
- Peter M. Senge



MOOC & SOL

With the help of the international community of the Society for Organizational Learning (SOL) we develop a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on how to develop a learning culture.

We started the process in the beginning of 2021. We plan to finish the MOOC in november 2021.

This MOOC is focussed on professionals that work in the field of L&D (Learning & Development-, HR- or Personnel Department).

With the help of this MOOC L&D professionals can create, implement and maintain their own learning culture for teams, departments or for the organization as a whole.

If you are interested in this MOOC, please let us know via the [SOL website](#).



SOL is a non-profit organization (since 1991) with members all over the world.

A network for organizations, professionals, researchers and consultants spread over more than thirty countries / communities of practice.

Started from MIT, by Peter Senge, among others, whose Organizational Learning philosophy forms the base of our current thinking and doing.

SOL promotes the development of sustainable organizations for the benefit of people, society and the environment.

More information? Check the [SOL Global Community website](#).

The magic of a Learning Culture

Learning as a means, not as a goal!

We as members of SOL have seen the inside of a lot of organizations. In only some of them we have seen the magic happen. You feel the energy and inspiration when you enter these organizations with a Learning Culture. Staff are more open, confident, curious and active. And the leadership is focussed on facilitating an inspirational learning and working environment.

Most important learning of these best practices is that you should not focus on learning as a goal in itself, but to facilitate learning by developing a meaningful working and learning environment.

Sol Pro

The creation of a Learning Culture is not difficult. But it takes a systems approach and a long time commitment. We as SOL facilitate this process by offering memberships at our SOL Pro Community of Practice. Filled with professionals working on their own Learning Culture.

Members of SOL Pro "Learning Culture" meet each other every month online. SOL facilitates these sessions by asking one or more of these members to share a learning challenge; an example, struggle, mistake, problem or success of daily practice. Focussed on learning from and with each other.

We promote weekly (short) peer-2-peer communications. And we try to meet each other physically once every year. Evaluating last year's learnings and creating and sharing our own learning plans for the coming year.

All members have direct access to the online learning environments of all six of the Communities of Practice. Filled with tools, theories, models and best practices that can be of use to you as a specialist on learning how to learn (organizational learning, L&D, innovation, etc.).



One time Offer

Join our Community of Practice "Learning Culture".

With an introduction fee of only € 50,- for three months (normally € 37,50 per month).