



# What makes a school a learning organisation?

A guide for policy makers,  
school leaders and  
teachers

Today's schools must equip students with the knowledge and skills they'll need to succeed in an uncertain, constantly changing tomorrow. But many schools look much the same today as they did a generation ago, and too many teachers are not developing the pedagogies and practices required to meet the diverse needs of 21st-century learners.

In response, a growing body of scholars, educators and policy makers is making the case that schools should be reconceptualised as "learning organisations" that can react more quickly to changing external environments, embrace innovations in internal organisation, and ultimately improve student outcomes.

#### WHAT ARE LEARNING ORGANISATIONS?

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The concept of the learning organisation began to gain popularity in the late 1980s. While the literature is disparate, it is generally agreed that the learning organisation is a necessity, is suitable for any organisation and that an organisation's learning capability will be the only sustainable competitive advantage in the future. Most scholars see the learning organisation as a multi-level concept involving individual behaviour, team work, and organisation-wide practices and culture. A learning organisation is a place where the beliefs, values and norms of employees are brought to bear in support of sustained learning; where a "learning atmosphere", "learning culture" or "learning climate" is nurtured; and where "learning to learn" is essential for everyone involved

#### THE NEED FOR A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCHOOL AS LEARNING ORGANISATION

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Despite strong support for and the intuitive appeal of the school as a learning organisation, relatively little

progress has been made in advancing the concept, either in research or practice. This lack of progress partly stems from a lack of clarity or common understanding of the school as learning organisation. Although reaching consensus is a daunting task, it can be achieved through further research and sustained dialogue among scholars, policy makers and educators around the world.

The OECD-UNICEF Education Working Paper, "What makes a school a learning organisation" should be seen as a first step towards a shared understanding of the concept that is both based on the literature and is recognisable to all parties involved, i.e. scholars, educators, policy makers, students and parents.

#### AIMS OF THIS BOOKLET

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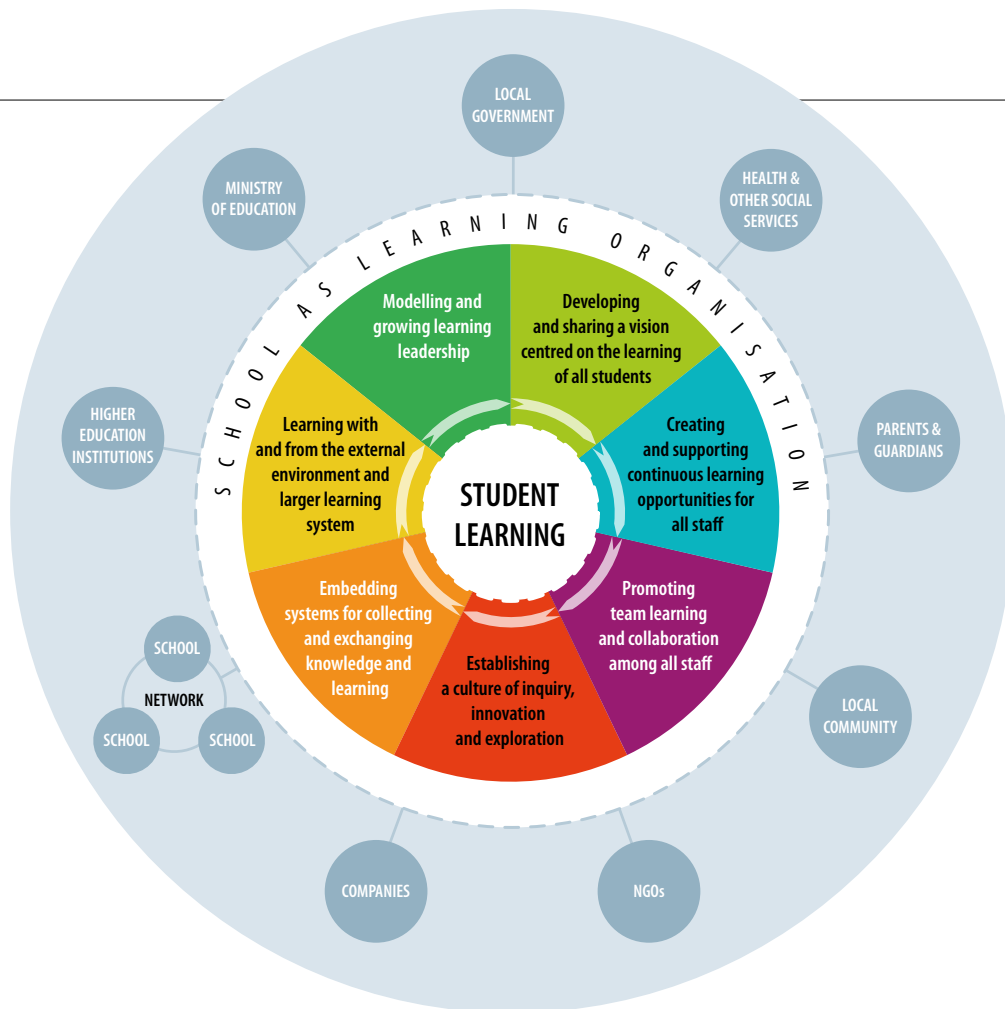
This booklet summarises some of the main findings published in the working paper. It is also intended to stimulate thinking and offer some practical guidance to school staff, (local) policy makers and other stakeholders who want to transform their schools into learning organisations.

