Chapter 7:   The implementation and management of a learning organisation

7.1   Introduction

The challenge of implementing and managing a learning organisation lies in facilitating the learning of all employees, thereby ensuring the continued transformation of the department itself. Thus, the learning organisation does not fit itself within bureaucratic forms of management with fixed chains of command or lines of communication. The purpose of the learning organisation is to enhance individual capabilities in order to strengthen departmental capacity, in order to secure responsive service delivery. The management of a learning organisation cannot be achieved through human resource development and training but rather through the implementation of a holistic human resource management system that would address all aspects regarding the management and development of human resources.

In this chapter, attention will be focused on the characteristics and culture of a learning organisation, addressing the challenges hindering the implementation of a learning organisation, the steps involved in the implementation of a learning organisation and the management processes involved in facilitating the implementation of a learning organisation.

7.2   The building blocks of a learning organisation

The building blocks of a learning organisation can further be explained by focusing on the different types of learning. The different types of learning, according to Farago & Skyrme (1995:2), include:

a)   level one learning, which involves learning facts, knowledge, processes and procedures as they apply to known situations;

b)   level two learning consists of the learning of new job skills that are transferable to other situations;

c)	level three learning describes the learning or the adaptation to more dynamic situations where the solution need to be developed; and

d)	level four learning implying the learning to learn level, which includes characteristics such as innovation and creativity in problem solving.

Establishing a learning organisation depends on creating a learning culture. A learning culture does not mean sending employees on as many training courses as possible without evaluating the outcomes of these courses but rather identifying, on a continuous basis, those training courses that would satisfy both individual and organisational development needs. A learning culture should support learning and be based on ensuring the free exchange and flow of information to put expertise where it is most needed and encouraging individuals to network extensively across organisational boundaries in order to develop their own knowledge and expertise as well as supporting the commitment to learning and personal development where learning is rewarded and encouraged. The learning culture will be characterised by creativity, diversity and a climate of openness and trust. The learning culture supposes that learning from mistakes can often be more rewarding and instructional, than learning from success (Farago & Skyrme 1995:2).

The DPSA learns through employee learning but employees who learn will, by no means, guarantee that departmental learning will take place. Without employee learning, the DPSA will not evolve into a learning organisation. The most basic building block for a learning organisation is its commitment to individual employee learning. Senge (1990:140) maintains that a manager's fundamental task no longer lies in planning, organising and controlling but in providing the enabling condition for an employee to lead the most enriching life he or she can. Senge (1990:6-11) proposes five disciplines that underwrite the building blocks for a learning organisation. The five disciplines are personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking.

The phrase 'personal mastery' is used to describe the discipline for personal growth and learning. Employees with high levels of personal mastery continuously expand their ability to create the results in life that they truly seek. Their quest for continuous learning is the basic spirit for the learning organisation. Personal mastery goes beyond mere competence and skill although it is grounded in achieving competence and obtaining appropriate skills. Being a personal master in your current position means that you approach your position from a creative point of view and not from a reactive viewpoint. Personal mastery embodies two underlying movements including to continually clarify what is important and to continually learn how to see the current reality more clearly. The gap between the vision of what the employee wants to achieve and the realities of the current position should generate a creative tension – the force to bring them together. The essence of personal mastery is learning how to generate and sustain the creative tension in the day-to-day functions of employees (Senge 1990:140-142).

Mental models, according to Senge (1990:8-9) are the deeply ingrained assumptions and generalisations that influence the way in which employees will understand and take action. The mental models focus on turning the attention inward, to the development of the self and realising what can be learned from others, without making assumptions on whom these persons are. Senge (1990:174) maintains that new insights are not implemented because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the Department works. These images limit the way employees think and act and the managing of mental models would then imply surfacing, testing and improving internal images of how a department functions. Developing employee capacity to work with mental models involves learning new skills and implementing departmental innovations that will help bring the new skills into regular practice. The purpose of the mental models is to ensure that managers focus on them in order to ensure that the prevailing assumptions are brought out into the open, challenged and changed through a process of systems thinking (to be discussed shortly). Hodgkinson

(2000:5) stipulated that establishing new mental models in an ever changing environment will not be an easy task to accomplish, but that the first step towards it should be for all employees to acknowledge their mental preconceptions and learn to deal with them.

A shared vision creates a sense of commonality that penetrates the whole Department and provides a sense of cohesiveness to all diverse activities and employees. When employees truly share a vision, they are bound by it, deriving a common care and aspiration for it. The shared vision is crucial to departmental learning because it provides focus and energy for learning. It could be argued that through shared vision employees will strive to learn because learning a new skill becomes part of their vision and is, thus, important to them. A shared vision is a vision to which employees are committed, because it also reflects their own personal vision (Senge 1990: 205-206). A shared vision would be hard to identify because employees might have their own personal agendas. It could manifest itself as a power struggle or a clash of egos, but hierarchical pressures for the effective and efficient delivery of services might not allow much time for identifying values that would guarantee a shared vision (Hodgkinson 2000:6).

Team learning invests in the potential wisdom of teams. An unaligned team is wasted energy and even though individual employees may work very hard, their collective effort does not translate into an efficient and effective group effort. The more a team becomes aligned in their performance, the more they will complement one another's efforts. Senge (1990:233-236) maintains that aligning the team becomes a prerequisite for empowering the individual that will empower the team. Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of the team in order to ensure departmental effectiveness and efficiency. Teams build on the shared vision principle. Focusing on team learning proposes that individual learning is not enough to ensure departmental learning. Individual learning has proven not to be responsive to departmental training priorities and

thus focusing on the team accomplishments set the tone for and established the standards of learning for the whole department.

