

ENTELECHY

Entelechy n, [LL, entelechia, from Greek]1. the vital force or principle directing life and growth. 2. a realisation or actuality as opposed to a potentiality.

On learning and development

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Learning one-on-one

The previous ***Entelechy*** newsletter (Vol. 2 No. 2) focused on how individuals can develop their capacity to know themselves as learners. This newsletter takes the next step up the hierarchy of learning (see newsletter Vol. 1 No. 7 for details of the hierarchy of learning). It deals with how an individual can help one other person to know himself/herself better as a learner. The only assumption here is that the helper has spent some time understanding himself/herself as a learner.

For the sake of clarity, the person playing the role of helper is identified throughout this newsletter as a learning facilitator, irrespective of his/her actual job title.

How learning facilitators differ from other workplace helpers

Because so many of the words that describe how one person might help another in a work-related context are used loosely or interchangeably, it is often difficult to make clear distinctions between them. The following, gleaned from the literature, are offered for the sake of clarity and consistency.

Immediate supervisor: The person to whom an employee reports, and who is responsible for ensuring that the employee achieves predetermined results and targets, performs his/her work to specified standards, and generally meets the terms of his/her employment.

Coach: An employee's boss or another subject matter expert, who is involved in a deliberate process of on-the-job training or assistance designed to help the individual improve on or exceed prior levels of performance.

Mentor: An individual of relatively high status within an organisation who, by mutual consent with the protégé, performs the role of career guide and role model to that protégé by championing, advising, steering, supporting, tutoring, and acting as confidant to him/her.

While there are obvious links between the roles of all workplace helpers, learning facilitators as described in this document are different from any of the three defined above.

The need for learning facilitators

For most employees, work offers the opportunity to:

- Do something (the "task" aspects of their work)
- Learn something (what can be learned from doing, and then reflecting on, the tasks that they perform)

Most people are much better at doing tasks than they are at thinking about their experiences and attempting to learn from them. That's because a task is seen as "concrete", something tangible to be achieved. Learning, on the other hand, seems to many people "fuzzier", less solid, less evident, and therefore less real.

While this view is inaccurate, it is the best reason for having learning facilitators among the helpers that might be assigned to individuals at work. Leaving individuals on their own, and hoping that they will somehow be able to make the most of the opportunities to learn they encounter at work, is far too optimistic. Since most adults are no longer consciously able to function "naturally" as self-directed learners, they need a helping hand. They need someone they can rely on for guidance, support, encouragement, feedback, direction, awareness of progress. In other words, someone who can help them maximise their learning.

The learning facilitator can be almost anyone, particularly a colleague, peer or other workmate. This person can be the "designated" learning facilitator as well as the immediate boss, coach or mentor, or it can be someone else entirely. The relationship can be incidental and informal, or it can be codified into an "official" arrangement. In all instances, however, acting as someone's learning facilitator is a part-time occupation that requires not more than an hour or two each week to be discharged.

A learning facilitator, as the name indicates, should be primarily concerned with helping the other person **learn** as much as possible from and through the work that he/she is responsible for doing. For the relationship between learner and learning facilitator to be successful, what is required above all is a climate of trust and openness.

Usually, such a climate must be consciously created and maintained. From the outset, the credibility of the learning facilitator must be firmly established in the eyes of the learner. The learner must also be certain that whatever he/she discusses in confidence with the facilitator will not be passed on to others, or made part of any personnel records, or later used against him/her in any way.

Roles and responsibilities of learning facilitators

Access to learning facilitators is particularly indicated when individuals are undergoing periods of significant change within their organisations (which, these days, is the case for almost everyone!). What everyone needs while experiencing change is a period of **transition**, to adapt to and accept the new ways of doing things.

This period of adjustment is necessary for everyone:

- Those who start off by resisting the new must be given the opportunity to confront (and if possible overcome) why they fear, or are suspicious of, change.
- Those who are reluctant to make up their minds one way or the other must be given the chance to become convinced that they stand to benefit more from involvement in the new than in adhering to the old ways.
- Those who enthusiastically (and perhaps unquestioningly) embrace what is being proposed must be given time to come to grips with all the implications (negative as well as positive) of what they're launching themselves into.

For all, access to a learning facilitator during this period of transition can make the difference between negotiating the transition successfully or failing to do so

There are many ways that learning facilitators can be of significant benefit to the individuals they are assigned to help. While they might be required to do everything that is listed below, it is not likely that they will be called upon to do it all at once. Hence, as they help others, learning facilitators will also be **helping themselves** to grow and develop their own competence as learners.

What learning facilitators can focus on

Learning facilitators can help other individuals to:

- Analyse their broad developmental needs and aspirations.
- Recognise opportunities for learning in the work they do.
- Establish their individual learning goals, and the outcomes they expect to flow from their involvement in specified work-related activities.
- Give learning "equal billing" with task in the key work-related activities they perform.
- Monitor the extent to which they're learning as well as achieving task outcomes, as they progress with work related activities and projects.
- Develop their ability to become self-directed, self-managed individual learners.
- Learn to ask for support and encouragement from others while they are carrying out particularly challenging work related activities.
- Learn to ask for feedback on work-related performance, accomplishments and difficulties being encountered.
- Learn to welcome constructive criticism about unproductive work-related efforts, and to redirect those that are deemed fruitless.
- Define their own models of efficient learning behaviour.
- Define their preferred learning style(s).
- Draw conclusions from the learning they're experiencing, and identify any skills and abilities needing to be further developed.

- Brainstorm where/how best to access resources (library books and journals; material available through the Internet; subject matter experts; external and/or in-house training programs; etc.) that might supplement their understanding of issues, concepts, management theories, etc. being identified as particularly relevant to the work they do.
- Use brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making and other techniques for overcoming the difficulties they might be encountering at work.
- Use demonstrations, presentations, reverse role playing and other accepted techniques for enhancing or integrating new learning into established patterns of behaviour.
- Progress from intuitive or incidental learning to full-fledged retrospective/prospective learners.
- Contrast their current skills, perceptions and abilities with what existed previously, so that they may become aware of the progress they're making as learners.

In short, the role of a learning facilitator is to act as "learning mentor" to the person being helped or, perhaps more colourfully but no less aptly, to act as "learning Greek chorus" to that individual!

Learning Facilitator's Self Assessment

Think of what you've been doing in recent weeks to help another person become a better learner.

1. WHAT ARE SOME OF THAT PERSON'S LEARNING ACCOMPLISHMENTS I CAN POINT TO WITH SATISFACTION? WHY?

2. WHAT ASPECTS OF LEARNING HAS THAT PERSON HAD THE MOST DIFFICULTY WITH? WHY WAS THAT?

3. WHAT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WOULD I HANDLE DIFFERENTLY WITH THAT PERSON NEXT TIME? HOW WOULD I HANDLE THEM? WHY WOULD I DO IT THIS WAY?

4. WHAT HAVE I LEARNED FROM THIS EXPERIENCE? WHERE/HOW MIGHT I BE ABLE TO PUT THIS LEARNING INTO EFFECT IN FUTURE LEARNING FACILITATOR ROLES? WHY?