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## An integrated model of the school as learning organisation

Informed by a small network of experts, the OECD-UNICEF paper proposes an integrated “school as learning organisation” model that focuses on:

- developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students
- creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff
- promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff
- establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration
- embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning
- learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system
- modelling and growing learning leadership.

In short, a school as learning organisation has the capacity to change and adapt routinely to new environments and

circumstances as its members, individually and together, learn their way to realising their vision.

These seven action-oriented “dimensions” and their underlying characteristics, referred to as “elements”, highlight both what a school aspires to be and the processes it goes through as it transforms itself into a learning organisation. All seven dimensions are essential for this transformation to be sustainable; and in the end, the whole – realising all seven dimensions – will be greater than the sum of its parts.

### FOUR TRANSVERSAL THEMES: TRUST, TIME, TECHNOLOGY AND THINKING TOGETHER

A set of themes flows through all seven dimensions: the four Ts: trust, time, technology and thinking together. Although some of these themes may seem more pertinent to one action than to another, all four have an impact on the whole. For example, trust underpins the kind of relationships needed internally and externally for learning organisations to thrive; and all aspects of school development require the provision of time.

## The actions needed to transform schools into learning organisations: an overview

### DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION CENTRED ON THE LEARNING OF ALL STUDENTS

- A shared and inclusive vision aims to enhance the learning experiences and outcomes of all students
- The vision focuses on a broad range of learning outcomes, encompasses both the present and the future, and is inspiring and motivating
- Learning and teaching are oriented towards realising the vision
- Vision is the outcome of a process involving all staff
- Students, parents, the external community and other partners are invited to contribute to the school's vision

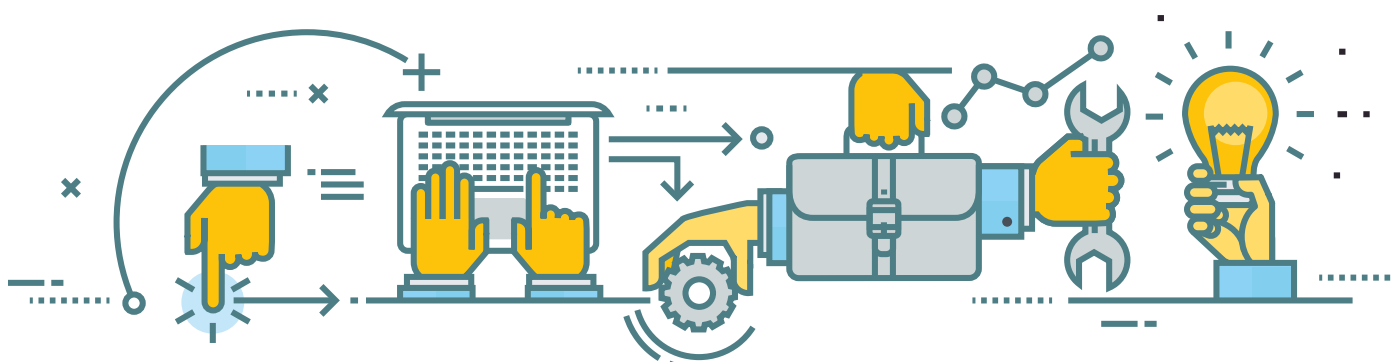
A school as a learning organisation has a shared vision that gives it a sense of direction and serves as a motivating force for sustained action to achieve individual and school goals. Having a shared vision is more an outcome of a process than it is a starting point – a process that involves all staff, students, parents and other stakeholders.

One of the biggest challenges facing communities today is integrating those on the margins of society whose learning difficulties undermine their self-confidence. Not only is their exclusion a waste of human potential, their alienation poses a real threat to democracy. Education stakeholders need to believe that a school's vision and goals include a moral purpose. Having an inspiring and motivating vision statement that is committed to enhancing the lives of *all* students is vitally important.

Success in school is possible for all students. Many schools and education systems around the globe

have realised their vision to dramatically improve the learning outcomes of the most disadvantaged children. PISA 2012, for example, shows that the countries that have improved student performance significantly since 2000, including Brazil, Germany, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Tunisia and Turkey, have managed to reduce the proportion of low-achieving students. The evidence shows that excellence and equity in education are not mutually exclusive goals.