Hendricks (2002) stated that the DPSA is moving away from a strictly hierarchical structure to a more matrix orientated structure, promoting team effectiveness and efficiency above individual performance. Only when team functioning characterise a department, can team learning be propagated, but in a hierarchical structure, placing emphasis on the importance of the individual position in the realisation of departmental effectiveness and efficiency will provide the basis for instilling a learning culture. Hodgkinson (2000:6) stated that team learning could be achieved through an attitude of give and take and that sharing visions for the team would coordinate the team effort efficiently. Team learning is also significant for individuals who could show personal mastery and talented team members should be used to develop others. However, a lack of departmental support in terms of counselling and mentoring could hinder team learning. Personal or individual challenges to team learning deals with managers not being able to deal with staff from different levels in the hierarchy, managers losing power and control positions and managers having to take the responsibility for allowing employees to develop themselves.

The fifth discipline is titled systems thinking, which is based on utilising the way of thinking about a language for describing and understanding the relationships that shape the behaviour of systems (Frydman *et al.* 2000:4-5). *'Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes'* (Senge 1990:68). Systems thinking analyse the interrelationships and patterns that bind systems together. Systems become more complex and complexity can undermine confidence and responsibility. Systems thinking are labeled the fifth discipline because it is the cornerstone for all the other four disciplines. Systems thinking see the interrelationships rather than just cause-effect situations and identify the processes of change rather than providing snapshots. The practice of systems thinking begins with creating an understanding of what is meant by feedback. Trying to simplify the work situation

by identifying the deeper patterns that shape events and details (Senge 1990:71-73). Individual challenges, identified by Hodgkinson (2000:6), pertain to the laziness and apathy of employees highlighting, once again, the importance of identifying the role of the individual within a department. The problem statement of this thesis describes the fact that training and development could not, at this stage, be categorised as integral parts of a learning organisation. Training and development in a learning organisation should be part of the daily activities of employees and not be seen, as it is at the moment, as a measure to try and address the gap between actual performance and desired performance.

Critten (1995:204-205) states that the learning organisation has a climate that fosters individual learning and development. The learning culture will also be extended to include customers, suppliers and all other stakeholders. Furthermore, human resource development strategies will become an integral part of the Departmental strategic policies enforcing a culture where learning and working become synonymous with one another. The learning organisation has to be realised from within building on the principle of continuous transformation.

Throughout the thesis the importance of aligning the individual employee's position with the departmental strategic goals has been discussed and repeated. Through the implementation of the five disciplines proposed by Peter Senge, the foundation for the learning organisation can be created. Without alignment, however, individual employees will not share a departmental vision, focus on departmental team thinking or learning and the complexity of the system will never be understood. Facilitating the creation of a learning organisation is dependent on the reciprocal meaningful relationship between the individual employees and the departmental effectiveness and efficiency.

7.3   Challenges facing the creation of a learning organisation

Garratt (1990:78-80) identified specific conditions that would facilitate departmental learning, including creating the perception that learning is a cyclical

process (as discussed in Chapter 1). The free flow of information is a necessary prerequisite for the creation of a learning organisation as well as the ability of managers to value employees as the key assets for departmental learning. Managers need to understand that a new approach to training and development (the creation of a learning organisation) will not be implemented without challenges. Specific challenges deal, for instance, with the lack of strategic awareness on the part of managers as well as a lack of personal development processes.

7.3.1 Operational preoccupation

Farago & Skyrme (1995: 3) maintain that not creating time to sit back and think strategically will only hinder the successful management of a learning organisation. Strategic thinking can be a powerful tool in ensuring human resource development and training because strategic thinking will ensure the creation of the important link between human resource development (individual employee effectiveness and efficiency) and organisational development (departmental effectiveness and efficiency).

Garratt (1990:XV) maintains that managers lack awareness in terms of their own strategic leadership roles in the creation of a learning organisation. Day-to-day functioning prevents managers from being able to sit back and strategically think about the department's positioning and how to improve and adapt to the ever changing external environment. No learning system is able to keep up with the changes taking place in the external environment and thus no department can ever, in the true sense of the concept, become a learning organisation.

7.3.2 Hierarchical thinking

The tendency to focus too much on systems and processes to the exclusion of other factors, inhibits the management of a learning organisation (Farago & Skyrme 1995:3-4). The challenge is evident when a departmental structure is too hierarchical and the free flow of information is not promoted. Employees hold on

to their positions and status, because they do not understand the larger role that they play within the overall department. Their territory has to be protected, and innovation or development might just harm their *status quo.*

7.3.3 Reluctance to train

The reluctance to train or invest in training is a great challenge for public managers to overcome (Farago & Skyrme 1995:4). The reason for not investing in training could be due to personal fears or prejudice but it does hamper the successful implementation and management of a learning organisation. Garratt (1990:XV) identifies the lack of a personal development plan as a stumbling block to the successful implementation of a learning organisation. Lack of training could be as a result of a lack of resources. Budget constraints could prevent training from occurring or the employee workload could discourage the release of employees for training. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that a department that does not train, will not be able to respond to changing demands, will not be able to transform itself and cannot be defined as a department valuing human resource development.

