

ORGANIZE TO LEARN

SUSTAINABLE CHANGE AND THE FOUNDATION FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND GROWTH.



Whitepaper.

earlybridge.

PEOPLE DRIVEN CHANGE

INTRODUCTION.

In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity have become the norm. Disruption is now a constant threat to companies, which must continuously adapt to survive.

To be future-proof, organizations must develop strategies that not only consider the unexpected but also prioritize agility and resilience. And at the heart of any successful strategy are employees who bring insight, intention, and involvement to the table to create a culture of adaptability and employee engagement.

The challenge: continuous change

Implementing change can be challenging. The nature of change management and psychology are often at odds. Change management encourages us to think outside the box and try new things, while psychology teaches us that people tend towards stability, comfort and ease. This can make any transition difficult: reorganizations, new team members, new strategies, new projects and market events. Leaders need to be aware of the tension between the need for change and people's natural desire for stability. This is something that leaders need to actively manage in order to successfully navigate periods of transition.

The change capacity of an organization, the extent to which it is agile and resilient, determines how well employees are able to anticipate and respond to changing circumstances. Focusing on the learning capacity of an organization can encourage people to contribute as part of a collective learning process. Fear of judgment and rejection often prevent people from fully contributing. This fear creates uncertainty, which means that opportunities are missed, ideas are not shared and innovations are not identified or realized. When individuals stagnate, so too does the growth of an organization. However, by focusing on their capacity to learn and grow, this power of change can be used in a way that motivates people to collaborate as part of a collective learning process. By doing so, organizations are able to access the power of transformation which further boosts agility and resilience.

Organizations that prioritize learning have a competitive advantage in the market. A learning organization is one that values continuous learning and growth, both individually and collectively. Such organizations create a culture of innovation, creativity, and collaboration. In a learning organization, employees are encouraged to experiment, take risks, and learn from their mistakes. These organizations are more agile and responsive to changes in the market, and they have higher employee engagement and retention rates.

ORGANIZE TO LEARN.

Organize to Learn is a concept aimed at stimulating and guiding a collective learning process. It makes sure that an organization keeps developing by trying new things and adopting a vision that everyone can get excited about. By constantly pushing boundaries, new behavior can emerge. *Organize to Learn* is the way to make sure that an organization can keep changing for the better.

Amy C. Edmondson is Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School. Her books and research have been an inspiration since 2012. Edmondson focuses on how an organization can transform into a 'learning organization' and is known, among other things, for her research on *teaming*. *Organize to Learn* provides the foundation to make *teaming* a success as the building block of an agile and learning organization.

Teaming

Teaming refers to the practice of collaborating across functional and hierarchical boundaries to achieve a shared goal or objective. In a business context, *teaming* is increasingly important as companies face complex challenges that require diverse perspectives and expertise. *Teaming* involves bringing together individuals with different skills, backgrounds to work collaboratively on a project or initiative. This may include individuals from different departments or business units, as well as external partners or stakeholders.

To successfully team, business executives must foster a culture of collaboration and open communication. This includes creating an environment where individuals feel empowered to share their ideas and perspectives, and where there is a shared sense of purpose and commitment to the project or initiative.

Effective *teaming* also requires strong leadership, with leaders who are able to facilitate communication and collaboration, while also providing direction and support. This may involve setting clear goals and expectations, providing resources and support to team members, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the team.

Teaming plays an important role in an organization's success when:

- **People have multiple tasks, and there is a lot of freedom and minimal supervision.**
- **People have to switch between situations with a high level of communication and tight coordination.**
- **There is value in gathering multiple perspectives from different disciplines.**
- **People need to collaborate remotely or from different locations.**
- **Pre-planned coordination is impossible or unrealistic due to the changing nature of the job.**
- **Complex information must be processed, translated into insights and applied quickly.**

Ultimately, *teaming* can help businesses to leverage the diverse skills and perspectives of their workforce to drive innovation, solve complex problems, and achieve shared objectives. By promoting collaboration and cross-functional communication, businesses can create a culture of agility and adaptability that is essential for success in today's rapidly changing business environment.