Thus, any vision to transform a school into a learning organisation should include two things: a front and centre commitment to making a difference in the learning and lives of *all* students, especially disadvantaged students; and a focus on learning and teaching that influences a broad range of outcomes – both cognitive and social/emotional – for today and the future. Each individual must be equipped to seize learning opportunities throughout life, to broaden her or his knowledge, skills and attitudes, and to adapt to a changing, complex and interdependent world.





PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR ALL STAFF

- All staff engage in continuous professional learning
- New staff receive induction and mentoring support
- Professional learning is focused on student learning and school goals
- Staff are fully engaged in identifying the aims and priorities for their own professional learning
- Professional learning challenges thinking as part of changing practice
- Professional learning connects work-based learning and external expertise
- Professional learning is based on assessment and feedback
- Time and other resources are provided to support professional learning
- The school's culture promotes and supports professional learning

The kind of education needed today requires teachers who constantly advance their own professional knowledge and that of their profession. A growing body of evidence shows that teachers' professional development can have a positive impact on student performance and teachers' practice. Consequently, scholars, educators and policy makers around the world increasingly support the notion of investing in quality, career-long opportunities for professional development, and ensuring ongoing, active professional learning.

A school as a learning organisation has a supportive culture, and invests time and other resources in quality professional learning opportunities for all staff – teachers, school leaders and support staff – starting with their induction into the profession. It also connects work-based learning and external learning (e.g. workshops or university courses), ensuring that the former is designed so that professional learning is sustainably embedded in daily practice.

*“It is clearer today than ever that educators need to learn, and that's why professional learning has replaced professional development. Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must become learners ...”* (Easton, 2008)

In a school as a learning organisation, staff are fully engaged in identifying the aims and priorities for their own professional learning in line with school goals and student learning needs, as defined in the school's development plan. The staff's professional learning is also based on continuous assessment and feedback that should be built into their daily practice. Such reflection, analysis and challenges to established thinking patterns are necessary to bring about and embed change and innovation in educational practice.

Figure 1. Key components of the professional life cycle



Source: OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>.

## PROMOTING TEAM LEARNING AND COLLABORATION AMONG ALL STAFF

- Staff learn how to work together as a team
- Collaborative working and collective learning – face-to-face and through ICTs – are focused and enhance learning experiences and outcomes of students and/or staff practice
- Staff feel comfortable turning to each other for consultation and advice
- Trust and mutual respect are core values
- Staff reflect together on how to make their own learning more powerful
- The school allocates time and other resources for collaborative working and collective learning

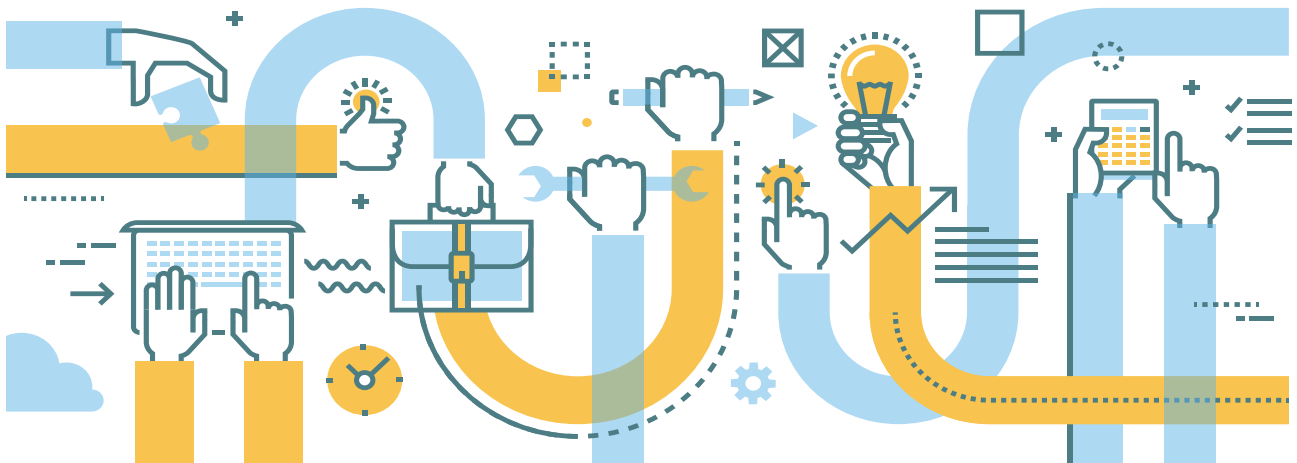
Neuroscience confirms that we learn through social interaction. Team learning and collaboration are central to the school as a learning organisation and to the pedagogical development of teachers and support staff.

Not all team activities are team learning. Team learning is a way of working designed to get members of a team thinking and acting together. Team learning is not collaborative learning, per se, but rather the collective learning shared among people. In a learning organisation, staff learn to work together and learn collectively – face-to-face and/or using ICT – with peer networking playing an important role in enhancing teacher and school leader professionalism.