7.3.4 Lack of real empowerment

Farago and Skyrme (!995:4) state that the lack of real empowerment is due to a management approach that is too top-driven and based on tight supervision. The management of a learning organisation is based on enhancing individual capacity and relying on creativity and innovation but too much supervision or control would only impede these goals.

Lawrence (1998:4) identified specific individual and organisational barriers to the implementation and management of the learning organisation. Individual employees may tend to think that they know everything that they need to know to function effectively and efficiently, they might feel a degree of discomfort with the idea of giving up what they belief or have implemented for a long time, they fear

that they might be incompetent for the period it would take them to learn a new skill or they might just experience a degree of mental laziness.

Organisational barriers deal with the assumption that senior management's decisions should not be questioned. A blaming rather than trusting departmental culture would inhibit learning together with an environment where questioning and challenging are not encouraged, it would block the sharing of learning. A learning organisation characterised by a cross-functional structure and a strictly hierarchical or too bureaucratic structure could impede the implementation of a learning organisation. Other organisational barriers could include a lack of training time, resources and materials, a lack of recognition for improving capabilities and contributions and a lack of knowledge transfer (Lawrence 1998:5).

Managers need to be able and capable of identifying possible challenges in the implementation of a learning organisation. The challenges themselves offer good learning opportunities for managers. The implementation of a learning organisation is, as has been stated before, an approach to employee training and development. It can be equated with the highest level of self-actualisation in a motivational theory. It is nirvana and managers should always strive to provide the best learning environment for their employees. The process and steps involved in the creation of a learning organisation will now be discussed.

7.4   Steps to a learning organisation

Kline & Saunders (1993:5) identified ten steps in the creation of a learning organisation, including assessing the learning culture, promoting the positive, making the workplace safe for thinking, rewarding the risk-takers, helping employees become resources for each other, putting learning power to work, mapping out the vision, bringing the vision to life, connecting the systems and the implementation thereof titled 'getting the show on the road'.

Redding & Catalanello (1994:135) reduced the ten steps to five stages. Stage one is working with no intentional learning programme but becoming aware of a training need would lead to the second stage, namely treating learning as a consumable. Stage three is bringing learning inside the department and through strategic linking, identifying a department with a learning agenda (stage four). Stage five is integrating work and learning through systemic skills and work integrity. During the first stage, learning occurs unintentionally usually because a department is newly created and everybody is still trying to figure out their own positions and strengths. The second stage is the institutionalisation of training and development initiatives. However, training occurs outside a department and is used as a reward for good performance. Stage three tries to evaluate the link between training and job performance. More training is provided within a department but the training is aimed at arbitrarily chosen perceived training priorities.

Stage four introduces an important shift – learning needs are established based upon the strategic training needs of a department. A department is able to determine the skills gap between what it has available and what it needs, and, can thus target the development of specific skills and knowledge. During stage four, most learning still occurs outside a department but during stage five the transformation occurs. The department (its senior management) realises that they have to move learning out of the external classroom and into the day-to-day work for learning in order to achieve maximum benefit for the department. Stage five is the alignment of all departmental systems towards the achievement of performance through learning. This fifth stage coincides with the fifth discipline as promoted by Peter Senge and described earlier in this chapter.

Lawrence (1998:7-10) places an emphasis on the importance of senior management to be the role models for the implementation of the learning organisation. The management styles should thus be based on open and honest communication with managers being capable of influencing the processes and

structures of a department. Senior managers need to first realise the extent to which they can still contribute and what they need to learn from others. Empowerment and innovation, according to Lawrence (1998:9) lies at the heart of the learning organisation. The threat of empowerment and innovation is located in the fact that managers will have to give up the control that they perceive to have over subordinates and replace that with participation, accountability and transparency.

The learning organisation could be characterised as possessing a learning approach to strategy basing decisions on participative processes, distributing information freely and without prejudice and not perceiving budgets and financial controls as barriers to becoming a learning organisation. The learning organisation perceives their managers as asserting the primary task of experimentation and learning from experience. The learning organisation is built on feedback (evaluation as discussed in the previous chapter), in order to obtain information that would create an understanding of the importance of self-development opportunities for all employees (Critten 1995:219-223).

Lawrence (1998:5) suggests that a learning organisation could be implemented if senior managers learn faster and become involved in teaching subordinates. Organisational teams are more effective than individuals in problem solving while managers should encourage innovation, drive for continuous improvement and promote an openness to new ideas.

In the learning organisation, learning takes place on three levels, namely individual, group and organisational learning. The importance of identifying the link between individual and organisational learning becomes apparent. In the problem statement of this thesis the assumption was made that training within the DPSA does not address both individual and departmental training priorities and thus does not promote the creation of a learning organisation. Research in both chapters 4 and 5 had proven that even though employees are able to

identify the departmental training priorities, they are not able to clearly determine how the link is drawn between departmental training priorities and individual training courses offered. Neither is specific regarding the extent to which the DPSA is successfully able to identify the strategic importance of the individual employee within a learning environment. The different management functions facilitating the creation of a learning organisation will now be discussed.

7.5   Key management functions in a learning organisation

The key management processes in the establishment and management of the learning organisation will focus on strategic planning, organising, guiding and control through effective and efficient performance management. However, it is also important to note some of the leadership characteristics that can be identified with a manager able to be an organisational learning leader.

