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## TEACHING & LEARNING

# Adaptive Learning in Concept and Implementation

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The theme of the Teaching & Learning Section for this issue is adaptive learning in some obvious and not so obvious forms. The common definition for that concept is “Learning where a system programs itself by adjusting weights or strengths until it produces the desired output” (Dictionary.com, 2012). The extension of this to organizational learning is not hard to find. We try new things and see what works or what meets our desired outcomes. Then we change inputs until we get some balance. A clearer understanding of adaptive learning is delivered by our first article, “Individual Contribution to a Team: The Importance of Continuous Adaptive Learning,” by Melissa J. Knott and D. Christopher Kayes. In this study, the authors examine the learning gained, lost, or never realized in course team experiences. Specifically, the study reports on the development and testing of a model for assessing “how an individual’s beliefs and team learning behavior contribute to team performance” (p. 30). Any management or organizational behavior instructor will be familiar with the feeling that students are participating but maybe not learning as much as they could from the class lecture or experiential exercise. Knott and Kayes offer some structure for understanding what is happening with our learning outcomes and some ideas for how to help students to learn more.

One aspect of adaptive learning suggested here is that individual beliefs, behaviors, and understanding must be integrated into the team experience for deep learning to happen. As we all know so well, however, there is some inherent tension in that process. The authors tested the hypothesis that “continuous adaptive learning will mediate the relationship between beliefs and individual contribution to the team.” This is important for several reasons and builds on previous research indicating that “adaptation is a situated process, in that different organizational settings (1) contain different kinds of clues about the underlying

issues, (2) offer different resources for generating and analyzing information, and (3) evoke different assumptions on the part of problem solvers” (Tyre & von Hippel, 1997, p. 71). Both the Knott and Kayes study presented here and the Tyre and von Hippel findings agree that people learn in context or multiple contexts through their interaction in groups or teams. In this sense, it is necessary for students to understand their own learning and reflective thinking in order to capture the learning of the team experience. Far from relying on the practice wisdom or group experience, Knott and Kayes have evidence-based conclusions as to why students often learn less than the experience offers.

The contextualized nature of team and organizational learning is dramatically illustrated in the second article. In “James Michaels (A) and (B),” Micheal T. Stratton shows us how a young assistant professor works to find a sense of justice in the wake of a personal attack by a disgruntled and bigoted student. This situation is framed as a case study with a separate teaching note, and one theme of the case is the central character’s effort to create continuous adaptive learning to find some meaning in the actions of both the student and the members of the college administration. Personal learning comes as Professor Michaels moves through a toxic political environment in an effort to seek justice and closure after experiencing instances of workplace harassment, administrative deceit, and procedural errors. The case and teaching note develop a powerful opportunity for students to understand how learning takes place and, more importantly, how learning becomes integrated into the self.

If greater self-awareness is a natural by-product of learning, then adaptive learning is how we fast-forward the process (Yu, 2011). The concepts of this are amply demonstrated in the Knott and Kayes article, while the actuality of working to create adaptive learning are fully shown in context in the case by Stratton. I think *OMJ* readers will be intrigued by both these articles and will see that they work together in a way that can facilitate adaptive learning. It will be a worthwhile exercise to put these to use in our own classrooms.

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