Learning in Teams

Bruce Britton
and *Olivier Serrat*

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ADB

What's in a Word?

Virtual	• Face-to-Face
Temporary	• Permanent
Self-Managing	• Externally Directed
Multi-Disciplinary	• Single Discipline
Field-Based	• Office-Based
Multi-Cultural	• Single Culture
Strategic Focus	• Operational Focus
Routine Tasks	• Unpredictable Tasks
Small	• Large
Energizing	• Enervating

Of Teams and Teamwork

Team

- A group of people who need each other to accomplish a result

Teamwork

- A process whereby a number of people with complementary skills become committed to a common purpose and reach agreement on specific performance targets and indicators, a working approach, and mutual accountability

Characteristics of Effective Teams

They tap the diverse knowledge, skills, experience, and interests of members.

They generate more creative responses to challenges than individuals.

They catalyze fresh ideas for new products and services, better processes, and profitable strategies.

They hone the leadership abilities of members.

They carry out their mission with dedication, energy, and efficiency.

They engender feelings of satisfaction and pride among their members.

They channel conflict into productive directions.

They learn from the individual and collective experience of members.

Characteristics of Team Members

They share a common goal or purpose.

They must collaborate and coordinate their activities to achieve this purpose.

They identify themselves as part of the team.

They have regular and frequent interaction with each other (which need not always be face-to-face).

They are prepared to give up their individual autonomy to the extent necessary to achieve the team's goals.

They support one another.

They are energized by co-working and learn from each other.

Why Learning is Important in Teams

- As work becomes more complex and the consequences of decisions and actions involve greater risks, individual experience becomes a less reliable basis for learning.

- The products of learning not only make teams more effective, the process of learning can be team-building.

- Teams capture, formalize, and capitalize expertise on behalf of the organization.

- By doing so, knowledge becomes shared and less dependent on individuals who may leave the organization.
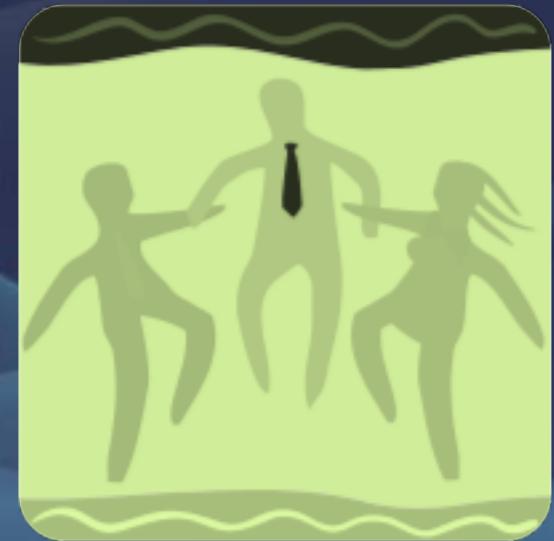
Learning in Teams

Learning in teams requires reflective practitioners but is more than the sum of individuals learning.

Team learning occurs as the members of the group discover together how best to contribute to the performance of the group as a whole.

Team members learn from and about each other, how to work effectively as a group, and how to apply that knowledge to achieving the purposes of the group.

Not all groups in the workplace are teams, but all groups can achieve collective learning.

Because they share goals put value on member interaction, teams can usually achieve deeper collective learning than other types of work groups.

Learning Needs Throughout Team Development

Forming

How to accelerate team cohesion

Understanding team dynamics

Creating a safe and trusting environment

Storming

Emotional intelligence

Conflict management and resolution

Listening and information sharing

Feedback skills

Norming

Emotional intelligence

Situational leadership

Listening and information sharing

Decision-making

Performing

How to evaluate and improve team productivity

Avoiding groupthink in the team as a whole

Personal and career development

Ending

Preparing for the end of the team

Taking stock of what the team has learned

The Wisdom of Crowds

James Surowieski

- Under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them. Groups do not need to be dominated by exceptionally intelligent people in order to be smart. Even if most of the people within a group are not especially well-informed or rational, it can still reach a collectively wise decision.

Individual Learning

Individual learning is not just about gaining knowledge and skills: it is about personal growth and development, increasing self confidence, changing attitudes, and working more collaboratively.

Individuals learn in many different ways: their preferences relate to the four stages of the experiential learning cycle.