Frydman *et al.* (2000:181-206) list and describe the various characteristics of the organisational learning manager. The characteristics include that:

a)   managers are pragmatic visionaries seeing their work in the larger context of the system as a whole;

b)   centrality of values reinforcing the core set of Departmental values;

c)   organisational learning managers are master strategists and tacticians being able to ascertain how external forces will shape the organisation and as a consequence also being able to articulate a realistic path for the future;

d)   the essence of organisational learning management is the skillful devolution of power developing the leadership capability of subordinates;

e)   organisational learning managers are stewards of learning and continuously will encourage other to learn;

f)   organisational learning managers are learners themselves despite their capacity to direct and strategise; and

g)   organisational learning managers realise that there is no single path to organisational learning and would depend on the culture and processes in an organisation.

From the above, it may be concluded that the manager who is able to lead subordinates into a learning environment, should be aware of his or her own training and learning priorities. The organisational learning manager is able to guide, direct, influence, plan and implement training and development priorities that would address departmental needs but also be able to attract and retain individual commitment to departmental learning.

7.5.1 Strategic planning

Planning is the process of determining the future course of action. In terms of the learning organisation, strategic planning would imply determining the extent to which the organisation and its senior management is able to formulate training goals and priorities as well the ability to describe the way in which the goals and priorities are to be achieved. According to Fox *et al.* (1991:50) the planning process can be divided into seven phases, which include assessing the situation, establishing objectives, forecasting, determining alternative courses of action, evaluating and selecting alternatives, implementing selected plans and evaluating the progress of the plan in terms of assessed needs, the stated objectives and set control standards.

Strategic planning should be based on encouraging assumptions and thinking that test management to consider innovative and creative solutions to problems Farago & Skyrme 1995:3). Shukla (1997:249) titles it creating the strategic intent to learn. The manager of the learning organisation is able to visibly and formally communicate his or her commitment to learning to their subordinates. The ability to promote visionary skills should stimulate strategic planning. Two ways can be identified to promote the creation of new knowledge in the organisation including articulating high, seemingly impossible goals to stimulate employees to review

their assumptions about work and redesign their tasks and functions. The discrepancy between the present and desired levels of performance should be magnified in order to provide direction to the problem-solving efforts of the organisation. Vision building exercises stimulate a department-wide process of reflection, discussion and questioning resulting in the organisation being able to redefine its operating processes (Shukla 1997:250-253).

Fox *et al.* (1991:49) identify specific reasons for planning being an important management function. Planning contributes to the effective handling of change and if one is to consider the degree to which the DPSA will have to change in order to strive for a learning organisation, planning becomes crucial. Planning provides direction and contributes to a sense of purpose for a department. Planning creates a higher level of predictability because employees gain a better perspective of what is going to be expected from them but most importantly, planning provides an increased opportunity for participation in a department. The creation and implementation of a learning organisation should be a goal not only important to senior management, but also to all levels of the hierarchy in a department. Involvement, commitment and participation are key concepts to the successful implementation of the learning organisation and can be facilitated through appropriate planning. Planning and organising affect one another and the organising function of the manager in the learning organisation is important in terms of creating an enabling learning environment.

7.5.2 Organising

Organising can be defined as the arranging and grouping of jobs, the allocation of resources and the assignment of work in a department in order to ensure that functions are implemented according to plan (Robbins 1995:164). Cloete (1998:165-167) states that when two or more people work together, an organisational structure should be put in place in order to facilitate the activities of employees. The organisational structure is the mechanism through which functions are effectively and efficiently implemented. The leadership roles and

patterns of workflow should be established through the organising function of the manager.

With regard to the learning organisation, the organising function of establishing lines of communication will be discussed later in this chapter. The information and knowledge that should be distributed through the communication lines, are however, important and influential to the creation of a learning organisation. Information management should be used to develop and exploit information as a resource and knowledge management is the process of categorising and sharing expertise to enhance organisational capacity. Capability planning entails profiling both qualitatively and quantitatively the competencies of the organisation (Farago & Skyrme 1995:3). Thus, the creation of the learning organisation depends on the ability of the manager to organise employees through effective and efficient communication.

7.5.3 Influencing

A leader practices influencing and leadership refers to the leading, directing, actuating and motivating of subordinates (Sisk & Williams 1981:7). Nigro & Nigro (1989:211) state that the basis of leadership is that it is an action aimed at influencing the actions of others. Thus, leadership cannot be taught, but it is inherent in the characteristics of a person. Effective leadership skills can, however, be taught to managers. Leadership also influences the way in which employees perceive the work situation. Employees would like to be challenged because employment is the tool to empower the employee in order to pursue more desirable activities during his or her time at a department.

Chung (1987:359) best describes the difference between a leader and a manager. A leader has followers, a leader has emotional appeal and a leader meets the needs of his or her followers. Managers have to supervise and subordinates have to follow the directive of the manager, whether it appeals to them or not. Leaders are expected to be charismatic, while managers are

expected to make rational decisions. Most importantly, a leader is chosen and a manager is appointed. Thus, leaders carry the interest of their followers first while, managers are expected to place a department's attainment of goals and objectives first. Managers are concerned with the wellbeing of their employees but the strategic link does not begin with the employee and end with management, but rather, it is usually the other way around.

