



**A Product Enhancement of the Learning Signature:
Development of a Best Practices Repository
for Organizational Learning**



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Background

Calliope Learning has been providing learning solutions to individuals and organizations since 1988 with the vision of:

*Meaningful Learning through Leadership and Participation.*¹

Through its independent consultants and under license from BusinessLab™, Calliope Learning delivers LearningEdge™ training and licensing in North America.

The LearningEdge™ suite of tools is a new product in North America (2003) and a best practices repository is non-existent. Without access to a body of knowledge gained through experience, LearningEdge™ consultants must rely solely on their personal knowledge and experience to develop effective organizational learning strategies.

As part of her educational requirements, Deborah Lang, an MBA student from Royal Roads University in Victoria, completed an organizational consulting project that examined the best practices of learning organizations. Calliope Learning sends out a big THANK YOU to Deborah for this valuable piece of work. For more information about this MBA program, please visit www.royalroads.ca

LearningEdge™

LearningEdge™ is an interactive set of tools and processes that have been developed from theories of organizational learning and change, coupled with experience and evidence from case studies.² From 2001 to 2002, BusinessLab™ Corporate Learning Environments (CLE) researched the learning strategies of a wide range of organizations. CLE examined innovations, key trends, learning processes, IT strategies, best practices and business models. As a result of this research, a business tool was developed and trademarked as the LearningEdge™.

LearningEdge™ consists of the following suite of tools:

- **Scene Setter:** this brainstorming tool helps identify environmental threats, opportunities and key past business decisions that affect the current or future state of the business.
- **Scenario Writer:** this strategic planning tool guides participants through the development and prioritization of different business strategies in anticipation of future threats and opportunities. Key organizational change initiatives are then identified to address the top threats and opportunities for the business.
- **Learning Signature:** this tool is designed to guide participants through an interactive process that evaluates the current learning environment - learning strengths and weaknesses are identified for the business.
- **Learning Map:** this second strategic planning tool compares organizational change initiatives identified in the Scenario Writer to the Learning Signature results to identify key learning strategies that will have the greatest impact.³

The LearningEdge™ process has been tested for a wide deployment by BusinessLab™. Calliope Learning, under license from BusinessLab™, delivers LearningEdge™ training and licensing in North America. Trained and licensed external or internal organizational learning consultants deploy the LearningEdge™ suite of tools (LearningEdge™ consultants).

LearningEdge™ is supported by a number of resources and materials, as follows:

- **Concepts Magazine:** the Concepts magazine provides information on the theory that supports the LearningEdge™ process.
- **Guide:** the guide supports the consultants by outlining a step by step process for deployment of the LearningEdge™ suite of tools.
- **LearningEdge™ Website:** the website supports remote access for consultants and sponsors, provides additional resources, and provides an avenue for LearningEdge™ consultants to communicate with each other through a community of practice area.⁴
- **CD-ROM:** the software on the CD ROM captures data, analyzes results and reports findings from the workshops with clients.