In a school that is a learning organisation, colleagues learn about their learning together. They take time to consider what each person understands about the learning and knowledge they have created collectively, the conditions that support this learning and knowledge, and what all of this means for the way they collaborate. An initiative by Foundation LeerKracht in the Netherlands combines many of the features of team learning and collaboration (Box 1).

Staff also have a positive attitude towards collaboration and team learning. Trust and mutual respect are core values. Trust forms the foundation for co-operation between individuals and teams. When people trust and respect each other, other means of governance and control can be minimised. Creating an organisational culture of trust and respect in which team learning and collaboration can thrive naturally involves most, if not all, members of the organisation. Trust and respect are also reflected in the allocation of time and other resources, such as a weekly schedule of regular hours devoted to team meetings or learning sessions, and time for colleagues to observe each other and engage in networked learning.

In schools as learning organisations, it is expected that staff share their insights on learning and teaching with colleagues. They meet regularly to reflect together on how to address challenges and solve problems, and learn how to enhance student learning and/or staff practice. School structures thus encourage collaboration and dialogue among staff. Regular staff meetings, presentations during conferences, peer coaching, or having longer-serving staff mentor new teachers are all examples of this collaboration (see Box 1).



## Box 1: Foundation LeerKRACHT, the Netherlands

Foundation leerKRACHT (the Dutch word for teacher), established in September 2012, aims to: implement a bottom-up capacity-building programme for schools, reaching more than 5 000 Dutch primary and secondary schools (out of a total of 8 700) by 2020; and reshape national education policy to create a body of high-quality teachers and encourage schools to create a culture of continuous improvement. The foundation believes that the quality of teachers is key. It aims to empower teachers by helping schools create a continuous improvement culture in which teachers work together to improve their teaching, with school leaders serving as role models. Three improvement processes are central to the programme: classroom observation and feedback conversations; joint lesson planning; and board sessions. These “board sessions” are based on the LEAN movement in the manufacturing industry, where small teams hold daily stand-up meetings to improve quality. The approach is underpinned by forum meetings with “Foundation leerKRACHT schools” in the region and by visits to companies that have a continuous improvement culture.

This private initiative now involves one in ten secondary schools, one in three vocational schools, and hundreds of primary schools in the Netherlands.



Source: Foundation LeerKRACHT (2016), [www.stichting-leerkracht.nl/ik-ben-geinteresseerd/](http://www.stichting-leerkracht.nl/ik-ben-geinteresseerd/).

### ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF INQUIRY, EXPLORATION AND INNOVATION

- Staff want and dare to experiment and innovate in their practice
- The school supports and recognises staff for taking initiative and risks
- Staff engage in forms of inquiry to investigate and extend their practice
- Inquiry is used to establish and maintain a rhythm of learning, change and innovation
- Staff have open minds towards doing things differently
- Problems and mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning
- Students are actively engaged in inquiry

One of the marks of any professional is the ability to reflect critically on both one’s profession and one’s daily work, to be continuously engaged in self-improvement that will lead to improvement in students’ learning. To be able to do this within an organisation requires a pervasive spirit of inquiry, initiative and willingness to experiment with new ideas and practices. This mind set is critical for schools as learning organisations.

To benefit from this spirit of inquiry, professionals need to be able to tolerate ambiguity, avoid snap judgements, consider different perspectives, and pose increasingly

focused questions. From that process comes deep understanding and, ultimately, better decisions. Being able to make informed decisions about learning, teaching and children gives professionals confidence, competence, insight, sound judgement, and the ability to adapt.

Inquiry has benefits for teachers’ professional learning. Cycles of inquiry and knowledge building are central to professional growth. These cycles lie at the heart of the Spirals of Inquiry approach in British Columbia (see Box 2), which has been influenced by work in New Zealand and other research on learning.

## Box 2: Spirals of Inquiry, Networks of Inquiry and Innovation, and the Aboriginal Enhancement Network, British Columbia, Canada

**Spirals of Inquiry:** A disciplined approach to inquiry is informing and shaping the transformative work in schools and districts across the province. Participating schools engage in a year-long inquiry about learning using the Spiral of Inquiry as the framework. The spiral consists of six key stages: scanning, focusing, developing a hunch, new professional learning, taking action and checking that a big enough difference has been made. At each stage, three key questions are asked: What is going on for our learners? How do we know this? How does this matter?