The Experiential Learning Cycle

Team Dimension:
Joint Planning

Team Dimension:
Coordinated Action
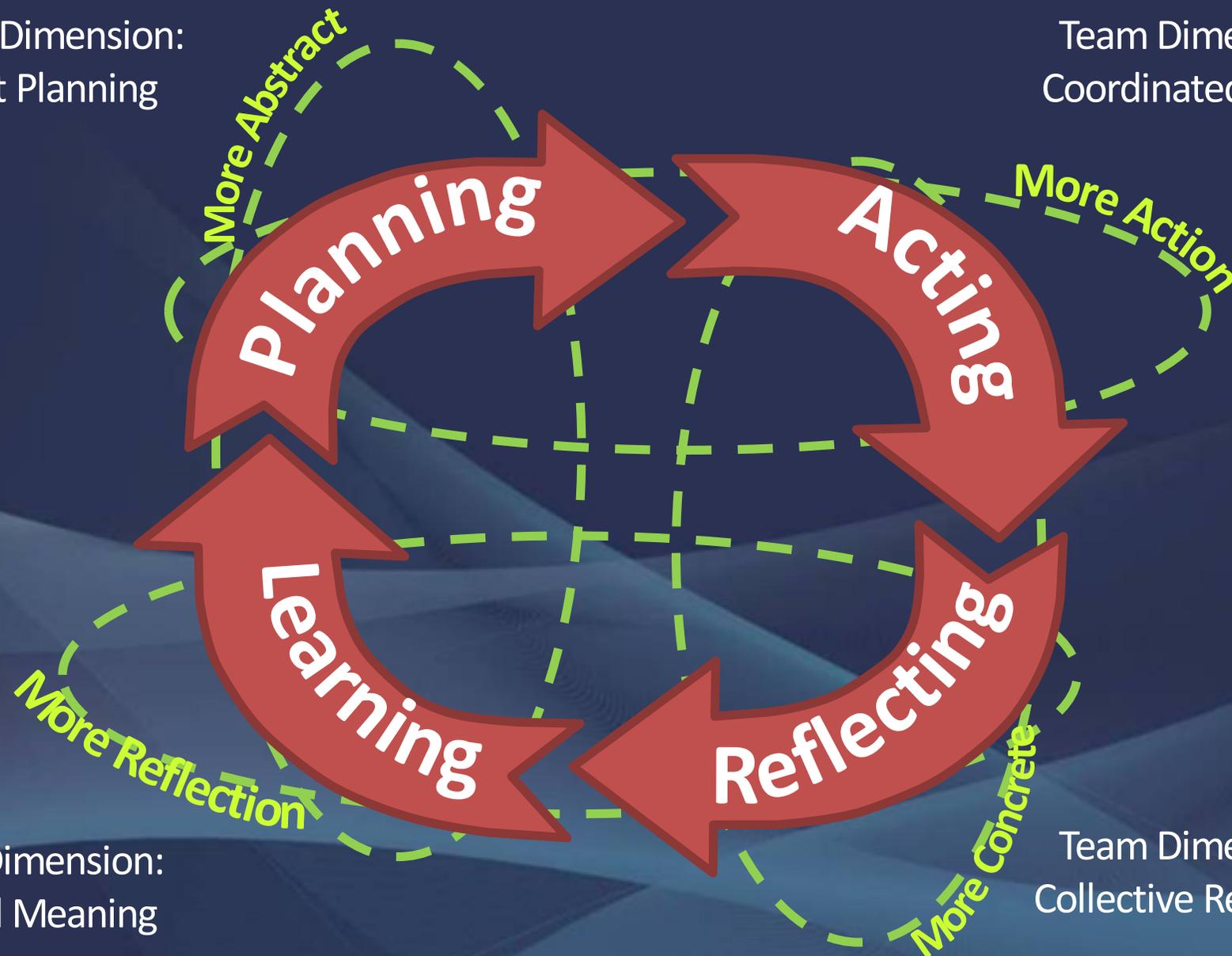
Team Dimension:
Shared Meaning