More information about LearningEdge can be found at www.learningedge.ca

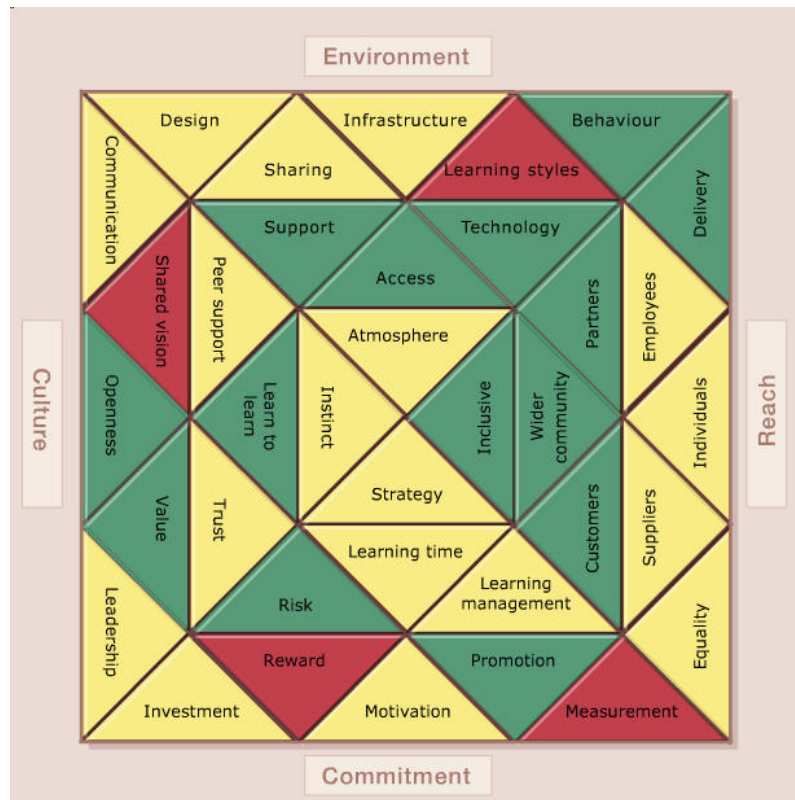
Learning Signature

The Learning Signature is a diagnostic tool that assesses organizational learning attributes and provides a snapshot of the organization's learning strengths and weaknesses.⁵ Based on research conducted by BusinessLab™, the Learning Signature is divided into four contextual elements of an effective learning organization:

1. **Environment** considers the structural conditions affecting learning within the organization;
2. **Commitment** considers the more strategic and managerial elements that an organization needs to have in place to support learning;
3. **Culture** looks at the human aspects of learning within an organization; and,
4. **Reach** considers learning delivery methods, and internal and external strategies that link the organization to the wider community.⁶

Ideas from the theories of learning organizations and information from BusinessLab™ case studies were combined to define 36 learning attributes across four quadrants -- nine attributes per quadrant which create the Learning Signature. The Learning Signature is a visual tool that utilizes the colours of green, yellow and red to indicate organizational learning strengths and weaknesses. "Green indicates that deep learning is taking place. Yellow indicates architecture that is not in place, is unused, or is unconsidered. Red indicates a barrier to learning."⁷ The signature reveals where current learning activities, policies and programs are working to support the main business goals and where learning initiatives are working against the business goals.⁸

See the Learning Signature below:



Learning Signature Cornerstones

The cornerstones of the Learning Signature are located in the corners of each of the quadrants and are considered key elements contributing to a sustainable learning organization:

1. **Environment Quadrant:**
 - Behaviour: the behaviour of people in the organization.
 - Design: the learning environment (surroundings and conditions).
2. **Commitment Quadrant:**
 - Investment: practices employed to maintain learning.
 - Measurement: methods of measuring and tracking learning.
3. **Culture Quadrant:**
 - Communication: how information and knowledge is shared.
 - Leadership: leaders champion, support and participate in learning.
4. **Reach Quadrant:**
 - Equality: equal opportunity for all learners in organization.
 - Delivery: variety and range of methods to support learning.⁹

Purpose and Method of the Project

The primary purpose of this project is to provide examples of best practices for organizational learning that correspond to the eight cornerstone learning attributes in the Learning Signature. Primary research was conducted to develop and administer an online survey which in turn provided real-life best practice examples from organizational learning specialists.

Results

A total of 150 best practice examples were extracted from the survey responses. The descriptive examples cited by respondents provided best practices at three levels of learning: individual (53), team (28) and organizational (69). The best practice examples were categorized into activities (79), tools (26) and processes (45) based on the consultant's experience and interpretation of meaning from the responses.

Questions 5 to 12 of the survey each represented one of the eight cornerstone learning attributes of the Learning Signature. Out of the 150 best practices, 57 examples were cited for more than one of the questions. The following provides a breakdown of best practices cited for multiple cornerstones:

- 39 best practices were cited for 2 cornerstone learning attributes.
- 14 best practices were cited for 3 cornerstone learning attributes.
- 1 best practice was cited for 4 cornerstone learning attributes.
- 3 best practices were cited for 5 cornerstone learning attributes.

This result seems to indicate that a substantial number of the best practice examples are effective at enhancing organizational learning for more than one of the cornerstone learning attributes.

The following tables provide a sample of the best practice examples that were identified by respondents for multiple cornerstone learning attributes. The tables have been compressed and synthesized into the three levels of learning: individual, team and organizational. Activities, tools and processes are displayed within the level of learning.

The first column of the table identifies the name of the best practice example preceded by eight columns which correspond to the survey question number and an abbreviation of the cornerstone learning attribute, as follows:

- Question No. 5 for Design: DS
- Question No. 6 for Behaviour: B
- Question No. 7 for Investment: I
- Question No. 8 for Measurement: M
- Question No. 9 for Delivery: DL
- Question No. 10 for Equality: E
- Question No. 11 for Communication: C
- Question No. 12 for Leadership: L

The tenth column shows how many respondents cited the example as a best practice. The eleventh column shows the total number of cornerstone learning attributes cited for the best practice example, as indicated by the following abbreviation (Total L.A.).

