

Value of Being a Learning Organization

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Learning is simply thought of as the ability to acquire new knowledge, skills or insights that have the potential to influence behavior; this continuously takes place in all activities at different levels and speeds.

A learning organization (LO) is one that facilitates the ongoing learning of all its members and is constantly changing to maintain best practice, to stay up to date with research, and to build a larger knowledge base. It is also an organization where a group of people may work together to collectively enhance their professional and personal capabilities in an area that they really care about. Within a LO members are encouraged to learn and to develop their full potential and are presented with many opportunities to do this. Many service providers who support children with special needs strive to be learning organizations, since learning is often placed first among priorities in the child's program as well. Ongoing learning and staff training has been shown to improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

LO's often have an advantage over other organizations because they value each member and everyone is viewed equally. This kind of organization also feels that everyone is both a learner and a teacher; everyone engages in lifelong learning. Some benefits to being a learning organization include:

- Everyone benefits when people apply shared knowledge and experiences
- Everyone expands their skills set and knowledge base, rather than just one person excelling
- Everyone is given the opportunity to share strengths and seek guidance from others

Individuals in a learning organization are able to gain insight and understanding through experimenting, observing, and analyzing both successes and failures in practice. As well, increased knowledge can be obtained through professional development opportunities.

Research also indicates that successful LO's tend to create more effective professional development. They focus on the issues that matter most to the organization by bringing in experts and guest speakers who are knowledgeable on specific issues. Professional development in a LO also works to ease communication by involving technology, providing content knowledge and practical strategies to use, reflecting on scenarios and engaging individuals through hands on learning. Professional development also encourages team members to work together to problem solve and provide feedback through regular follow-ups. LO's provide valuable opportunities to their staff to enhance their knowledge base and improve skills.

Ongoing learning not only benefits the organization, but staff and families as well. In the area of special needs, the knowledge base is ever expanding, making staff training a valuable component of service delivery.