

KM Executive Brief No. 2 Lessons Learned Meeting[©]

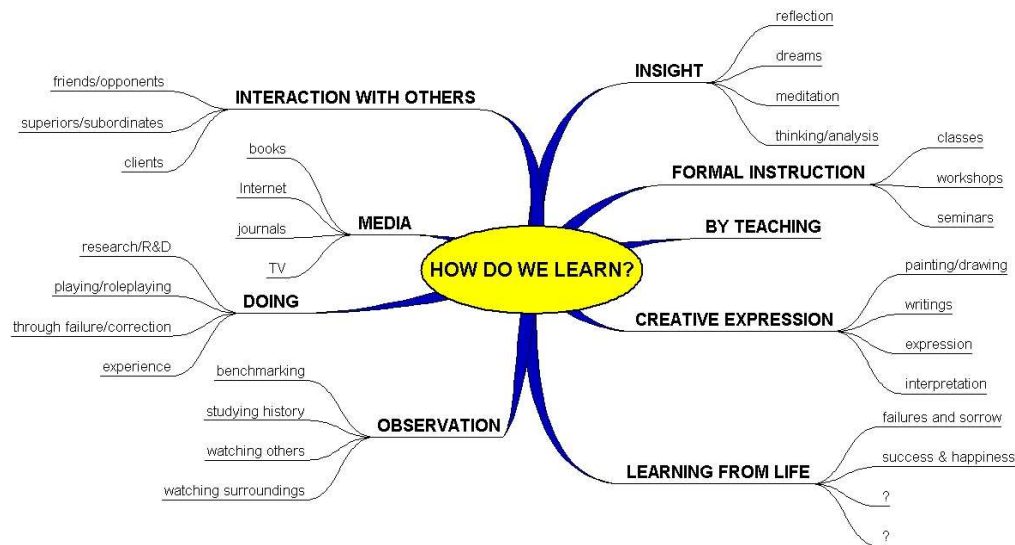
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How Do We Learn?

We asked a group of educational planners and administrators from the Ministry of Education of Malaysia the question, "How do we learn?" After their answers were clustered and mapped, the result was the following mind map:



It became clear to everyone that formal schooling is only one of many ways of learning. We recognized that learning does happen in almost everything we do, individually and socially. Learning is embedded in living. However, except for formal instruction, most of this learning is unintended and unplanned. In other words, most of the learning we gain from daily living is

Learning is **embedded in living** but this process is often **unconscious**.



often not a conscious process.

Etienne Wenger (1998), a leading researcher and writer in the field of learning and communities of practice developed a social theory on learning based on the assumptions that (a) learning is as much a part of human nature as eating and sleeping and (b) learning occurs naturally through our active participation in the practices of different social communities.

More Notes on Learning

1. Learning is inherent in human nature and linked to the ability to create new meaning.

Learning is integral to our lives involving the whole person. It is not a separate activity that can be taken up and put down. It is rather a life long process, a flow and expansion of the self. We form our reality in thought, then transform it in action, and from this action comes new learning, new formation and new transformation (Brian Murphy 1999). Organic growth comes from people internalizing a vision which transforms into a mission. Physicist David Bohm (1995) reminds us of the importance of being open to the fundamental shift of mind from seeing the world as being made up of things that are separate, fixed, and resistant to change, to a world that is open, full of possibilities, and primarily made up of relationships.

2. We note, too, that learning creates emergent structures.

The process of emergent structures occurs through continual individual, institutional, organizational and communal transformation. It involves redefining vision, strategy, and performance expectations. The drive to recreate is similar to the adaptive nature of biological organisms that evolve time. It assumes that an individual or an organization is free to create each moment that is experienced anew in response to how the external environment is changing. Essentially, once a sequence of events is set into motion, it can be interrupted at any point and a new direction can be established (William Guillory 1997).

David Bohm used to say that the tree does not grow from the seed. The seed rather is the aperture through which the tree gradually emerges by organizing the processes of growth which eventually bring forth the tree. The nature of the aperture rests in the spirit that shapes the undertaking. (William Isaacs 1999).

Learning evolves another rhythm with more creative pauses in it, more adjustment to individual needs, and new and more alive relationships.

3. Learning is experiential and social, connecting people in a shared process

Learning is **inherent** in our human nature.

Learning creates **new meanings** and **new structures**.



of participation.

Experience develops in us a subjective awareness of the character of reality and the dynamic relation between a perceived reality and self. Learning helps us draw insights from phenomenon and infuse them with meaning and value. Learning is neither imposed nor 'revealed'; it is personal, flowing from our direct experience, and integrated with our subjective awareness of self and reality.