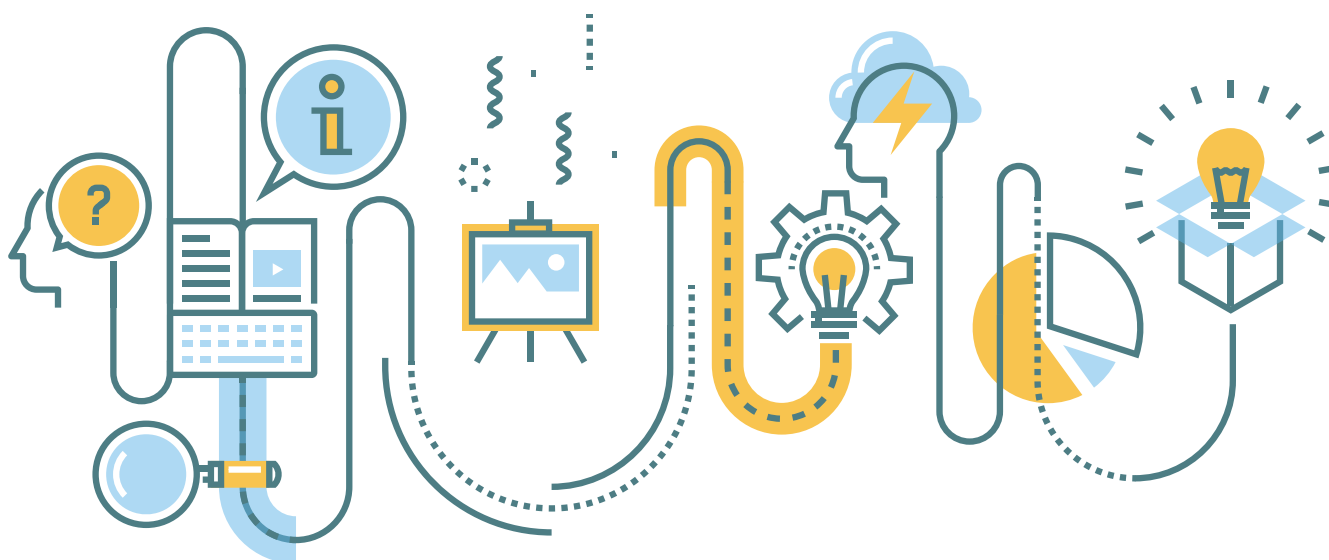
**Networks of Inquiry and Innovation (NOII) and the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN):** These networks connect professional learning through principals, teachers and support staff and accelerate the transformative work across the province. To date, 156 schools in 44 districts in British Columbia are members of NOII and AESN. A grant from the federal government funded a research study on the impact of teacher involvement in AESN and examined more than 50 inquiry projects around the province. The focus on inquiry learning has proved to be beneficial to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and teachers alike. The AESN is considered to be an effective mechanism for realising sustainable teaching and learning change.

Source: OECD (2015), *Schooling Redesigned: Towards Innovative Learning Systems*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264245914-en>.

For a school to become a learning organisation, it is essential that people dare to innovate in their daily practice. The school as learning organisation thus supports and protects those who initiate and take risks, and rewards them for it. It also expects that people will keep an open mind about new ways of doing things. Teachers are thus helped to overcome the uncertainties and isolation of traditional teaching through collegial and open dialogue, exchanging ideas and sharing experiences, debating issues and techniques, and by experimenting.

Some initiatives and experiments will fail, while others will succeed. Organisations – including schools – that systematically learn from failure are rare. This is not because of a lack of commitment to learning, but rather because mistakes or experiments that fail are viewed in the wrong way, or because accountability systems punish mistakes. In schools as learning organisations, problems and mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning.

**“Failure is instructive. The person who really thinks learns quite as much from his failures as from his successes.” – John Dewey**





## EMBEDDING SYSTEMS FOR COLLECTING AND EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

- Systems are in place to examine progress and gaps between current and expected impact
- Examples of practice – good and bad – are made available to all staff to analyse
- Sources of research evidence are readily available and easily accessed
- Structures for regular dialogue and knowledge exchange are in place
- Staff have the capacity to analyse and use multiple sources of data for feedback, including through ICT, to inform teaching and allocate resources
- The school development plan is evidence-informed, based on learning from self-assessment, and updated regularly
- The school regularly evaluates its theories of action, amending and updating them as necessary
- The school evaluates the impact of professional learning

Schools as learning organisations develop processes, strategies and structures that allow the schools to learn and react effectively in uncertain and dynamic environments. They institutionalise learning mechanisms in order to revise existing knowledge. Without such mechanisms, a learning organisation cannot thrive.

Effective use of data by teachers, school leaders and support staff has become central to school-improvement processes. Major improvements can be achieved when schools and school systems increase their collective capacity to engage in ongoing assessment for learning, and regularly evaluate, amend and update their theories of action about how their interventions are intended to work, and whether they actually do. Also important are school-based self-assessments, external accountability data, and a commitment to being honest about the reality of the situation. A school as a learning organisation makes lessons learned – whether good or bad – available to all staff. It also evaluates the impact of professional learning.

These schools have systems in place to ensure they are “information-rich” or, more appropriately, “knowledge-rich”. Information (data in this case) is not knowledge; it takes social processing in the school context to bring information to life. Only through sharing, exchange, conversations and collaboration can relevant knowledge and readiness for change be developed. So, for a learning culture to emerge, schools as learning organisations need to create the structures for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing among staff and others, such as parents, community members and businesses, when appropriate.