Case example

During the Corona crisis, the EarlyBridge team was starting an important change project to activate and grow leadership capabilities to help an organization become more self-reliant. When the Corona lockdown started, all employees of the client started working from home almost immediately. Managers were challenged to lead from a distance. The program had to be converted from a live learning program to a remote learning program, the needs of the participants changed, the possibilities for learning interventions changed, the need for technology skyrocketed and communication had to be revamped. Rapid response and a high degree of collaboration with the client was necessary.

The EarlyBridge team and the client had to ensure that the 70+ participants seamlessly switched to an online learning environment, with different processes, different learning interventions and a new online learning platform; the ultimate challenge under pressure. The team came together, determined the core needs and the necessary actions, and set parallel workflows in motion, so that a new digital online live program with remote business coaching started within a week.

This way of working is an example of how agile organizations and teams respond to changing circumstances, looking for resources and materials everywhere. Because we had no frame of reference, we improvised and experimented together. It was the cycle of a learning team: doing, pushing boundaries, falling down, learning and going at it again in dynamic and changing circumstances.

From concept to practice

Most organizations have traditionally been structured according to the 'organize to execute' concept, in which change is achieved through a careful and controlled project and program management approach. The '*Organize to Learn*' concept involves a change in mindset, behaviors, and the ways of working in favor of continuous learning.

Organize to Learn is a powerful approach to building a learning organization. By implementing the principles of *teaming*, organizations can create an environment that fosters collaboration innovation and continuous learning by:

- ▶ **Challenge the status quo**
- ▶ **Experiment with alternatives**
- ▶ **Engage around diversity and inclusion**
- ▶ **Create awareness vitality and well-being**
- ▶ **Encourage creativity and experimentation**
- ▶ **Free up energy and ideas for innovation and growth**

In doing so, a culture of openness, curiosity and eagerness to learn is fostered.

The EarlyBridge model for Organize to Learn

The EarlyBridge model provides a holistic approach to organizational learning and growth, emphasizing the importance of both interpersonal dynamics and working methods. By focusing on developing strong relationships, promoting diversity and skill development, and providing effective leadership, organizations can create a culture of learning and innovation that can drive long-term success.

This results in a quadrant model for Organize to Learn:



Figure: EarlyBridge model Organize to Learn

The 4 quadrants are important to achieve a successful implementation of *Teaming*.

Quadrant 1: Connecting people with purpose

This quadrant focuses on the combination of interpersonal dynamics and motivating people towards achieving the organization's goals. It emphasizes the importance of having an inspiring vision that connects people with purpose. When people engage around a shared vision and ambition, they are more motivated to realize it. A shared vision can also help to attract and retain top talent, as people are naturally drawn to organizations that have a compelling and meaningful purpose.

An example of an inspiring vision is:

patagonia®

- Build the best product
- Cause no unnecessary harm
- Use business to inspire
- Implement solutions to the environmental crisis

Patagonia has effectively propagated this vision and acted consistently with it. The vision engages the organization and is realized by the employees for their customers.

Quadrant 2: Strengthening adaptability and diversity

Increasing adaptability and resilience challenges leaders to stimulate the intrinsic motivation of individuals and teams and to develop their knowledge and skills.

Creating autonomy requires leaders to provide direction, create room to maneuver and demand results by:

- ▶ **Distributing information and placing the responsibility for making decisions with the people who have the best information.**
- ▶ **Giving authority and freedom, with the aim of enabling people to act.**

By managing the energy and talents of people, autonomy and self-reliance can grow, leading to a stronger learning culture with three guiding principles:

- 1 **Change as a constant catalyst for learning**
- 2 **Curiosity as a lens to look through to gain new perspectives and learn from them**
- 3 **Continuous growth as a basis for human development**

Being adaptable and resilient means that leaders are inspired by the perspective of others. An example of this is the surgeon who operated on himself and, as a patient, hated his doctor standing next to his bed. Based on this experience, he always sat next to the bed of his own patients, demonstrating the importance of empathy and putting oneself in other people's shoes.