Team Dimension:
Collective Reflection

More Abstract

More Action

More Reflection

More Concrete

Planning

Acting

Reflecting

Learning

Collaborative Learning

- Collaborative Learning is a relationship among learners that requires
    - Positive interdependence (a sense of sink or swim together)
    - Individual accountability (each of us has to contribute and learn)
    - Interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence (communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution)
    - Positive interaction (ideally, face-to-face)
    - Joint reflection on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better
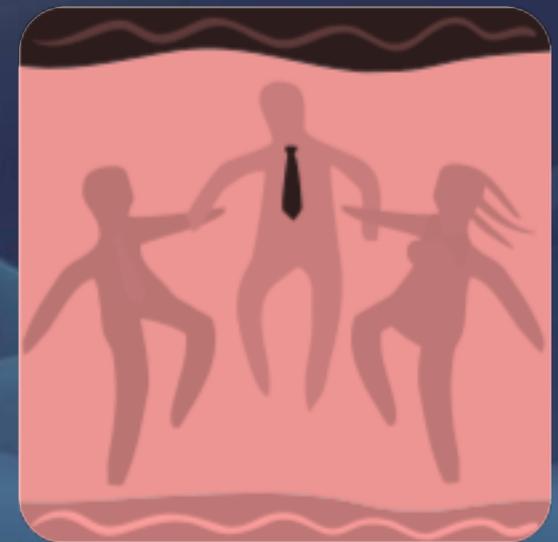
Features of Learning Teams

Learning teams know that they are dependent on learning for their success.

They are made up of reflective practitioners who are willing and able to collaborate and learn together.

They need members who have learning preferences that, together, cover all four stages of the experiential learning cycle.

They regularly reflect on their progress, assess their performance, examine what they have accomplished, identify what they have learned, and put that learning to use.

Benefits of Learning in Teams

Learning in teams helps

- Uncover new information
- Limit individual biases
- Create synergy
- Build a comprehensive picture of a situation, event, or process
- Ensure well-reasoned, meaningful actions
- Facilitate action that has broad ownership

Requirements of Radical Collaboration

Collaborative Intention—Individuals maintain an authentic, non-defensive approach, and make a commitment to mutual success.

Truthfulness—Individuals commit to telling and listening to the truth, and help create a climate that fosters this.

Self-Accountability—Individuals take responsibility for their circumstances, choices, and the intended or unforeseen consequences of these. They find a solution rather than someone to blame.

Self Awareness and Awareness of Others—Individuals commit to knowing themselves deeply and are willing to explore interpersonal issues. They seek to understand the concerns, intentions, and motivations of others.

Problem-solving and Negotiating—Individuals use problem-solving methods that promote a cooperative atmosphere.

Strategies for Building Collaboration

- Go first—be proactive.
- Be open about your intent to collaborate.
- Pay attention to responses.
- Keep talking—and listening.
- Forgive quickly—and move on.
- Conduct regular reviews and monitor progress.
- Use "interest-based" problem solving to negotiate disputes.

On Learning Environments

A learning environment is

- An organizational climate that enables, encourages, values, rewards, and utilizes the learning of staff both individually and collectively.

In a learning environment

- Learning is seen as a legitimate activity
- Learning is encouraged and supported
- Learning is given adequate resources
- Learning and courage are rewarded
- Experimentation is encouraged and learning from mistakes is valued
- Obstacles to learning are identified and overcome
- There are few if any undiscussable subjects

On Red and Green Zones

Red Zone:
Low Trust
High Blame
Anxiety
Guardedness
Rivalry
Denial
Risk Avoidance
Cynicism
Suspicion
Sarcasm
Withholding
Threats
Hiding Mistakes
Many Undiscussables
Defensiveness

Green Zone:
High Trust
Dialogue
Honesty
Mutual Support
Sincerity
Optimism
Cooperation
Friendly Competition
Shared Vision
Learning from Mistakes
Openness for Feedback
Ethical Behavior
Internal Motivation
Contribution
Flexibility

Contrasting Red and Green Zones

Indicators of Learning Teams

Colleagues are genuinely inquisitive.

Colleagues ask questions of each other, and constructively challenge each others' assumptions.

Errors are identified and dealt with but without blame.

Colleagues feel safe to expose problems. There are no undiscussable "elephants in the room."

Colleagues network widely and regularly bring new ideas into the team.

Colleagues use a range of tools and methods for learning and sharing.

The team displays 'Green Zone' behavior.

Obstacles to Learning in Teams

They believe they do not need to learn.

They lack the courage to learn.

They lack the will to learn.

They lack the ability to learn.

They are prevented from learning by external factors they cannot control, including (i) overwhelming workloads, (ii) limited opportunities for team learning, (iii) lack of managerial encouragement, and (iv) lack of resources.