Schools as learning organisations also need to ensure that their staff have the capacity to analyse and use data to improve and, where necessary, transform existing practice. This is essential, as research evidence shows that in many school systems, the capacity to systematically collect, analyse and exchange knowledge and learning – whether or not using ICT – is underdeveloped.

Staff need to be able to use data and information from multiple sources (e.g. from students, parents, teacher surveys, peer reviews, team-teaching), including through ICT, in order to provide feedback on learning and teaching and the allocation of resources. School development plans need to be updated regularly, based on this information and on a self-assessment process that involves all staff and other interested parties (e.g. students, parents, community members, other schools, businesses).

Using another form of evidence – external research findings – to improve day-to-day teaching practice has become a hot topic in many countries, although it is far from common practice. Many schools find it difficult to become “research engaged” because staff lack the necessary skills, resources or motivation. Research Learning Communities (see Box 3), a project supported by the University College London Institute of Education, is an example of how schools are learning to become more research-engaged and confident about using evidence.

### Box 3: **Research Learning Communities project, University College London (UCL) Institute of Education, England**

Primary schools in England have worked with the UCL Institute of Education in a two-year pilot project, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, focused on increasing the use of research in schools. The Research Learning Communities project was designed to help schools that aim to become more evidence-informed by: developing approaches to building teacher capacity to engage in and with research and data; exploring how school cultures can become more open to using evidence, making the use of research a cultural norm; exploring how schools can promote the use of research as part of an effective learning environment; and examining the structures, systems and resources needed to facilitate the use of research and share best practice.

Two leaders, a senior leader and an informal opinion leader, represented each participating school to ensure that central actors will champion research-informed practice and promote wider reach and buy-in to the approach across the school. During the first year, teams met four times in 10 groups of 5-6 schools for one-day workshops where they examined research and evidence relating to a commonly agreed area of focus. Based on this evidence, they then formulated, applied and evaluated school- or stage-wide development strategies. These were tested in schools between the sessions. The sessions were also designed to build capacity for sustaining the approach, ensuring that schools can continue to participate in the Research Learning Communities and use evidence effectively after the project ends. In the second year, participating schools led sessions, with external facilitators on hand to support and challenge them.

Source: Research Learning Communities, Education Endowment Foundation and the UCL Institute of Education, University of London, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects/research-learning-communities/> (accessed 5 April, 2016).

#### LEARNING WITH AND FROM THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AND LARGER SYSTEM

- The school scans its external environment to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities
- The school is an open system, welcoming approaches from potential external collaborators
- Partnerships are based on equality of relationships and opportunities for mutual learning
- The school collaborates with parents/guardians and the community as partners in the education process and the organisation of the school
- Staff collaborate, learn and exchange knowledge with peers in other schools through networks and/or school-to-school collaborations
- The school partners with higher education institutions, businesses, and/or public or non-governmental organisations in efforts to deepen and extend learning
- ICT is widely used to facilitate communication, knowledge exchange and collaboration with the external environment

Schools don't operate in a vacuum; they are "open systems" that are sensitive to their external environment, including social, political and economic conditions. The school as a learning organisation is proactive in continuously scanning the environment to monitor and respond to external challenges and opportunities, as appropriate. It also builds and maintains the capital it needs by forging partnerships with and networks of students, teachers, parents and members of the local communities.

Parents or guardians are key partners for schools as learning organisations. Without co-operation between

families and schools, it is unlikely that all students will meet the high expectations set by a demanding society. The school as a learning organisation shares information with parents and considers parents as partners in the education process and organisation of the school.

Thinking holistically about students means ensuring that they benefit from a wide range of services. Schools as learning organisations may need additional financial resources and the participation of multiple social services to respond adequately to the needs of disadvantaged students and students with special learning needs.

In schools as learning organisations, continuous professional learning among staff is not limited to the physical boundaries of the school. Teachers and school leaders expect to engage in collaborative work and learning with their peers in other schools by establishing networks or school-to-school collaborations. These

networked learning organisations develop and maintain trusting relationships and are flexible and adaptable to changing community and environmental needs. Networking among colleagues in different schools is a central feature of the Austrian New Secondary School reform (see Box 4).

#### Box 4: Collaborative learning and working through networks, Austria

The Austrian New Secondary School reform started as a relatively small-scale project in 2008 with 67 pilot schools. Since then, it has become a mandated school reform that will be completed in phases by 2018. Central to the reform is the creation of a new leadership position at the school level, the *Lerndesigner*, a teacher-leader who, together with the school's principal and other teacher-leaders (subject co-ordinators, school development teams, etc.) serve as change agents in their schools. They are guided by the principle of school-specific reform and focus on the dual national reform goals of equity and excellence.

Much effort is devoted to building social and leadership capital through networking events. These play a central role in the reform as they provide the venue for learning, peer learning and dissemination of good practice. A specially designed two-year national accredited qualification programme for *Lerndesigners* and an online platform for sharing ideas and practices are integral parts of the reform's continuous professional development and leadership development efforts.

