

Organizations That Learn Session 2 – Purpose & Principles (I)

Why are we here? How will we proceed?

Goal for the session: To build on your organizational learning reflections from the first Journal entry and your individual “Why am I here?” reflections from the second and begin distilling these reflections into tentative answers to the above questions.

Agenda

7:00 – 8:15 Group meetings & discussion (see below)
8:15 – 9:00 Group reports, discussion, wrap up and path forward

We’ll meet at C’ville Coffee. When you arrive (no later than 7:00 PM, please) find your group members (see below), introduce yourself, get something to eat or drink if you like, find a place to meet and proceed as outlined below.

John and I will stop by to see how things are going. We’ll convene as a class at 8:15 for group reports and discussion.

1. The Workers

Take a couple of minutes (no more than five or ten) and reflect as a group on the following story as it relates to an organization’s purpose:

A man looks out his window and sees two men with shovels, one walking behind the other. The first man digs a hole and moves down the street about 20 yards. Meanwhile, the second man fills up the first man’s hole. Then the whole process is repeated, again and again: the first man digs a hole, the second fills it up. Puzzled the onlooker yells out to the first man, “Why are you doing this?” The man replies, “Oh. We’re part of a three person team. The third guy is sick today. He plants the tree.”

What (if anything) does the story tell you about the “Why are we here?” question, the value of asking it and the sorts of things to consider in trying to answer it?

2. “An Organization That Learned To ...”

Based on your Journal entries and any other thinking you’ve done about learning, organizations and this course, develop one possible scenario that describes the future of “Organizations That Learn.”

Your group’s scenario will ultimately take the form of an article that appears in the *New York Times* five years in the future, dated May, 5, 2010, reporting on the course and its longer term impact. The article will appear under the headline “An Organization That Learned To ...” (you fill in the blank). Your group gets the byline; i.e., you, collectively, are the reporters.

The article should answer the basic journalistic questions: what, why, how, who, where, when. In the context of the article these questions can be understood roughly as follows:

- **What?** What did the organization (i.e., ISSS 476S) accomplish? What did it do?
- **Why?** Why did it do it? What was its purpose in doing what it did? What gave meaning to its actions?
- **How?** How did it do it? What principles, values, culture, approach allowed it to achieve what it did?
- **Who?** Who was involved in the process and how were they involved? What roles did they play?
- **Where?** Over how large an area did the activities take place. Over how large an area has their impact spread?
- **When?** At what pace did the story unfold? What is the timeframe of the narrative?

At the conclusion of the group meetings, at 8:15, each group should be prepared to report back summary versions of its answers to the above six questions.

- By COB on Tuesday, Feb. 1, each group should publish its complete and fully edited article, in form and style appropriate to the *NY Times*, in the “An Organization That Learned to ...” forum of the Blackboard Discussion Board.
- For class next week every member of the class should review and reflect on *all* of the stories published in this forum. We’ll use them as input in a collaborative development of purpose and principles which will guide the class for the remainder of the semester.

Suggestion: In thinking about purpose perspective is important. Here are a couple of questions that may help your group maintain the appropriate – i.e., broad, long range – perspective:

- Why is it important that this organization – our class - continue to exist? What would we lose if we lost this organization even if every individual in it could find a spot in some other class?
- Can you frame the purpose of this organization in such a way that if you woke up tomorrow morning and realized that you were already a UVA/BIS graduate, you would still look forward to actively participating in this organization?

Note: Suggested readings and journal prompts for next week will be posted in the Assignments section of the Toolkit.