Tools and Techniques for Learning in Teams

- Action Learning
- Reframing Matrix
- After-Action Reviews and Retrospects
- Peer Assists
- Critical Incident Technique
- Learning Before, During, and After
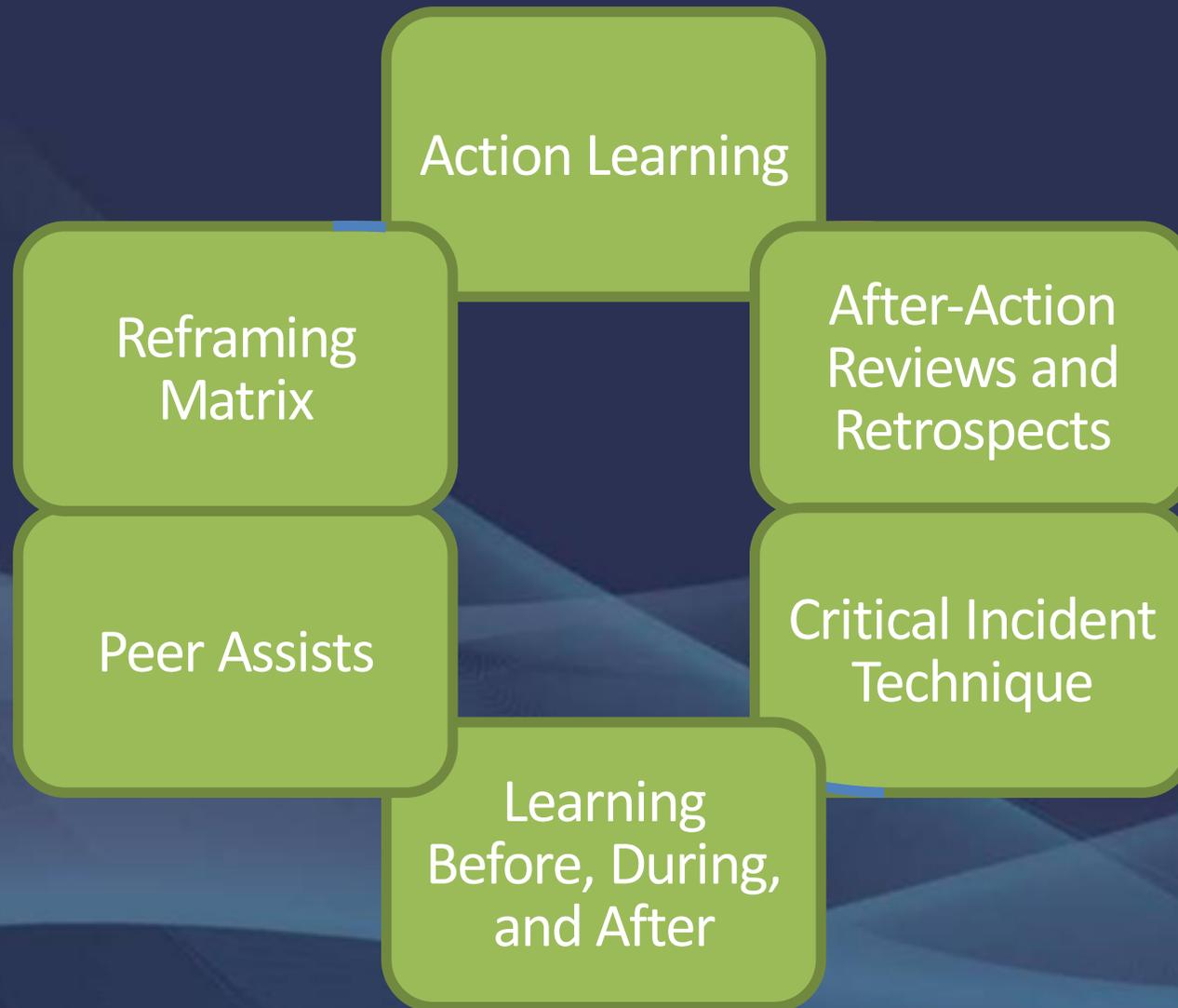
Groupthink