Coad & Berry (1998:2) have identified seven leadership styles that are applicable to the implementation and management of a learning organisation, including *laissez-faire*, management-by-exception, contingent reward, individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealised influence. The *laissez-faire* leader allows employees to do as they please and abdicates any responsibility towards them. Management-by-exception and contingent reward management are categorised as transactional leadership styles. Transactional leadership involves role clarification, creating structures, attempts to meet the social needs of employees and the distribution of punishment and reward based on performance. Management-by-exception means that managers will only take action when they realise that functions are implemented contrary to the strategic plan of a department. Contingent reward is an exchange process based on manager and employee following agreed upon roles and responsibilities for each predetermined goal and the manager offers rewards when employees have performed adequately. This style of leadership is effective to a department and satisfies the employee, because they receive continuous feedback on individual performance (Coad & Berry 1998:2-3).

Individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealised influence are types of transformational leadership styles. Transformation leadership is defined as creating a heightened awareness of the key issues impacting on employee development and influencing achievement, growth and development. Transformational leadership stimulates interest among employees to view their work from a new perspective, to generate and

awareness of the vision and mission of a department, to develop employees to achieve their potential and to motivate employees to transcend their self-interest so as to benefit a department as a whole (Coad & Berry 1998:3).

Managers provide employees with personal attention through individualised consideration. A trust relationship is built focusing on employee needs. The manager provides challenging work assignments to boost the confidence and skills of employees. Intellectual stimulation supposes that managers will encourage their employees to use their imagination and to re-think the ways of doing things. The manager generates the flow of ideas, questions assumptions and encourages employees to come up with their own structures and solutions to problems (Coad & Berry 1998:3).

Creating a clear picture that the future is both optimistic and attainable, is the responsibility of the inspirational motivator. Managers will set high expectations and communicate a vision to employees in simple language. Employees react willingly and increase their effort to achieve the vision. Managers who are role models for employees are idealised as influence leaders. Managers will show great persistence and determination in achieving departmental objectives and goals, they will reinforce high standards of ethical conduct and share their success with their employees. Managers are thus admired, respected and trusted. Employees wish to emulate them and follow them without any prejudice (Coad & Berry 1998:3).

Armstrong (1990:170-171) identified the primary and accessory leadership roles of the manager. The primary leadership roles of the manager are as a visionary, an executive, a planner, a policy-maker, a controller and a provider of rewards and punishments. The accessory functions are functions assigned to the manager because of the leadership position vested in a management position. The manager acting as role model, symbol of group unity, object for identification and, sometimes, target for aggression when employees are frustrated

disappointed and disillusioned, are all examples of the accessory leadership roles ascribed to managers. The leadership roles assumed by managers will vary according to the task at hand. For the management of the learning organisation the manager will, for instance, need to be a visionary, an expert, a role model and a symbol uniting his or her employees and guiding them through the changing learning environment.

Team and organisational development are integral parts of establishing a learning organisation and include the use of facilitators to help groups with work, job and organisation design and team development by reinforcing values, developing a vision and creating an organisational culture based on a climate of cohesiveness, sharing, support and stretching goals (Farago & Skyrme 1995:3).

7.5.4 Control

Control is implemented to ensure that departmental activities are implemented according to a predetermined standard. Plunkett & Attner (1989:359) emphasise that control is the systematic effort of identifying performance standards and comparing the actual performance with the planned performance goals and objectives. Control intends to ensure optimal utilisation of resources. The main aim of control is to ensure that departmental effectiveness and efficiency are promoted.

The factors that will have an impact on the behaviour of employees are experiences, environmental influences, such as the value of the Department, and the perception regarding the availability of rewards for good performance. In addition to these factors, specific aspects such as the skills of employees and the incentives offered by the Department to enforce compliance, will encourage employees to perform (Plunkett & Attner 1989: 297-298).

Stahl (1983:246-249) states that motivation should be used to promote the establishment and implementation of specific new processes, such as the

concept of a learning organisation. The motivation should be based on participative management, sharing decisions, keeping communication channels open and fluid, and encouraging suggestions on how performance could be enhanced.

With regard to the learning organisation, control will manifest itself in the ability of the manager to manage individual employee performance through a system of performance management and development (as was discussed in the previous chapter). The ability to offer rewards and incentives for learning will also enable the attainment of the learning organisation. The performance measurement tool should encourage the investment in learning by identifying appropriate measures and indicators of performance. Processes and systems that recognise the acquisition of new skills should be in place in order to facilitate individual effort, team accomplishments and continued personal development (Farago & Skyrme 1995:3). The implementation of the management functions could be enhanced by using specific management tools and techniques available to ensure compliance with a new process or in this case, a new approach to human resource training and development.

7.6   Tools and techniques to enhance the learning organisation

Popper & Lipshitz (2000:12) maintain that effective learning is enhanced through an investment of time and money in the training process and creating an environment that would protect transparency of performance. The manager should devote his or her time in terms of participating and therefore, reinforcing the learning experience. Ensuring that the learning experience is evaluated is another way of ensuring that the learning environment is created. Specific tools and techniques that could be utilised by managers to ensure compliance with the concept of a learning organisation include fostering learning and creativity skills, enforcing effective and efficient communication and providing a mentoring programme to reinforce the learning experience.

7.6.1 Listening and creativity skills

Listening skills are not natural skills and different styles of listening can be identified. Puth (2002:50-51) categorises listeners as interpretative, supportive, probing, understanding and emphatic. Interpretative listening is defined as being judgmental in the sense that the receiver of the communication tells the sender what the problem with the communication is, but not what he or she should do about it. A supportive listener wants to merely reassure the sender that the message was understood in order to avoid any conflict or problems. The probing listener will require further information until his or her needs are satisfied in terms of the original message. Understanding listening implies that the receiver will paraphrase the message to ensure that the message was communicated effectively and the emphatic listener will encourage an atmosphere for the sender to express him- or herself in order to solve any problems with the original communication.