The learning process becomes more productive in the social realm when it involves dialogue and the sharing of perceptions concerning common phenomena being investigated. Dialogue maximizes the variety of perceptions, insights and alternative conclusions from which eventually we are able to conclude an interpretation of the reality under scrutiny. The benefit of a pool of information, perceptions and vantage points in the process of dialogue enhances the whole learning process involving people in the experience of shared learning (Brian Murphy 1999).

Learning involves listening to both self and the other in a 'participative universe'. This principle builds upon the realization that individuals are active participants in the living world, a part of nature as well as observers of it. Bohm suggests that each part of the universe is enfolded into every other part. Like language and music, every word, every note, is interconnected. This principle is best depicted in the concept of the hologram.

4. Learning is about engagement.

Our presence is the fundamental gift that we bring to the human community. It is the foundation of all other opportunities and interactions, of everything that is meaningful in our lives. The learning process is one in which we perceive the meaning of our lives as a dedicated search for the Truth, a search which starts from the deeper layers of our own inner world and manifests itself outwardly in new forms of praxis and co-action, and in friendship and solidarity with others engaged in the same search. (Majid Rahnema 1997).

The strategy in realizing this principle is to externalize our vision rather than internalize the external dilemmas we confront. (Brian Murphy 1999).

Engagement is about achieving what needs to get done. It celebrates the diversity and difference that is present in an environment of dialogue and carries it forward in the habit of practice.

Engagement involves a dialogical process wherein people are encouraged to go beyond the trees and view the woods/forest. It is a dynamic process, vibrant with the energy of sensitivity and co-creation.

Learning is a **social process** of forming shared meanings.

Learning comes from **dialogue** in a human community.



5. Learning is about imagination.

This principle requires reflection. It challenges ones underlying assumptions, the reasons for the way we think and act. It gives rise to generative dialogue in which we begin to create entirely new possibilities and create new levels of interaction. A new kind of mind begins to come into being which is based on the development of a common meaning that is constantly transforming in the process of dialogue. (William Isaacs 1999).

It works on the realization that we are free to interact and transact within our environment. It is the exercise of this freedom which allows us to transcend and remake the human status in which we find ourselves and move towards the essential human possibility that we can be.

As Murphy emphasizes, both imagination and vision are the cutting edge of knowledge. The process he says of formulating questions and creating a range of possible answers is a function of the imagination, of vision. The limits that are imposed upon learning are then imposed upon us by our own imagination and vision lack of it.

6. As a living experience learning is self-related.

This principle implies that all learning is subjective – self related. It begins with the individual's quest to the answer 'Who am I and where am I going?' In the process of understanding the phenomenon of self/Self we being to transcend ego and appreciate the desire to realize our relationship with others and our environment. In fact the process of learning is the essential substance of the content of learning (Brian Murphy 1999).

In 1972 UNESCO in its final report of the International Commission on the Development of Education for a just, equitable and humane world, came up with the document "*Learning to Be, The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*".

In the words of the Latin American social analyst Hector Dada, "we spend our lives talking to ourselves. One long conversation, the most meaningful and profound we will ever have. If we cannot talk well to ourselves, there is little hope for our intercourse with others".

Getting Practical

How do we bring these realizations about learning into the practical world of daily living and working? How can we make learning a conscious process, both personally and organizationally?

The freedom to **transcend our assumptions** brings about learning.

Learning is a process of personal **reflection**.



Ask yourself this question:

Estimate what percent of what you know now came from what you learned from school.

Most of those we asked this question gave a figure much less than 50%.

What does that mean? It means we learn much – often much more – from doing than from listening to a lecture and reading a book or manual. More knowledge is gained from doing than from formal schooling. The workplace is a greater school.

From the results of a Stanford University research, the converse is also true: in the workplace, we tend to apply more the knowledge we gained from the workplace than those we gained from school.

According to University of Southern California Marshall School of Business Professor Morgan W. McCall, Jr. 73 percent of surveyed MBA program graduates in the U.S. said that their MBA skills were used “only marginally or not at all” in their first managerial assignments.

Stanford University Professors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton noted that despite 1,700 business books published yearly (1996 data), \$60 billion spent on training, an estimated \$43 billion spent on management consultants, and 80,000 MBAs doing business studies, the changes in actual management practice is, correspondingly, disappointingly little (The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action, Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

After four years of studying this “knowing-doing gap”, they concluded:

“...one of the most important insights from our research is that knowledge that is actually implemented is much more likely to be acquired from learning by doing than from learning by reading, listening, or even thinking.”