Source: OECD (2015), *Schooling Redesigned: Towards Innovative Learning Systems*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264245914-en>.

Information and communication technology is widely used to facilitate communication, knowledge exchange and collaboration with external partners. Whether or not supported through ICT, networked-based learning facilitates collaboration and peer learning and can help reduce the isolation of independently functioning schools, helping to transform them into learning organisations that are part of a larger "learning system".

Partnerships with higher education institutions can benefit both partners. Schools can draw on their expertise and capacity, and innovative ideas and practices implemented in individual schools can

influence the thinking in universities and teachers colleges. The American Professional Development Schools and Sweden's "training schools" are examples of such partnerships. They aim to build capacity for learning and teaching in individual schools and in higher education institutions.

But as the Brazilian "Neighbourhood as School" example (see Box 5) shows, partnerships are not necessarily confined to traditional stakeholders. Innovative learning environments, many of which resemble schools as learning organisations, involve a diverse range of non-formal partners.

#### Box 5: Neighbourhood as School project, Brazil

A new concept of education was developed in Vila Madalena, a small district in Brazil's largest city, São Paulo. Since 1997, the non-governmental organisation Cidade Escola Aprendiz, has been turning squares, alleys, cinemas, ateliers, cultural centres and theatres into classrooms. This "Neighbourhood as School" concept, an extension of formal schooling, aims to expand learning spaces in the community, creating a pedagogic laboratory in which learning is also knowing oneself and socially intervening in the community through communication, art and sports. The success of the Neighbourhood as School concept rests on a partnership among schools, families, public authorities, entrepreneurs, associations, craftspeople, non-governmental organisations and volunteers. Everybody educates and everybody learns.

Source: UNICEF (2009), *Child Friendly School Manual*, UNICEF, New York, [www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child\\_Friendly\\_Schools\\_Manual\\_EN\\_040809.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child_Friendly_Schools_Manual_EN_040809.pdf).

## MODELLING AND GROWING LEARNING LEADERSHIP

- School leaders model learning leadership, distribute leadership and help grow other leaders, including students
- School leaders are proactive and creative change agents
- School leaders develop the culture, structures and conditions to facilitate professional dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange
- School leaders ensure that the organisation's actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values
- School leaders ensure the school is characterised by a 'rhythm' of learning, change and innovation
- School leaders promote and participate in strong collaboration with other schools, parents, the community, higher education institutions and other partners
- School leaders ensure an integrated approach to responding to students' learning and other needs

Leadership is the essential ingredient that binds all of the separate parts of the learning organisation together. Learning leadership provides direction for learning, takes responsibility for putting learning at the centre of the school's mission (and keeping it there), and translates vision into strategy so that the organisation's actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values. It is at the heart of daily practice in schools as learning organisations. By engaging in professional learning as "lead learners", and creating the conditions for others to do the same, school leaders model and champion such professionalism throughout the school and beyond the school's boundaries.

School leaders have a vital role in establishing a learning culture, and promoting and facilitating organisational learning. They are responsible for shaping the work and administrative structures to facilitate professional dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange, all of which are crucial for promoting organisational learning in schools. They have to create a safe and trusting environment in which people can change their behaviour, take initiative, experiment and understand that it is expected that they challenge the status quo. This means that school leaders too need to develop the capacity to challenge their own habits and current ways of thinking and operating. School leaders need to realise that becoming a learning organisation requires adaptability and creativity, and depends on how they interact with their staff, particularly when staff resist change.

In schools as learning organisations, staff are encouraged to participate in decision making. Distributed leadership develops, grows and is sustained through collaboration,

team work, and participation in professional learning communities and networks. Research evidence shows that teachers tend to report a greater sense of self-efficacy and more job satisfaction when they are given the opportunity to participate in decision making at school.

Evidence also shows that leaders of the most successful schools in challenging circumstances are highly engaged with and trusted by parents and the wider community. Efforts to improve the performance and well-being of socio-economically disadvantaged students requires school leaders to become more involved with partners beyond the school, such as local businesses, sports clubs, faith-based groups and community organisations.

While committed school leaders are key to the success of schools as learning organisations, the support of policy makers, administrators and other system leaders (e.g. superintendents, inspectors, other local leaders etc.) is crucial. They encourage professional learning and development, promote innovations and school-to-school collaboration, and help disseminate good practice. Without government/policy support for collaboration and collective learning, schools as learning organisations will continue to operate in isolation (if at all), especially in an age of accountability.

For references please see Kools, M and L. Stoll (2016), "What makes a school a learning organisation?", OECD Education Working Paper, No 137, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jlw62b3bvhen>.





## How the OECD helps countries transform its schools into learning organisations

The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills aims to gather evidence from a wide range of countries on how to develop schools into learning organisations. Practical guidance and support are also provided to schools and local and system-level stakeholders for catalysing the desired change and innovation, and developing professional learning cultures across school systems.

