

## Organizational Learning: Building Capabilities

By Darlene Chambers, Ph.D.

Economic uncertainties and continual technological innovations have literally changed the face of doing business. Competitors often strike quickly, unexpectedly, and unconventionally. In response, many companies seek a competitive advantage by embracing such strategic initiatives as price manipulation, product improvement, and reduced design-to-shelf cycle time.

Today however, more organizations have begun to realize that promotion and price may be more quickly duplicated whereas leveraging

“Learning is not compulsory...

neither is survival.”

- W. Edwards Deming



## Information Station

**Four building blocks an organization must achieve on its way to building learning capabilities include:**

- 1. Identify and measure current organizational learning characteristics:** Design interventions to overcome specific barriers and shore up those practices that are favorable to creating and sustaining knowledge and informational sharing.
- 2. Establish a supportive learning environment:** Develop a culture which appreciates differences, is open to new ideas, and provides reflection time.
- 3. Develop concrete learning processes and practices:** Use, practice, and share knowledge in systematic and clearly defined ways.
- 4. Leadership that reinforces learning:** Actively question and listen to employees – and thereby prompt dialogue and debate – so that people in the organization feel encouraged to learn.

learning capabilities are not as easily replicated. Learning has become a critical skill to ensure the adaptation to changes that cannot be controlled and to learn from the ones that can.

What does a learning organization look like? Much of the organizational learning literature seems to involve a debate about whether or not whole organizations can learn and many just take the approach that organizational learning is the sum total of the individual learning occurring in the workplace.

Peter Senge, author of “The Fifth Discipline,” is most cited in support of a whole systems approach to building knowledge capacity. His vision of a learning organization depicts a group of people who help their firms cultivate tolerance, foster open

discussion, and think holistically and systemically through the mastery of five disciplines – systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning.

Building capability through organizational learning will take a shift of shared responsibility to the entire enterprise and a support for the development of wisdom along with expertise.

*Darlene Chambers, Ph.D. Vice President of VistaGroup, specializes in performance management.*

**Save the Date!**

“High Performance Organizational Model” Webinar

Wednesday, July 22nd  
from Noon - 1:00pm eastern



VistaGroup is dedicated to helping organizations produce improved business results. We do this by building system-wide focus and alignment, which instills the confidence and commitment to take action. If organizational performance or the pace of organizational improvement is a concern, VistaGroup can help.

VistaGroup is committed to helping organizations align people and processes with the intent of building competitive advantage. Let us help you begin today - *moving ideas to action.*



## Book Pick of the Month

**How Organizations Learn: An Integrated Strategy for Building Learning Capability**

By Anthony J. Dibella and Edwin C. Nevis

Shifting from individual to organizational learning involves a non-linear transformation clearly outlined by the authors who use an insightful mix of theories from Argyris to Senge, case studies, models, and a set of how-to-tools providing both an academic and practical read on how organizations learn and collectively build system and talent capacity.

### *Dibella and Nevis map an integrated approach to learning on a "Cycle of Three Processes"*

- Creation or Acquisition – give meaning to information so that creation of knowledge becomes basis for action
- Dissemination – process to transmit and share
- Use – to alter decisions, behavior, and culture

# Organizational Learning

# VistaView



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Facilitated by:

Mark Frasco  
President

&

Darlene Chambers, Ph.D.  
Vice President

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