These findings destroy our cherished assumptions about the value of academic degrees.

These findings tell us what is actually happening to most of us, yet we are not aware of these; and so we continue to prefer learning from books and from lectures, or from schools.

The lesson is this: for more effectiveness, knowledge application and knowledge acquisition processes must occur within contexts as close together as possible. We must consciously alter our preferences away from academic

We learn more from **doing** than from reading or listening to lectures.

The **knowing-doing gap**: we know so much from schooling and research yet so little gets used in the workplace.

Knowledge we use at work is more often the knowledge we **gained from work**.



learning. Our preferences must be biased towards the lower right corner in the table below.

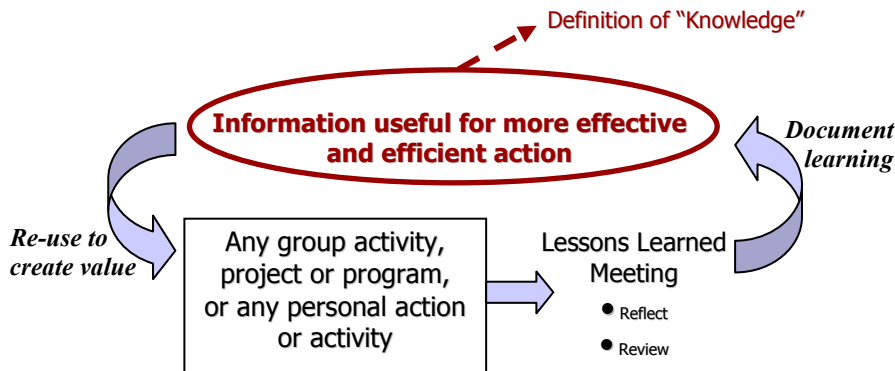
	Outside the Work Setting	Within the Work Setting
Immediacy		
Remote from use	Academic degree programs, Professional journals	Corporate universities, In-house training programs
Proximate (before or after use)	Case studies, Industry benchmarks and best practices	Work templates & manuals, After-action reviews, Lessons-learned meetings (or post-mortems)
Immediate (during use)	Management games, Computerized simulations, Role playing	Process documentation, Learning-in-action, On-the-job training

For best results, knowledge application and knowledge acquisition must occur **within the same context.**

Consequently, the practical questions the knowledge manager must address is this: How do we facilitate learning from doing? Conversely, how do we facilitate reuse of such learning in further doing?

In an organization, group or community, learning is a social process. So, the operative question really is: How can these doing-learning-doing processes be facilitated in a group or team context? In short, what are the tools of Team Learning?

The partial answer to the last question is Lessons Learned Meeting or LLM. The chart below explains the significance of LLMs.



Facilitate **learning from doing**; facilitate **doing from learning.**

LLM is **reflection** after action.



An LLM should be conducted at the end of any activity, no matter how short or long, among those who performed the activity, to document their answers and insights on the following questions:

- What worked, or what worked well? Why?
- What did not work? Why?
- What were the facilitating and hindering factors?
- How differently should we do it the next time around to improve effectiveness and efficiency?

The answers will be useful to those who will repeat the same or similar activity under the same or similar context. Therefore the answers must be documented and made available in a convenient and easily accessible way.

The answers to the “why” questions above can be significant. A “why” question can uncover unconscious assumptions (read: limiting mental boxes). Awareness of one’s assumption creates the opportunity to examine, and if needed to revise, those assumptions (read: freeing oneself from a limiting mental box). Out-of-the-box thinking is a golden door of opportunity to innovate something that works even better than a current “best practice”.

“What worked well” or “what works best” refer to current good or best practice. Out-of-the-box thinking can produce a future “next practice”. Documenting a good or best practice for replication is good but it is simply copying from the past; innovating “next practice” is better as it is creating something completely new for the future. It means extending the envelope of productivity and effectiveness farther than everyone else.

A second or third “why” question addressed to the answer to the first “why” question can lead to root-causes of problems. It can lead to re-framing an issue or problem statement from a larger or systemic perspective, or based on a more relevant context. It can lead to asking personal questions such as, “Why do I keep doing what I do?” “What are my unconscious behavioral patterns and where did they come from?” It can lead to more conscious scrutiny of what Peter Senge calls our “ladder of inference” – the often unconscious way we reason out and make conclusions or decisions based on what we believe are the facts.