Puth (2002:51) identified specific barriers to listening including that listeners have preconceived ideas, they think they might know more than the speaker, they might worry about something else, they might be tired or uncomfortable or they might be afraid of the speaker and, thus, refrain from commenting on the communication and misunderstandings can be created. The use of empathy in communication, the ability to resist distractions and learn to concentrate as well as the ability to be a critical listener and making sure that you understand the message, are all guidelines for improving listening skills (Puth 2002:52-55)

The rewards of effective listening is that employees will be able to add to their knowledge, they will encourage others to be more open in their communication thereby improving interpersonal relationship, misunderstandings will be eliminated and possible problems could be detected early (Puth 2002:55). Thus, creating a conducive environment for the implementation of a learning organisation, can be facilitated through open and honest communication. Learning and creativity skills can be clarified through seeking information,

brainstorming, associating ideas, deciding on courses of action, observing outcomes and reframing new knowledge into mental models (Farago & Skyrme 1995:3).

Innovation is a cornerstone for continuous improvement. Unfortunately, managers are not always equipped to deal with innovation especially where the organisational structure is bureaucratic. Regarding any new idea with suspicion, just because it is new and a subordinate suggested it and insisting that people need managerial approval before acting on new ideas could stifle innovation. Critten (1995:218) states that employees should not be asked to challenge or criticise each other's suggestions and management should not just offer criticism freely, without counteracting it with praise. Treating problems as failures, controlling everything carefully and assuming that just because a manager is placed in a senior management position, he or she would automatically know everything, will hinder innovation and creativity in a department.

From the above, it could be concluded that effective listening and creativity skills should be taught to managers who would assume leadership positions in the creation and management of a learning organisation. Listening is the ability to understand the feedback on original communication and without effective listening skills, managers will not be able to implement performance management systems or be able to determine whether departmental training priorities are aligned with individual training needs. The ability to promote innovation is an important principle in the implementation of a learning organisation. Managers should be aware of behaviour and perceptions that could hinder the creative learning environment and should always strive towards creating an enabling training and development framework for departmental effectiveness and efficiency.

7.6.2 Communication

Effective communication should never be taken for granted and managers should never assume that they are good communicators. Messages can very easily become obscured in the implementation of new processes, or in this case, a new approach to departmental training and development. The ability to communicate the intentions of senior management becomes imperative to the successful implementation of the approach. Bendix (1996:328) identifies specific physical barriers such as temperature, noise, distance and method of communication as hindering the successful transfer of understanding. Additional barriers to effective communication, such as language, poor listening habits, differences in perceptions, lack of honesty and trust, were stipulated by Robbins (1995:358-363).

Communication is the process of creating understanding and should be based on the principles of observing and listening. Communication, according to Farago & Skyrme (1995:3), should be encouraged especially across departmental boundaries ensuring that all employees have equal access to pertinent information regarding, for instance, human resource development and training initiatives.

Rainey & Watson (1996:768) identified specific strategies to enforce effective communication. Firstly, managers should develop a vision for the desired future by examining past experiences, the present situation and the future goals. All information should be disseminated and the vision communicated to all employees. Secondly, communicating the vision should lead to the creation of meaning and trust among all employees. Thirdly, management should choose the best course of action so as to instill trust, identity and integrity, by being consistent in the application of the communication. Fourthly, the manager should always keep his or her own skills and weaknesses in mind and strive to overcome his or her limitations by using employees that will compensate for managerial weaknesses. This successful communicator is one who is not afraid

to listen to advice and rely on experience from employees. Successful communication relies on feedback because the content of the feedback would determine whether or not the communication was successful.

Through the questionnaire, the perceptions of employees regarding communication, were determined. From previous chapters it could be deduced that the communication from senior management to lower levels in the hierarchy, is not always successful, especially when taking into account the fact that the majority of employees were not able to align their own personal development and training goals with the DPSA's training priorities. Figure 7.1 illustrates the extent to which the DPSA requires employees to give formal feedback after training courses were attended.

**Figure 7.1:   Receiving formal feedback after training courses**
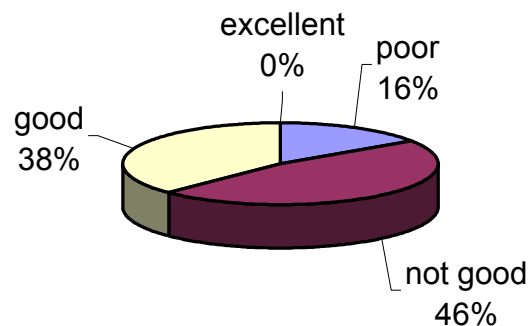
The majority of respondents (62%) indicated that formal feedback sessions after attending training courses are not required by the DPSA. The question was posed as to whether employees receive any formal feedback sessions from their colleagues who have attended training courses. Information sharing is an important building block for effective communication but without information, decisions regarding the DPSA's training priorities cannot be appropriately made. Information sharing does, however, begin with the individual employees and Figure 7.2 tested whether employees themselves are involved in distributing information regarding attended training courses.

