



Key Organizational Concepts in Evidence-informed Practice

There are many factors important to the successful implementation and sustained use of evidence-informed practice. On this page we outline the key organizational and individual factors that require assessment and focus when implementing evidence-informed strategies. This information and more can be found in the PART guidebook, *Organizational Change in Child Welfare*.

What you will find on this page:

- Organizational Culture
- Organizational Climate
- The Learning Organization
- Leadership

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture consists of deeply rooted patterns of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of the groups or teams that make up an organization. Organizational culture is both a product *and* a process related to the distinct environments that affect each organization. The culture of an organization may include several sub-cultures. Culture develops within all organizations in response to external influences, facing and solving problems, and the integration of new behaviours and practices. Culture is passed on as new individuals and groups join an organization.

The different values, beliefs, and assumptions that are shared through organizational cultures are ones that have historically been beneficial for group members; even when they are not viewed as positive for the organization as a whole. Culture has been referred to as the 'glue' that holds everything together. Language, norms, values, rituals, and daily routines form part of a meaningful reality that shapes how and what people do as they work. It is these events and processes that produce and maintain culture.

Research: organizational culture influences worker factors such as stress, burnout, and turnover.

Organizational Climate

Organizational climate is the understanding between the individuals who make up a group or team about their perceptions of the influence that the workplace environment has upon their wellbeing and ability to effectively complete tasks.

The *perception* of events is crucial to organizational climate. Perception is unique to each individual's interpretation of their subjective experiences. Links between workplace stress, caseload, and job design have been found to contribute to the organizational climate. While organizational culture is relatively stable, organizational climate is much more temporary and vulnerable to changes in individual perceptions.

The Learning Organization

The concept of the **learning organization** can provide a roadmap to highlight ways in which links between traditional practice knowledge and continuous learning can be forged through collective collaboration, creative thinking, and strategic action.

Individual learning, although a necessary feature of the learning organization, cannot contribute to an organization's growth and development without mediation through a collective process of knowledge translation.

Where learning organizations are concerned, individual learning does not refer exclusively to traditional models of training or education. Learning organizations and organizational learning are supported, and in some ways held together, by a culture that values distributed, multi-levelled, and ongoing learning processes within and outside of the workplace.

Continual Self-improvement

Individuals are the cornerstones of learning organizations. An organization cannot grow unless its individual members are committed to continuous learning and self-improvement. Members of learning organizations are required to take personal responsibility and cultivate attitudes of lifelong learning in order to stay on top of developing trends in professional knowledge and skill. They are also expected to share their knowledge with their peers and with the organization as a whole. The commitment to ongoing personal and professional development and learning is based on a sense of personal vision that guides and motivates self-improving action.

Continual Transformation and Improvement

Learning organizations engage in deliberate self-reflection about the ways in which what they learn shapes *what* they do and *how* they do it. This allows the structure of service provision, and of the organization itself, to be informed by an ever-evolving

understanding of the context of their work. An organization that develops mechanisms to think critically about the nature of the relationships and processes connecting its internal components and external influences (the organizational system) will be in a better position to uncover and learn from the deeper patterns that exist between everyday events and details. Organizational cultures that support such reflection value honest, collective thinking, and collaboration based on trust to orient action towards continuous improvement of service delivery and outcomes.

Shared Vision

The kind of culture that supports constant improvement requires a shared vision that inspires commitment across all individuals, departments, and levels of an organization. Individual visions can be connected through forums for open, lateral communication that evaluate ideas and search for solutions using available data, and hearing from a variety of different perspectives. These forums do not necessarily value “expert” answers more than any others, but pursue open-ended outcomes that can reinforce organizational self-reflection. Skilled leadership remains crucial to their success. Leaders of learning organizations understand that shared visions are not imposed from above or found in technical planning processes. They must act as stewards and teachers, encouraging others to understand how their personal visions engage with and contribute to those of the organization as a whole.

Team Learning

Teams are the hubs around which individuals within a learning organization collaborate and share their knowledge and experience. They also provide a (relatively) safe environment within which experimentation can occur and from which mistakes can be learned. Just as the organization as a whole must cultivate an overall culture of learning, teams can provide a manageable forum through which skilled individuals can collaborate to produce knowledge that is greater than the sum of individual training and experiences. The team environment can incorporate official policies, procedures, and training opportunities with the ability to create informal lessons from practice and personal histories. Team leadership is important for facilitating this process, but leadership can come from any team member. Proactive team leadership cultivates commitment to the team, and thus the organization, and encourages creativity. In a learning organization, teams are encouraged to share gained knowledge while minimizing the politics and resistance that may define more traditional organizations.