- Groupthink refers to faulty decision-making in a group.
- Groups experiencing groupthink do not consider all the alternatives, and they desire unanimity at the expense of quality decisions.
- Groupthink occurs when groups are highly cohesive and/or when they are under considerable pressure to make a decision.
- Groupthink also occurs when groups have low levels of emotional intelligence.
- The symptoms of groupthink include group feelings of superiority, conformity, active filtering, and reconstructing reality.
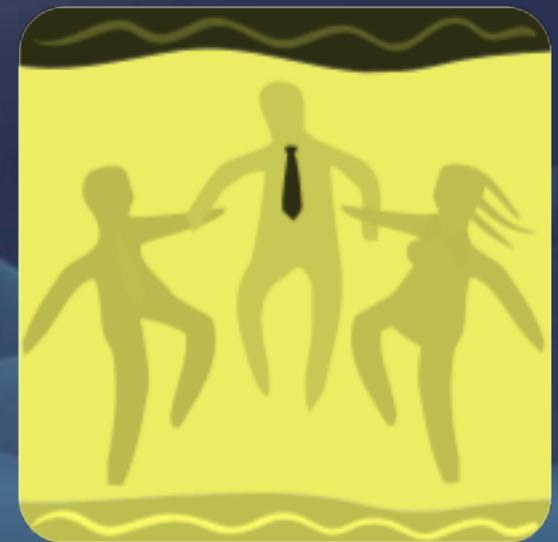
Negative Effects of Groupthink

Teams that exhibit groupthink

- Rapidly accept the current idea.
- Examine few alternatives.
- Are highly selective in gathering information.
- Do not seek expert opinion.
- Have no contingency plans.

Avoiding Groupthink

- To avoid groupthink
  - Use subgroups
  - Build in internal checks
  - Invite alternative perspectives
  - Reappraise the rightness of your cause
  - Introduce more diversity in the team by promoting
    - Different perspectives on problems
    - Challenge to assumptions and the status quo
    - Opportunities for greater learning
    - Skills and background that complement one another
- Strengthen relationships between the team and outsiders
- Use communities of practice
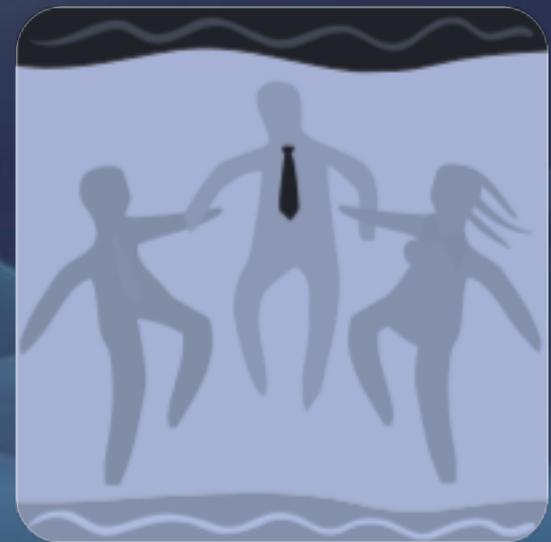
The Devil's Advocate

A devil's advocate is someone who takes a deliberately provocative or challenging position on an issue arising from a view which they may not actually hold. The person does this to determine the validity of others' positions or simply for the sake of argument.

A devil's advocate can be used intentionally to test assumptions and challenge the validity of thinking. They are particularly useful at the reflection and learning stages of the experiential learning cycle.

What Jazz Can Teach Us About Leading Learning Teams

- Develop individual competence.
- Create opportunities for reflection during and after action.
- Challenge habits and conventional practices.
- Ensure everyone has a chance to solo from time to time.
- Cultivate supportive practices.
- Design more interdependence into tasks.
- Create environments that value errors as sources of learning.
- Balance control and spontaneity.
- Look outside the team for new ideas.