Table 6.1 displays best practices that were identified for 3 or more cornerstone learning attributes at the individual level of learning. Activities and processes are represented in the table; no tool was mentioned for 3 or more cornerstones.

Table 6.1: Breakdown by Cornerstone of Multiple-Cited Examples: Individual Level										
Best Practices Examples For 3 or more Cornerstones Activities and Processes	DS 5	B 6	I 7	M 8	DL 9	E 10	C 11	L 12	Total No. Resp.	Total No. L.A.
Coaching		1	1	1	2			9	14	5
Performance Reviews Linked to Learning		1	2	2		2			7	4
Mentoring		1	4	1					6	3
Action Learning			1	3				1	5	3
Learning Celebrations		1					1	2	4	3
Orientation Programs	1		1		1				3	3
Learning Development Plans: Individuals			5	6		5			16	3
Time for Learning & Practice			11	2		3			16	3
Tuition Reimbursement			11	2		3			16	3

Table 6.2 displays best practices that were identified for 2 or more cornerstone learning attributes at the team level of learning. Only activities are represented in the table below, as tools and processes were not mentioned for multiple cornerstones.

Table 6.2: Breakdown by Cornerstone of Multiple-Cited Examples: Team Level										
Best Practice Examples For 2 or More Cornerstones Activities Only	DS 5	B 6	I 7	M 8	DL 9	E 10	C 11	L 12	Total No. Resp.	Total No. L.A.
Leadership Programs				1		1		5	7	3
Meetings: Departmental		1	1				5		7	3
Cross Functional Teams	2	5							7	2
Learn and Share Sessions		2		3					5	2
Communities of Practice					1		1		2	2
Leadership Forums (Mng.)		1						1	2	2
Learning Sessions (Teams)		1	1						2	2

Table 6.3 displays best practices that were identified for 3 or more cornerstone learning attributes at the organizational level of learning. Activities, tools and processes are all represented in the table.

Table 6.3: Breakdown by Cornerstone of Multiple-Cited Examples: Organizational										
Best Practice Examples For 3 or More Cornerstones Activities - Tools - Processes	DS 5	B 6	I 7	M 8	DL 9	E 10	C 11	L 12	Total No. Resp.	Total No. L.A.
Virtual Learning Centre		1		1	6	1	4		13	5
All Employee Meetings Town Hall Meetings	1	2				1	3		7	4
Knowledge Repository Lessons Learned Repository	1	1	1	1			2		5	4
Intranet Portal					6	1	28		35	3
Funding Levels Equal			1			12		1	14	3

Table 6.3: Breakdown by Cornerstone of Multiple-Cited Examples: Organizational

Best Practice Examples For 3 or More Cornerstones Activities - Tools - Processes	DS 5	B 6	I 7	M 8	DL 9	E 10	C 11	L 12	Total No. Resp.	Total No. L.A.
Learning Management System			1	5			1		7	3
After Action Reviews	1	2						1	4	3
Learning Development Plans: Organizational			1	2	1				4	3

As can be seen by the tables, the best practice examples cited by the survey respondents often fit under different questions (cornerstone learning attributes).

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the results of the online survey is the interrelatedness of some of the best practice examples to the eight cornerstone learning attributes of the Learning Signature. The major result of this finding is that the implementation of a single best practice can have multi-faceted effects on the learning capabilities of an organization.

More Information

The complete list of 150 best practices (including details on each best practice) is being utilized as a basis for the development of an online searchable database made available to certified LearningEdge consultants. For more information about how you can access this database, please contact Calliope Learning at info@calliopelearning.com

Endnotes

- ¹ Calliope Learning, "Calliope Learning Home Page", Calliope Learning Website, <www.calliopelearning.com>, accessed May 1, 2004.
- ² Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Concepts, (Victoria, BC: Calliope Learning, 2003), p. 25.
- ³ Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Guide, (Victoria, BC: Calliope Learning, 2003), p. 6-34.
- ⁴ Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Guide, p. 6-34.
- ⁵ LearningEdge™, "LearningEdge™ Background Information," LearningEdge™ Website, <www.learningedge.ca/background.html> accessed May 1, 2004
- ⁶ Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Concepts, p. 22.
- ⁷ Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Concepts, p. 25.
- ⁸ Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Concepts, p. 24.
- ⁹ Patrick Thurbin, LearningEdge™ Concepts, p. 46-49.