Figure 7.2:   Conducting or participating in formal feedback sessions after training courses
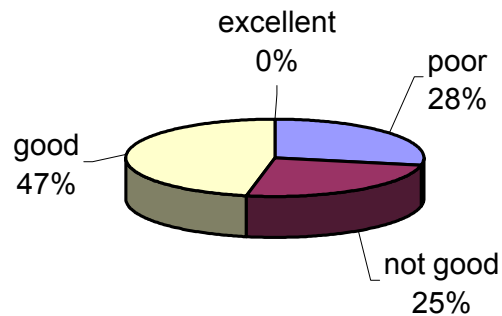
In most instances, employees are expected to write a report after a training course was attended, but the figure suggests that this mechanism is not enough to influence decisions regarding training goals and objectives for the future. A total of 53% of respondents agreed that it is not expected from them to be involved in formal training feedback sessions. Formal feedback sessions could lay the groundwork for a meaningful evaluation of a training course, but when no feedback sessions are provided, the evaluation is incomplete and will have no real effect on the communication process of choosing appropriate training courses for the DPSA training priorities. Figure 7.3 ascertains whether employees have participated in presenting periodic reports on training conducted by the DPSA.

Figure 7.3:   Presenting periodic reports on departmental training courses
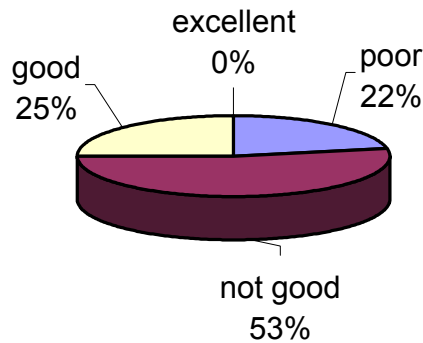
The vast majority of respondents (75%) indicated that they do not have to present any reports on training provided by the DPSA. Thus, the figure suggests that training provided by the DPSA is not regarded as a high priority and, it could be argued that employees prefer training to be conducted by trainers from outside the DPSA. As mentioned previously, partnerships with tertiary institutions strengthen the training system. Training provided by tertiary institutions could culminate in formal qualifications and when evaluation is built into the training course, it could be argued that the effectiveness and efficiency of the training efforts will be guaranteed. Reporting is an important mechanism to ensure effective and efficient communication. Reporting can also be used to facilitate team and departmental learning through the sharing of information that could influence decisions regarding departmental training priorities. Communication through, for instance, reporting will enhance individual and group dynamics and thus ensure that through the alignment of individual goals and objectives with group training priorities, the manager (leading the group) will be able to align the group training priorities with Departmental training priorities.

Improving group and organisational dynamic is most often only a matter of opening up the correct communication channels and ensuring that all parties affected have access to all the relevant information. Improving communication depends on establishing trust, mutual respect, a supportive departmental climate and sharing power through participatory decision making (Sadri & Tran 2002:2).

Improving relational communication increases job satisfaction and worker involvement and could also contribute to higher productivity even though the link between communication and productivity has not been conclusively proven. The fact does remain that the perceived openness in communication develops good interpersonal working conditions and improves overall job performance. A learning organisation is built on the premise that employees are able to work in teams, effectively and efficiently, to further departmental goals. Thus, effective group communication and group cohesion would have an impact on the ability of a department to transform itself into a learning organisation.

Effective alignment of training and development priorities between individual employees, the group and the Department require departmental change on three levels. First, cultural change involves the changing of the organisation's basic assumptions, values, beliefs and ideologies that define its view of itself and the environment within which it operates. Second, structural change entails changing the grouping of positions and departments within the organisation and third, behavioural change involves changing the behaviour, attitude and perceptions among individuals and work groups (Sadri & Tran 2002:3-4).

From the above, it could be concluded that communication is an important ingredient for effective and efficient training and development. Communication should, however, reflect the alignment of individual training priorities with that of the group and this with the department as well. Communication is a process that, when implemented effectively and efficiently, should provide employees with the opportunity to participate in training evaluation and, thus, influence decisions regarding departmental training priorities.

7.6.3 Mentoring

Mentoring is known as the most effective way of assisting newcomers into the organisational culture. Mentoring entails establishing a relationship between a senior (position) employee and a more junior (position) employee with the aim of increasing and promoting communication. All three levels of change (cultural, structural and behavioural) have to be in place before mentoring can be successful as a strategy to facilitate diversity management (Sadri & Tran 2002:2-3). For example, management must publicly announce and support the mentoring programme (cultural level) proceeding by ensuring that enough experienced employees are on board to serve as mentors, especially during times of organisational restructuring (structural level). The mentor must be willing to share his/her experiences and wisdom with younger employees and in turn, the younger employees must not be too scared to ask questions (behavioural level).

Mentors play a developmental as well as psychosocial role. The developmental role entails being a coach, sponsoring advancement, providing challenging assignments and fostering a positive visibility in the work environment. The psychosocial role comprises offering personal support, friendship, acceptance, counselling and being a role model (Sadri & Tran 2002:4).

All activities characterising mentoring are interpersonal in nature and it are built on and extend to a reciprocal and open communication channel between mentor and employee. The advantages of mentoring are that employees will be better able to make the transition from being outsiders to being part of the group. They will be able to establish interpersonal relationships more effortlessly and perhaps most importantly to the department, they will be able to discover their role in the Department clearly. Conflicts will be solved more easily and the assessment of the relationship between self-evaluation, as it relates to own performance, and departmental performance evaluation could be more easily established (Sadri & Tran 2002:4).

