

Learning and Learning Organization

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What is learning?

Cambodian traditional context: learning means going to school and listen to teacher. Rout learning was commonly known in the old Cambodian education system. Students perceive that teachers have higher knowledge, and there are expectations of getting a “right” or “wrong” answer for any question asked by the students/participants. In Cambodian culture, teachers (in Khmer: Kru) often get a lot of respects from students.

In development context, learning is connected with change. Any change in behavior implies that learning is taking place or has taken place. Often, people learn from their past experience and mistakes. Learning is not just listening to a teacher or facilitator, but it is a process of sharing, exploring, and thinking, analyzing, discovering, and practicing. Learners have active roles in the leaning process. The participatory learning or the so called “learner centre approach” suits best in the development context because it develops learner’s ability to think, analyze and draw out the learning or solutions by themselves.

What is a learning organization?

In Cambodia, up to now, the concept of learning organization seems still new and not yet widely and deeply understood by many organizations.

Peddler et al defined a learning organization as “**an organization, which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself**”. The purpose of a learning organization is for the organization growth and survival.

In his article "NGOs as a Learning Organization", James Taylor, Director of CDRA (South Africa), wrote four characteristics for a learning organization:

1. It is not defined as one which learns, but as an organization, which learns **consciously**.
2. The organization achieves "**improved practice**". The organization is able to implement the required “actions” to address identified challenges and problems, and therefore improve its practice.
3. The organization learns **continuously** in achieving an appropriate balance between reflection, learning and action.
4. The organization develops the means and ability to exploit fully its own actions and **experience** as a primary source of learning.

What about your organization?