PANEL THEME: The Role of Mentoring in Shaping the Thriving Learning Organizations of the Future

1. ***How would you define a learning organization? What is your personal definition of a learning organization?***

The global pandemic has emphasised the perception that our world is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Considering the many global challenges that we are facing including climate change, inflation and war, people and organisations need to adapt quickly to an ever fast-changing environment. In this context, a learning organisation uses its assets and resources, particularly its human capital to find new solutions to new problems. Learning is based on curiosity, experience, reflection, and action. When these principles are embedded in the organisational culture, leadership, and business processes, the organisation can learn, adapt, and thrive.

2. ***Peter Hawkins says that the greatest challenge of organizations today is to learn faster than the speed of change around us. What makes it difficult, in your view, for companies to transform into learning organizations? Please feel free to name all the challenges you notice + the reasons why you see that particular aspect as a challenge.***

Learning is not easy, for individuals and organisations alike. There are three key challenges for becoming a learning organisation. First, drawing on learning theories, learning is a complex process. For example, the stages of development of adults often include a period of discomfort, yet conducive of learning. This stretch zone, also called the "proximal zone of development" by Vygotsky, varies from one individual to another. Indeed, individuals approach learning with various levels of motivation, readiness, openness, and preferences. Similarly, organisations develop in various ways. Therefore, a "one-size-fits-all" approach to becoming a learning organisation is not appropriate.

Second, diversity - age, culture, ethnicity, gender, etc. is an opportunity but also a challenge for deploying a uniform, structured and centralised approach to training, upskilling, and reskilling the workforce. Organisations need to develop diversity and cultural intelligence to adapt to the specific needs of different groups in its workforce and create further engagement.

Third, it takes time to reflect, define new actions and embed them in our daily life. At organisational level, it takes time to implement change. However, managers and employees perceive time as a scarce resource and consequently feel under pressure to deliver. With the rise of mental health issues in the workplace, it is vital to re-think processes, to re-design how we work, and re-focus on our organisational purpose. In sum, organisations may lack the structural agility and mindset needed to become adaptive and resilient.

3. ***What will it take for us to see more organizations (corporate, public, NGOs) turning into learning organizations in the near future?***

As organisations are facing complex global challenges, they need to identify and engage with multiple stakeholders to design collaboratively new solutions. These stakeholders include primarily its workforce and clients/customers/target audience. As coaches and mentors, we can support their strategic thinking by asking leaders: "What can we do as an organisation to support our employees so they can deliver the service/good needed now?; what can we do differently?; what are our under-used assets and resources?".

Besides, external stakeholders include local and international suppliers, governments, local communities, which are key partners to consider. Additional questions may include: "How to capitalise the learning gained from internal and external stakeholders? How may cross-fertilisation operate? How to design new ways of working effectively and sustainably?". In times when global supply chains are disrupted and employees often disengage from their organisation, trust-based leadership seems critical to develop learning and resilient organisations.

4. ***What role does mentoring - and mentors - play in the transformation of organizations into learning organizations?***

Mentoring is a powerful approach to share knowledge, experience, and establish long-term trustworthy relationships. However complex, the problems that organisations face can be explored through the lens of experience and existing knowledge. We need to start somewhere! Mentors have a critical role to play in developing learning organisations. The role of mentors is to share their social capital, experience and understanding of underlying mechanisms of collaboration across multiple stakeholders. By doing so, they help to bridge old and new approaches, and avoid repeating the same mistakes. Their role is also to support the development of employees, at a cognitive, behavioural, and emotional levels. Particularly, they have an important

role as connectors in the new hybrid and digital world or work, where they facilitate connection-focused conversations to ensure that employees are engaged and feel supported.

Karine Mangion-Thornley, 05/10/2022