To break through the status quo:

- **Invite disrupters to challenge conventional thinking**
- **Allow other generations a voice at the table**
- **Inject diversity into conversations**
- **Inspire creativity with new ideas and experiments**
- **Reframe failure as an opportunity for growth**

Quadrant 3: Leverage mental models

Mental models enable teams to work together more efficiently and effectively by aligning their thinking and decision-making processes. They also help to avoid misunderstandings and promote a common understanding of the problem at hand, leading to better solutions and outcomes.

If you ask people to draw a car in five seconds, there is a good chance that everyone will draw roughly the same car. That is a strong mental model. The task of the leader is to create or discover those mental models together during the development and learning process and to use them as clear and trusted frameworks on which people can rely.

Strong Mental Models:

- **Are clear and recognizable, easy to understand and translate into your own environment**
- **Provide frameworks and offer guidance for people**
- **Arouse sincere curiosity**
- **Are part of the vernacular and internal communication**
- **Mirror the change agenda and safeguard the ways of working**

Leaders can facilitate the development of strong mental models by encouraging open communication and collaboration among team members, promoting active listening and empathy, and providing feedback and coaching to help individuals and teams refine their thinking and approaches.

Quadrant 4: Psychological safety

In this quadrant leaders continually work to create an environment where people feel safe to speak up, give each other feedback, and make choices. Individuals dare to share their thoughts and views and teams learn through action and reflection to gather, share, combine and apply knowledge together. Organizations with a high degree of psychological safety experience higher productivity, higher innovative capacity and strong employee engagement (source: McKinsey, February 2021).

Leaders can cultivate psychological safety by:

- ▶ **Encouraging open and honest communication and feedback, without fear of retribution or negative consequences; giving people room to express doubt, to be insecure and to ask the ‘why’ question.**
- ▶ **Recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives and ideas, and creating a culture of inclusivity and respect.**
- ▶ **Leading by example and modeling vulnerability, admitting mistakes, and showing empathy and understanding.**
- ▶ **Encouraging experimentation and learning from failures.**
- ▶ **Providing support and resources to help individuals and teams achieve their goals.**

Creating a psychologically safe environment can be challenging, but it is essential for building trust and fostering collaboration. When individuals feel safe to share their thoughts and ideas, they are more likely to contribute to the collective knowledge of the organization and to take risks that lead to innovation and growth.

The **EarlyBridge Organize to Learn Model** provides a useful framework for leaders to navigate the challenges of creating a learning organization. By understanding and addressing the challenges of interpersonal dynamics and the way of working, and by focusing on the core tasks of motivating and facilitating, leaders can create a positive and productive work environment that supports organizational growth and success.

For leaders, the big challenge lies in four areas:

- 1 **Giving people space to make their own choices in how they get their jobs done based on ownership and their competences.**
- 2 **Leveraging people’s strengths and talents, because ownership leads to revenue improvement, well-being, innovation and less turnover (source: Gallup 2021).**
- 3 **Avoiding quiet quitting: preventing people from disengaging and no longer actively contributing (source: Fortune Magazine, Sept 2022).**
- 4 **Being open to the input of others and developing individuals and teams.**

CONCLUSION.

Organize to Learn is a powerful approach to building a learning organization. By implementing the principles of *teaming* theory, organizations can create an environment that fosters collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning. In today's rapidly changing world, organizations that embrace *Organize to Learn* will have a competitive advantage in the market and will be better equipped to navigate the challenges of the future.

ABOUT EARLYBRIDGE.

EarlyBridge sets organizations in motion. We build bridges between people, between leaders and their teams. Because results start with people. EarlyBridge develops and implements leadership and team development programs. We help organizations, teams and individuals break out of ineffective patterns and break through to new levels of performance. Through a combination of advice and training, we translate strategy into action through a combination of theory and practice to contribute to sustainable behavior change.



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