However, the departmental culture, structure or behaviour, judgements made between mentor and employee who became too involved in each other's personal lives, mentors being tyrannical or selfish and, employees only becoming a clone of the mentor and not realising their own potential and role to be played are examples of barriers to mentoring (Sadri & Tran 2002:4). The key to overcoming the problems or barriers to mentoring lies in successfully placing the mentor with the correct employee. This goes beyond personality and should be based more on trust and respect if the relationship is to be enhanced. The mentoring programme should, however, follow a structured approach beginning with a training session informing both mentor and employee what could be expected from each other. The most important positive result from mentoring is that group dynamics will be enhanced and employees see an improvement in their work performance and their ability to interact with each other (Sadri & Tran 2002:4-5).

From the above, it could be concluded that mentoring is a technique that could be utilised by managers to ensure that individual employees understand the importance of their positions within the group structure and thus within the overall departmental structure. Through mentoring the process of determining appropriate training and development priorities could be facilitated. Thus, mentorship should form part of the creation of a learning environment.

7.7   The knowledge intensive organisation: A new challenge

The knowledge intensive organisation is based on the assumption that information, knowledge and learning are central to any organisation operating in a technologically advanced environment. While Grieves (2000:8) maintains that the nature of knowledge work can mostly be observed in high technology environments, the importance of applying the knowledge intensive/learning phenomenon to all organisations should not be underestimated, since all organisations, and especially the public service, operates in an increasingly

complex environment. Knowledge management reflects on the primary role of the organisation and thus the essence of the organisational capability that manifests itself in the creation, integration and dissemination of knowledge (Beeby & Booth 2000:3). This process is called knowledge conversion and can be divided into four types, including (Beeby & Booth 2000:3-4):

a)   socialisation referring to the sharing of implicit knowledge between individuals either through formal or informal communication channels;

b)   externalisation referring to the conversion of implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge through a process of codification to ensure formal conversion and widespread dissemination;

c)   combination referring to the spread of explicit knowledge to all individuals and teams mainly through the use of information systems ; and

d)   internalisation depicting the reinforcement of explicit knowledge.

The attention focused on the knowledge-intensive organisation stems from the fact that the important factor of production in any department, is no longer capital, but intellectual labour (skilled employees). Knowledge is seen as the primary source of competitive advantage while employees are no longer satisfied with the traditional command and control management styles. Knowledge is incorporated into an organisation's knowledge assets comprising its core competencies, technology, value-adding activities, processes, systems, procedures and structures. The embodied knowledge constitutes the assets through which an organisation cam maintain its competitive advantage. The role of departmental learning is to continuously create new knowledge that would lead to the more effective and efficient handling of the departmental assets. The matrix structure (organisational structure) is the only structure that would accommodate a knowledge-intensive organisation. Previously mentioned, Hendricks (2002) stated that the DPSA is moving towards a more matrix organised structure, but if the learning processes to facilitate a learning organisation have not yet been implemented, the creation of a knowledge-intensive organisation would not be possible.

Departments, responding to the demands of a knowledge intensive/learning environment should adhere to ensuring an adequate supply of knowledge workers. The knowledge workers should, continuously, be identified, developed and evaluated. Knowledge workers should be motivated and rewarded in order to guarantee maximum productivity and quality service delivery. Attention also has to be paid to the fact that knowledge workers operate in a less bureaucratic departmental structure and, thus, the department should be able to adapt itself (Grieves 2000:8).

Knowledge and the management thereof have been equated, by Heaton & Harung (1999:2), with a stream. *'A stream has an impressive ability to adapt, to shift the configurations, to let the power balance move, to create new structures. But driving this adaptability, making it all happen, is the water's need to flow. Water answers to gravity, to downhill, to the call of the ocean. The forms change, but the mission remain clear. Structured emerge, but only as temporary solutions that facilitate rather than interfere. There is none of the rigid reliance on single forms'.* This indicates that, in order to establish a knowledge-intensive organisation, all sense of power, control, command and internal prejudice should be replaced by a structure, ever changing as the environment demands.

7.8   Conclusion

This chapter focused on the implementation and management of the learning organisation. The learning organisation is an approach to departmental training and priorities for the DPSA. The concept of the learning organisation can be equated with the self-actualisation level in motivational theories. It could be argued that the learning organisation is something that could be aimed at, but the actual attainment of it, will remain outside the reality scope for the DPSA. The five disciplines for the learning organisation, namely personal mastery, mental models, a shared vision, team learning and systems thinking were highlighted and discussed.

The implementation of the learning organisation will not happen in isolation and managers should expect specific challenges to arise including operational preoccupation, bureaucratic structure and the reluctance to train. However, specific steps have been identified by various authors, on how to implement the learning organisation. Different approaches to the implementation of the learning organisation were discussed, but since the concept of the learning organisation is only used, in this thesis, as an approach to improve training and development for the DPSA, no one approach to implementation was proposed.

The key management functions as well as the tools and techniques available to managers to facilitate the learning organisation, were discussed and the chapter concluded with a new challenge presented to the DPSA - the knowledge-intensive organisation and what that would mean for the DPSA. In the next chapter an overview will be given of the previous chapter, but more importantly, specific recommendations and conclusions will be drawn from the discussions pertaining to this thesis.