Creating the Motive, Means and Opportunity for Learning

Providing Models, Methods, and Support

- Ensure conceptual clarity
- Offer models and methods
- Support the competences necessary to learn
- Supply specialist assistance
- Invest financial resources
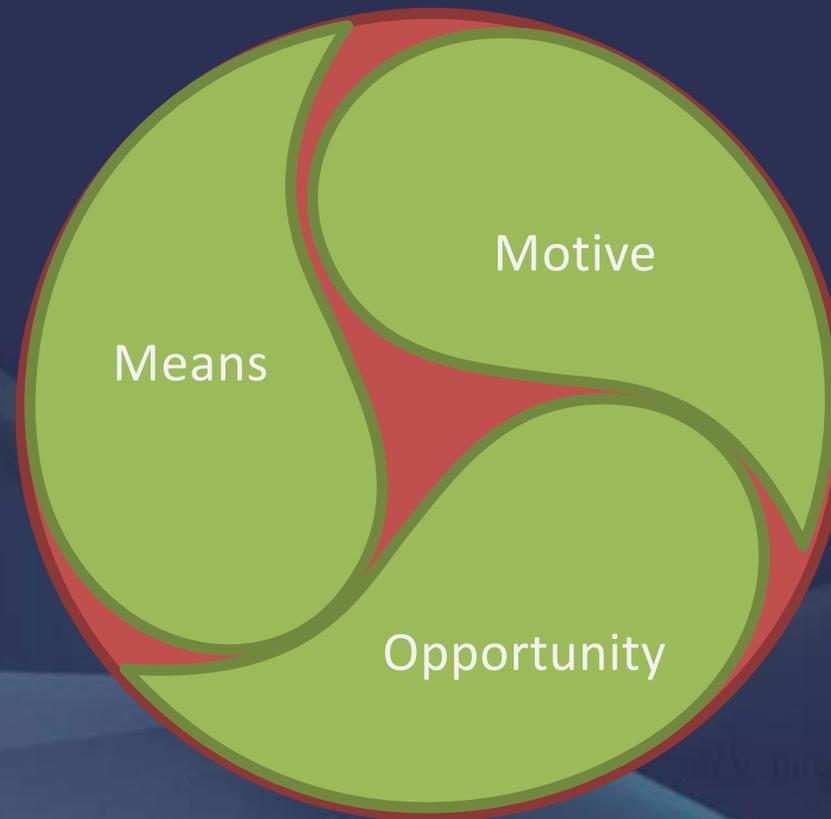
Understanding Learning and Why It is Important

- Ensure supportive leadership
- Develop and sustain a learning culture

Motive

Means

Opportunity

Opening a Space for Learning

- Make organizational learning a strategic goal
- Integrate learning in the project cycle
- Invest in knowledge management infrastructure
- Build relationships of trust

The Role of Leader in a Learning Team

- Create the motive for learning: help team members understand why learning is important to them, their team, and their organization

- Provide the means for learning: develop team members' understanding of models and methods for learning; help them develop the competences required, and provide support and guidance to them

- Create the opportunity for learning:
open up the "space" for team members
to reflect on their work,
get exposure to new ideas,
and test out new thinking with others
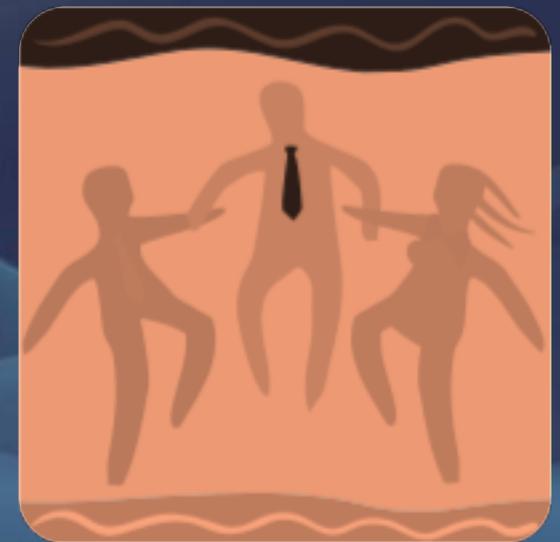
Why Formal Leaders May Worry About Learning in Their Team

Learning is about change, and change, by definition, upsets the "status quo."	Learning involves team members taking initiative not just doing what they are told.	Learning requires time and may therefore be perceived as reducing the time for "action."	Learning can have unpredictable outcomes—so is not open to control.	Learning leads to personal growth—valued team members may leave the team to take on more responsible positions.

What Learning Teams Can Do to Support Their Leaders

Develop as reflective practitioners.

Participate in communities of practice.

Put the team's reputation before personal ambition.

Ensure that shared understanding of purpose guides action.

Stick to agreed principles for working collaboratively.

Help create a Green Zone environment.

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Bruce Britton

Organizational Learning Specialist
Framework
bruce@framework.org.uk
www.framework.org.uk

Olivier Serrat

Principal Knowledge Management Specialist
Regional and Sustainable Development Department

Asian Development Bank

knowledge@adb.org

www.adb.org/knowledge-management

www.facebook.com/adbknowledgesolutions

www.scribd.com/knowledge_solutions

www.twitter.com/adbknowledge