Documentation from an LLM is explicit knowledge. It makes available to others useful lessons and valuable insights by those who performed an activity that otherwise would remain tacit, unconscious or forgotten. From our definition of “knowledge” (see KM Executive Brief No. 1), the information in this document qualifies to be called knowledge – namely, information useful for more effective and efficient action.

As an evaluative tool, an LLM is similar to project evaluations or

“Knowledge” is defined as **what works**.

“Why” questions are important.

Innovating “next practice” is better than copying best practice.

LLM converts **tacit to explicit** knowledge.



organizational assessments, but there are important differences. The table below shows those differences.

	Project Evaluation	Organizational Assessment	Lessons Learned Meeting
Purpose	To assess outputs against project objectives	To assess performance against mandated functions	To document learning and know-how developed/tested
User	Project manager; project owner/financier	Administrator of organization or higher body	People who will repeat a project or activity
Focus and Question	Project outputs: How well did the project achieve its objectives?	Organizational performance: How effective and efficient?	Knowledge: What were workable tools, processes and arrangements?
Nature of Learning	Learning by project manager and owner (vertical learning)	Learning by administrator or higher authorities (vertical learning)	Learning by practitioners or implementors (horizontal learning)
A Tool of –	Project management	Business or Public Administration	Knowledge management

The purpose of LLM is different from that of a project evaluation

Project evaluations and organizational assessments benefit mainly executives or project owners. They learn from project evaluations. LLMs on the other hand are for the benefit practitioners; so that people who perform similar activities can learn from each other.

The former is a kind of vertical or autocratic learning, the latter is a more horizontal or democratic learning. Both kinds of learning are important and should take place in organizations, but of course the former is the more prevalent or common. In a learning organization, the latter should occur more – everyone in the organization should be into learning and innovation.

Among the valuable knowledge an LLM can uncover or recover are:

1. New skills learned or developed
2. New tools, procedures, work templates, checklists, measuring instruments, forms, manuals, organizational arrangement, positions, etc. designed, tested, developed or validated
3. New linkages or networks set up, relationship of trusts gained

The above knowledge can be gathered from various phases of a project: project development, implementation, cooperative arrangements with stakeholders.

LLM is one of the tools that the Center for Conscious Living Foundation had developed and tested for Team Learning. LLM facilitates group learning from

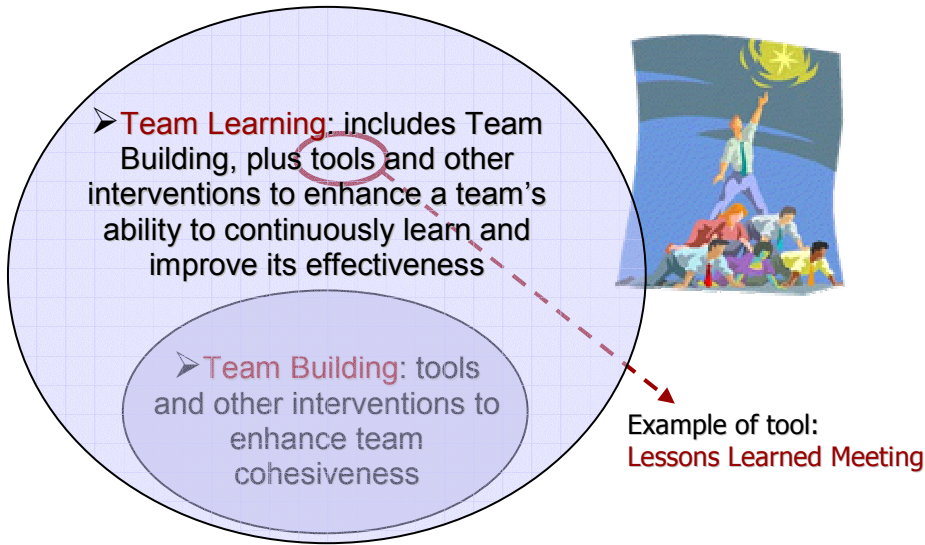
LLM promotes horizontal, democratic and **wholesale learning.**



group doing.

Team Learning is a group process of continuous learning and improvement of team effectiveness and productivity. For us in the Center, the ordinary Team Building is a precursor and part of a larger process of Team Learning. According to Peter Senge, Team Learning is one of the habits or disciplines of a Learning Organization.