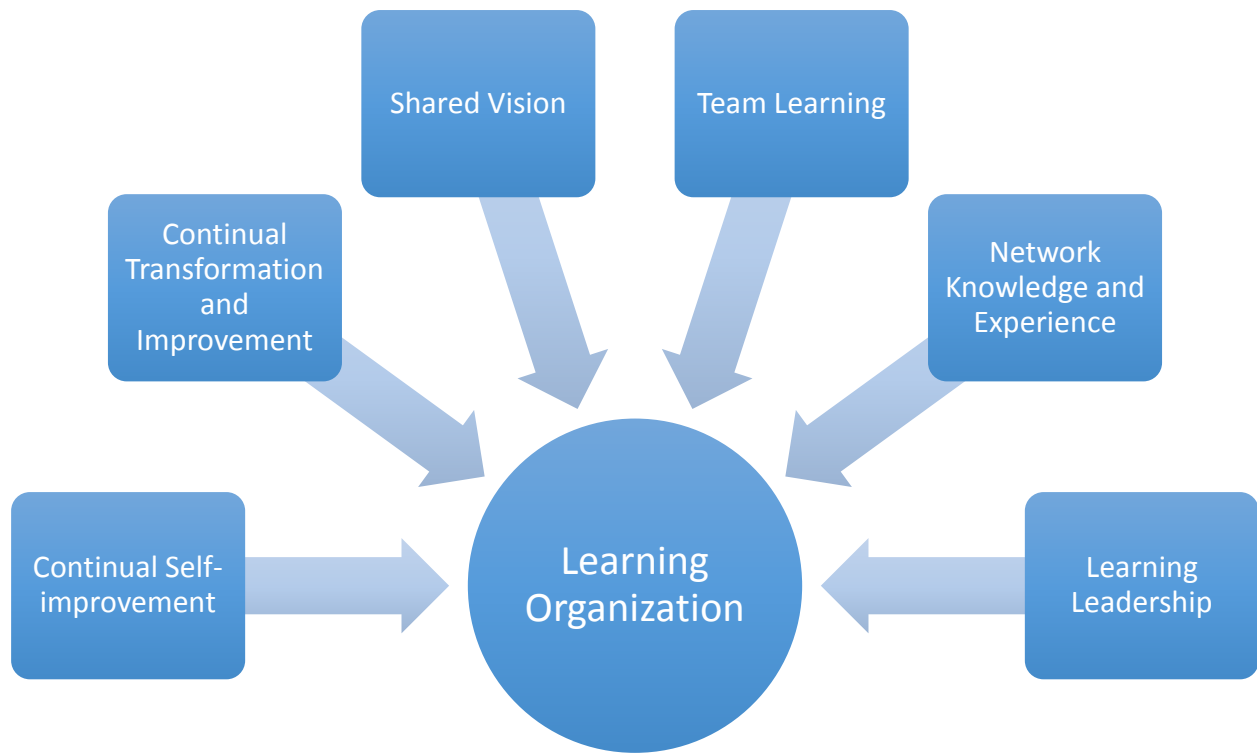
Networked Knowledge

The learning and knowledge generated by teams and individuals is useless to a learning organization unless networks exist to manage its transfer throughout the organization. In order to be truly useful, however, knowledge and experience must be

framed as raw materials that can be interpreted, understood, and used by others. Knowledge that is shared as fixed, absolute, or above analysis is at odds with the goals and processes of learning organizations. Useful knowledge can take the shape of routines, standard operating procedures, documents, or manuals, and is valued regardless of its source in the organizational hierarchy. Pathways for the networking of knowledge can be learned by emphasizing the importance of thinking about the organization as a system of components (individuals, teams, departments, external influences, etc.) connected by dynamic relationships.

Learning Leadership

Learning organizations require [formal and informal leaders](#) at every level who are responsible for fostering an environment that encourages understanding of complexity, clarity of vision, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving. Individuals are required to show the leadership needed to sustain lifelong learning and meaningful collaboration. Team leaders, supervisors, and other middle managers can act as coaches and mentors who coordinate and advocate for effective formal and informal learning opportunities. Senior leaders require a clear vision of how learning environments can take root in their organizations, and the foresight to understand how the values and actions of the organization can be interrogated, tested, and revised without relying on aggressive or punitive methods. Leaders at all levels can carry the goals of a learning organization a long way. In fact, a learning organization cannot exist without their deliberate action and reflection. Please see the leadership downloadable document for further information on leadership.



(Adapted from Snell, 2001 and Bui & Baruch, 2010)