As we all know, to stay ahead of competitors, companies must constantly enhance the way they do business. But more performance-improvement programs fail than succeed. After all, how can organizations respond creatively to new challenges without first discovering something new—then altering the way they operate to reflect new insights?
Without learning, companies repeat old practices, make cosmetic changes, and produce short-lived improvements. To transform your company into a learning organization, Garvin recommends mastering five activities:

Instead, generate hypotheses, gather data to test your hypotheses, and use statistical tools such as cause-and-effect diagrams to organize data and draw inferences. Systematically search for and test new knowledge. Use small experiments to produce incremental gains in knowledge. For instance, Marlene Fiol and Marjorie A. Some, for example, believe that behavioral change is required for learning; others insist that new ways of thinking are required? What policies and programs must be in place? What concrete changes in behavior are required? What policies and programs must be in place? How do you get from here to there? Most discussions of learning organizations finesse these issues.

Their focus is high philosophy and grand themes, sweeping metaphors rather than the gritty details of practice. Three critical issues are left unresolved; yet each is essential for effective implementation.

First is the question of meaning. We need a plausible, well-grounded definition of learning organizations; it must be actionable and easy to apply. Second is the question of management. We need clearer guidelines for practice, filled with operational advice rather than high aspirations.

And third is the question of measurement. Without this groundwork, progress is unlikely, and for the simplest of reasons. For learning to become a meaningful corporate goal, it must first be understood.

Surprisingly, a clear definition of learning has proved to be elusive over the years. Most scholars view organizational learning as a process that unfolds over time and link it with knowledge acquisition and improved performance.

But they differ on other important matters. Scholars have proposed a variety of definitions of organizational learning. Here is a small sample.

Marlene Fiol and Marjorie A. Some, for example, believe that behavioral change is required for learning; others insist that new ways of thinking are enough. Some cite information processing as the mechanism through which learning takes place; others propose shared insights, organizational routines, even memory.

And some think that organizational learning is common, while others believe that flawed, self-serving interpretations are the norm. How can we discern among this cacophony of voices yet build on earlier insights?

As a first step, consider the following definition: A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights. This definition begins with a simple truth: new ideas are essential if learning is to take place.

Sometimes they are created de novo, through flashes of insight or creativity; at other times they arrive from outside the organization or are communicated by knowledgeable insiders. Whatever their source, these ideas are the trigger for organizational improvement. But they cannot by themselves create a learning organization.

Without accompanying changes in the way that work gets done, only the potential for improvement exists. This is a surprisingly stringent test for it...
rules out a number of obvious candidates for learning organizations. Many universities fail to qualify, as do many consulting firms. Even General Motors, despite its recent efforts to improve performance, is found wanting. All of these organizations have been effective at creating or acquiring new knowledge but notably less successful in applying that knowledge to their own activities.

Total quality management, for example, is now taught at many business schools, yet the number using it to guide their own decision making is very small. Organizational consultants advise clients on social dynamics and small-group behavior but are notorious for their own infighting and factionalism.

And GM, with a few exceptions like Saturn and NUMMI, has had little success in revamping its manufacturing practices, even though its managers are A Practical Approach to the Study of Form in Music 1st edition on lean manufacturing, JIT production, and the requirements for improved quality of work life.

Organizations that do pass the definitional test—Honda, Corning, and General Electric come quickly to mind—have, by contrast, become adept at translating new knowledge into new ways of behaving. These companies actively manage the learning process to ensure that it occurs by design rather than by chance. Distinctive policies and practices are responsible for their success; they form the building blocks of learning organizations.

Learning organizations are skilled at five main activities: systematic problem solving, experimentation with new approaches, learning from their own experience and past history, learning from the experiences and best practices of others, and transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization.

Each is accompanied by a distinctive mind-set, tool kit, and pattern of behavior. Many companies practice these activities to some degree. But few are consistently successful because they rely largely on happenstance and isolated examples. By creating systems and processes that support these activities and integrate them into the fabric of daily operations, companies can manage their learning more effectively. This first activity rests heavily on the philosophy and methods of the quality movement.

Its underlying ideas, now widely accepted, include: Most training programs focus primarily on problem-solving techniques, using exercises and practical examples. These tools are relatively straightforward and easily communicated; the necessary mind-set, however, is more difficult to establish.

Accuracy and precision are essential for learning. Employees must therefore become more disciplined in their thinking and more attentive to details.

They must push beyond obvious symptoms to assess underlying causes, often collecting evidence when conventional wisdom says it is unnecessary. Xerox has mastered this approach on a company-wide scale. Employees are provided with tools in four areas: generating ideas and collecting information—brainstorming, interviewing, surveying—reaching consensus—list reduction, rating forms, weighted voting—analyzing and displaying data—cause-and-effect diagrams, force-field analysis—and planning actions—flow charts, Gantt charts.

They then practice these tools during training sessions that last several days. The result of this process has been a common vocabulary and a A Practical Approach to the Study of Form in Music 1st edition, companywide approach to problem solving.

Once employees have been trained, they A Practical Approach to the Study of Form in Music 1st edition expected to use the techniques at all meetings, and no topic is off-limits. This activity involves the systematic searching for and testing of new knowledge. Using the scientific method is essential, and there A Practical Approach to the Study of Form in Music 1st edition obvious parallels to systematic problem solving.

But unlike problem solving, experimentation is usually motivated by opportunity and expanding horizons, not by current difficulties.

It takes two main forms: ongoing programs and one-of-a-kind demonstration projects. Ongoing programs normally involve a continuing series of small experiments, designed to produce incremental gains in knowledge. They are the mainstay of most continuous improvement programs and are especially common on the shop floor.

Corning, for example, experiments continually with diverse raw materials and new formulations to increase yields and provide better grades of glass.

Building a Learning Organization


Students of form develop perceptual tools that allow them to proceed from the aural experience to an understanding of the arch-principles upon which music is organized.

The authors hold that the organizing principles of a given piece of music may be gleaned from studying the internal attributes that give a section its specific identity, the functional relations between sections, the ordering of those sections. Get A Copy. Paperbacks. More Details Original Title. Other Editions 2.

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Practical Approach to the Study of Form in Music by Peter Spencer


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