

How's Your Learning Culture?

By Marcia L. Conner

Conduct a learning culture audit to begin the process of creating a learning culture and to enroll others in the effort. Although there may be no single best way to do this, using a simple diagnostic can help you assess your organization and your management team's orientation to learning. An assessment describes the characteristics of cultures that encourage learning and those that block learning. While this learning culture audit is not exhaustive and may not be in the form that will work best for your organization, it may help you assess how you are doing as a leader of a learning culture. We invite you to consider each question carefully and think about your behavior and that of your colleagues. You might also want employees to complete such a survey to get a sense of how they feel that you and the entire organization are doing. By taking organizations through this audit, you begin to demonstrate you're willing to ask tough questions and you have an interest in hearing answers that are honest rather than reassuring.

Rank your organization on each characteristic on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being always yes and 1 being always no. At the bottom, tally your numbers to determine if your organization has more of a pro-learning or an anti-learning culture. Circle the items in each category that will require special attention from you in the coming days, weeks, and years.

Learning Culture Self-Audit			
Pro-Learning Culture	1-5	Anti-Learning Culture	1-5
People at all levels ask questions and share stories about successes, failures, and what they have learned.		Managers share information on a need-to-know basis. People keep secrets and don't describe how events really happened.	
Everyone creates, keeps, and propagates stories of individuals who have improved their own processes.		Everyone believes they know what to do, and they proceed on that assumption.	
People take at least some time to reflect on what has happened and what may happen.		Little time or attention is given to understanding lessons learned from projects.	
People are treated as complex individuals.		People are treated like objects or resources without attention to their individuality.	
Managers encourage continuous experimentation.		Employees proceed with work only when they feel certain of the outcome.	
People are hired and promoted on the basis of their capacity for learning and adapting to new situations.		People are hired and promoted on the basis of their technical expertise as demonstrated by credentials.	
Performance reviews include and pay attention to what people have learned.		Performance reviews focus almost exclusively on what people have done.	
Senior managers participate in training programs designed for new or high-potential employees.		Senior managers appear only to "kick off" management training programs.	
Senior managers are willing to explore their underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations.		Senior managers are defensive and unwilling to explore their underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations.	
Conversations in management meetings constantly explore the values, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations underlying proposals and problems.		Conversations tend to move quickly to blaming and scapegoating with little attention to the process that led to a problem or how to avoid it in the future.	
Customer feedback is solicited, actively examined, and included in the next operational or planning cycle.		Customer feedback is not solicited and is often ignored when it comes in over the transom.	
Managers presume that energy comes in large part from learning and growing.		Managers presume that energy comes from "corporate success," meaning profits and senior management bonuses.	
Managers think about their learning quotient, that is, their interest in and capacity for learning new things, and the learning quotient of their employees.		Managers think that they know all they need to know and that their employees do not have the capacity to learn much.	
Total for pro-learning culture		Total for anti-learning culture	

This assessment appears in the Afterword of *Creating a Learning Culture: Strategy, Technology, and Practice* by Marcia L. Conner and James G. Clawson (Cambridge, 2004) and online at <http://www.agelesslearner.com/assess/cultureaudit.html>

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