

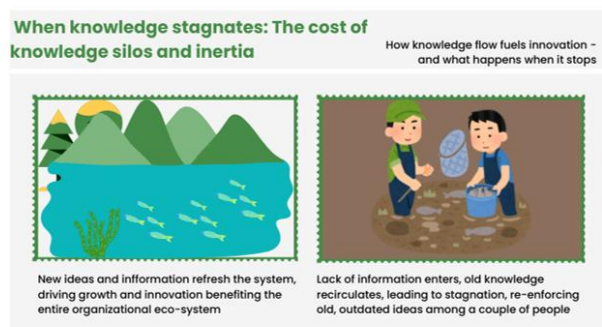
An ALS Micro-Module: How do organizations learn?

Organizational learning occurs through a collective process that includes organizational commitment, differing perceptions, shared understanding, acquisition of new knowledge, psychological safety, dialogue, and shared mental models through a combination of information and interaction. I realize that's a mouthful, but it brings to light exactly what organizations need to learn, and why training alone is not effective.

Learning is an individual event, yet culture is a collective experience. Individual knowledge is maintained or re-shaped within the context of an individual's mental model. Consequently, individual learning is often over-shadowed by the needs, demands, and limitations of the culture.

Organizations have a collective mental model, referred to as a *schema*. Schemas are the concepts, conceptual relationships, and information contained within the institutional knowledge-bank. Think of a schema as an abstract, cloudlike framework in which the collective knowledge of the organization exists. In the absence of new information (i.e., lack of knowledge transfer, dialogue) the old framework exists within a vacuum, unable to collectively shift even if new knowledge emerges. It is the lack of dialogue that limits any ability for a new framework to develop or for organizational learning to occur. Even as new knowledge or information comes to light it fails to become part of the organizational lexicon, ensuring the long-term existence of the status quo. Culturally this is represented as, "because we've always done it this way." In the absence of a new schema, it is likely that many sub-schemas will develop creating disorder and confusion as well as knowledge silos.

In order for organizational learning to occur it requires both information (knowledge) and interaction (dialogue and sharing). Informational learning occurs when organizations acquire, distribute, and interpret information. New information, when shared, allows for the modification of the existing framework. Interactive learning is the social support among team members. Interactive learning presents as discussion, storytelling, knowledge sharing, and experimentation to name a few. In the absence of an evolving schema new information becomes difficult because there is no shared understanding.



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Dialogue is the key to successful organizational learning and individual development. In the absence of a supportive organizational community (organizational citizenship, psychological safety, values alignment, leadership support), dialogue is often overlooked or even discouraged. Mistakes, seen as missed opportunities or vulnerabilities, are regarded as crucial missteps rather than learning events.

Effective learning, both individual and organizational, has long been considered a strategic advantage in business. Researchers have identified a notable relationship among knowledge transfer and organizational commitment as well as effective learning and organizational citizenship.

- **Ready to Enhance Your Learning Culture?:** Discover the power of shared knowledge, collaboration, and continuous improvement for a thriving organization.