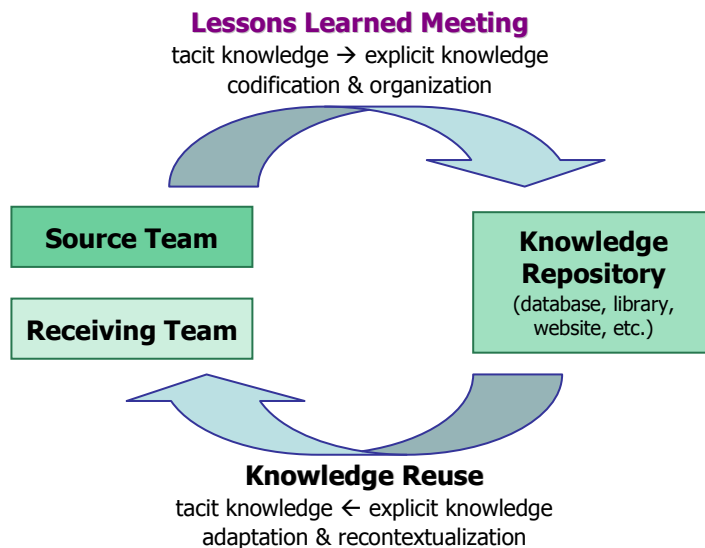
Team Building is but a precursor and part of Team Learning.



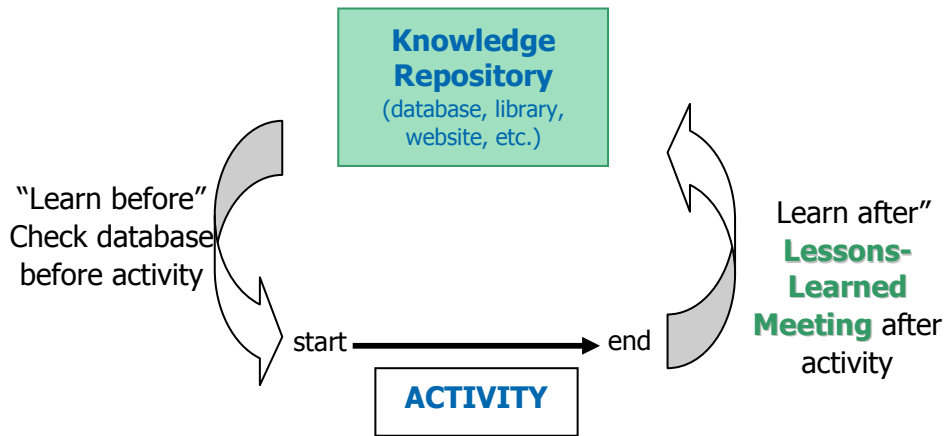
Team Learning is one of the **habits** of a Learning Organization.

Team Learning is the people side of the processes in an Organizational Learning Brain. LLM is a process of "mining" individual tacit knowledge and

LLM is **mining** or surfacing tacit knowledge.



converting it to explicit group knowledge, which can then be conveniently multiplied and shared for wider use and benefit. The explicit group knowledge can be stored, organized, retrieved and managed as a knowledge repository or knowledgebase – the information technology side of an Organizational Learning Brain. Group explicit knowledge, when accessed, applied and adapted or re-contextualized by a member in another work area is thereby reconverted into that member’s new or incremental individual tacit knowledge. The system consisting of this constant conversions and enrichments between individual tacit knowledge and group explicit knowledge, between learning from doing and doing from learning, and between face-to-face LLM and ICT-mediated knowledge repository, can be called the Organizational Learning Brain. The repository of knowledge



codified from LLMs (and other knowledge capture/creation processes) is a growing, living repository – like the brain of a living organism that a dynamic and responsive organization is very similar too.

As a matter of habit in a learning organization, the repository is consulted before starting an activity – check what were the lessons learned from previous groups who performed the same or similar activity. As the figure above shows, there is learning before an activity (retrieved from the knowledgebase) and there is learning after the activity (contributed to the knowledgebase).

The LLM is one of the tools for facilitating group learning processes. There are other knowledge capture and knowledge culture/creation tools. Dialogue is another tool.

LLM is generates inputs for an **Organizational Learning Brain.**

Learn before and learn after every activity.

Learning in a group or social context addresses the problem of fragmentation we experience in our world and moves us to enquire together into the organic unity and relatedness between ourselves and the world of life. It brings to bear the untapped potential of what has been called the art, the magic, the miracle of “dialogue”.