Support will be tailored to countries' specific needs, but can consist of the following main activities:

### 1) ASSESSING THE CHANGE AND INNOVATION CAPACITY IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

An assessment of the change and innovation capacity in a school system will be conducted using an innovative form of the OECD Education Policy Review methodology (see below) consisting of:

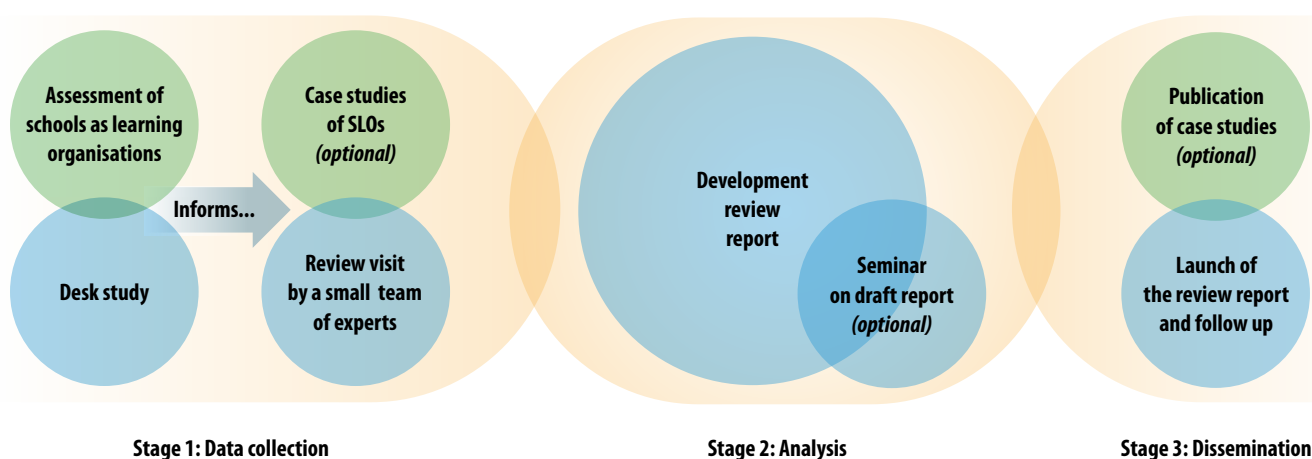
- Implementation of the *schools as learning organisations assessment*, which is based on the schools as learning organisation model presented in this booklet. The assessment consists of a questionnaire for teachers and school leaders, and a background questionnaire, and is supported by *desk research*.

- A five-day *review visit* to the country by a small team of experts, during which policy makers, school leaders, teachers and other stakeholders will be interviewed.
- Analysis of the assessment to identify schools as learning organisations i.e. 'good practices' that could be developed into *case studies* (optional) to be incorporated into the review report and posted on the OECD website.

Countries may opt to repeat the review at a later stage to get an update on progress made in establishing a professional learning and self-improving culture across their school system.

The scope of the review can be broader and include other topics (e.g. evaluation and assessment, governance, etc.) or questions of interest.

Figure 2: **Overview proposed review methodology**



Note: Activities in blue circles visualise the components of the standard OECD Education Policy Review methodology. Activities in green circles are innovations on the standard review methodology.



## 2) ORGANISING CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS TO FACILITATE PEER LEARNING

Conferences and/or seminars can be organised in participating countries to facilitate knowledge sharing and peer learning among schools, (local) policy makers and other stakeholders. These events will draw on the above mentioned review report and will be led by international experts.

Representatives of other countries and initiatives relevant to the participating country will also be invited. In turn, the target country will be invited to conferences and seminars organised by other countries.

At least one international peer-learning event will be organised at OECD headquarters in Paris each year.

## 3) BUILDING CHANGE AND INNOVATION CAPACITY WITHIN SCHOOLS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The OECD proposes to support the transformation of a select number of schools into learning organisations in participating countries. The organisation will work with international experts who will research the specific context and work with local governments to build their capacity, and that of school leaders and teachers in a select number of schools, to establish the desired professional learning cultures.

A tailored package of supporting materials, including a *School as learning organisation self-assessment instrument*, will be developed to support schools as they transform themselves into learning organisations. Guidance will also be provided to local and system-level stakeholders. Governments can use the lessons learned from this work to develop their reform programmes.

## Main outcomes for countries

- A review report that provides countries with insights into the progress made so far in establishing a professional learning and self-improving culture across the school system.
- Capacity built among (local) governments, school leaders and teachers for developing schools into learning organisations and working towards a self-improving school system.
- Evidence and support for countries' wider education reform programmes.
- Participation in an international network of countries that exchange relevant knowledge, skills and ideas through peer-learning events and other international exchanges.
- International exposure includes recognition as one of the first countries to implement the OECD schools as learning organisation model and having the country's experience included in the OECD Education Policy Outlook series (2018).



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