William Isaacs, in his book “Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together”, describes dialogue as:

- a shared enquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together.
- a living experience of inquiry within and between people.
- the unimagined parts of a conversation.
- a process of coming to shared meaning from which shared action arises.
- an effort to reach new understanding in order to form a whole new basis from which to think and act.
- harnessing collective intelligence.

Dialogue engages us at three levels of expression:

- the voice and language of meaning (the true: objective science)
- the language and voice of feelings (the beautiful: aesthetics)
- the language and voice of power (the good: ethics, collective action)

Dialogue ultimately is about reflection in action.

In the days of my (William) involvement with the university student movement we were aware that education had become more about absorbing information than about learning. This led to a feeling of disconnect and fragmentation which we experienced deep within ourselves and in the world around us.

Awareness came with getting intimately in touch with our own experience of the world and that of the “other”. The exposure and the immersion into the world of the “other”, revealed to us the fragmentation that we felt within ourselves leaving us both vulnerable and with a deep desire to search for the meaning of it all. It required that we learn to listen with a deep sense of humility and openness.

The quest for meaning which began with looking at our own lives extended beyond “ourselves” to the world around us. The search invited us to look at the social, cultural, economic, political, and religious context that we lived and moved in expanding even across the boundaries of nations in order to find wholeness. We began to see the woods from the trees.

As we learned to listen, we discovered that the journey to wholeness flowed

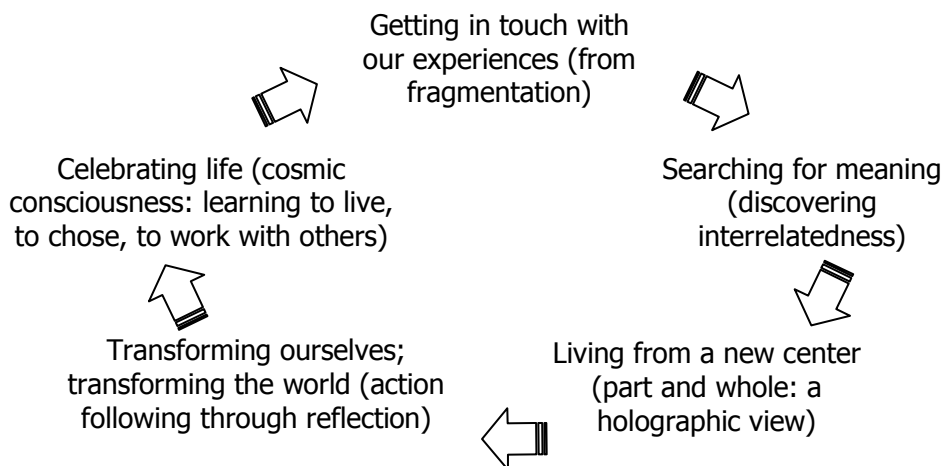
Dialogue is learning together.

Dialogue is the art and technology of thinking and deciding together.



back to ourselves encouraging us to look at how our own thoughts and actions are formed and motivated. From that initial starting point of fragmentation we had moved to think and act now from the appreciation of wholeness and our commitment to a learning path which was transformative.

What began with looking at “our experience” had set in motion a learning process that poured itself out in a continuous spiral of action-reflection-celebration-action:



Dialogue is cyclic **action-reflection-celebration-action.**

Learning as reflection in action happens when we realize that we have found our way and that we must move along it. It is that point from which there is no longer any turning back.

Facilitating Team Learning is both an art and a technology. It relies on skillful use of both information technology and people skills, of facility with the external world of action and with the internal world of reflection. It is a technology because procedures such as knowledgebases, search engines and LLM exist to facilitate team learning. It is an art because organizational learning is more like tending a garden than fixing a machine:

GARDENER METAPHOR	MECHANIC METAPHOR
An organization is more like a living organism.	An organization is more like a machine.
Organizational greening	Fixing a machine
Maria Montessori’s method	Henry Ford’s assembly line and replaceable parts
People skills	ICT technologies





Besides Lessons Learned Meeting, other tools and service packages the Center for Conscious Living Foundation has developed and delivered to various clients along **organizational greening** include: Filipinized Organizational Climate Survey, Learning Organization Diagnostics[®], Green Spot[®] Strategic Planning Workshop, Tapping into Your Creative Wellsprings, Problem-Finding Workshop, Logframe Workshop, Team Learning workshop series, Training of Team Learning Facilitators and Personal Learning Mode workshop series.

Organizational greening is both an art and a technology.





William



Apin



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"Awareness creates choice for change."

