

The organizational learning inventory (OLI): an assessment guide for understanding your institution's learning capabilities
by Eric F. Grosse Jr. and Anthony DiBella

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Coping with uncertainty and turbulence has become imperative for organizations to survive. The survival/coping strategies are an outcome of accumulation/acquisition of new knowledge that happens through “learning.” “The rate at which individuals and organizations learn may become the only sustainable competitive advantage” (Stata, 1989, p. 64). Hence, learning can be viewed as something very vital to the core of an organization. Organizational sustainability in this turbulent environment is dependent on how fast an organization learns. Hence, the extent of occurrence of organizational learning is a precursor to know whether the organization as a living entity is moving in the right direction. As succinctly noted by Chiva *et al.* (2007), the ability of organizations to learn which is considered as “organizational and managerial characteristics” has utmost importance to organizational growth and development. Therefore, whether organizations are moving in the right path toward learning and the extent to which learning is happening are paramount. The current book acts as a yardstick in this direction.

The book titled *The Organizational Learning Inventory*, which was originally developed by Anthony DiBella and colleagues (1992), is the outcome of extensive research conducted across the USA, Europe and Asia. The current form of the book is based on the collaborative work between DiBella (contributor) and Grosse Jr (author). The book, in the form of a questionnaire, is aimed at assessing whether organizational units operating in the field of higher education can be assessed as learning systems. The sampling unit's profiling in terms of learning can be mapped in terms of learning style, learning strength and developmental needs, and on the basis of the results obtained, action plans will be designed for further improvement.

The book is structured in four parts, namely, evaluating learning orientations (Part 1); judging unit's facilitating factors (Part 2); envisioning a desired profile that is achievable (Part 3); and a hypothetical case study exemplifying the applicability of the inventory (Part 4).

Part 1 which deals with “learning orientations” is based on seven dimensions. This captures where learning happens along with the nature of learning. The beauty of this section lies not only in tapping the response but also in cross-checking the responses through four paired statements with opposite position or approaches. Along with cross-checking, this part contains a subsection named as “example,” where a brief write-up is needed to justify the final rating score that has emerged from the previously obtained responses.



Part 2 provides the processes and structures that oversee how smoothly learning can happen. These are captured through ten “facilitating factors.” Each factor has a brief description about it. The extent to which each factor is practised is rated through several statements in Likert scale. Again, the “example” subsection cross validates the responses.

Going through both the parts, I appreciate the way the author and the contributor have tried to justify the responses from multiple angles.

Part 3 of the inventory presents a summary sheet on the participants’ desirous of a learning profile and the achievability of the same. This is built on Parts 1 and 2.

Part 4 of the book contains a hypothetical case study and study material exhibiting the applicability of the inventory in detail.

My observation regarding the book, whose design is in the form of a questionnaire, can be described as “holistic assessment of organizational learning phenomenon” in the sense that it has three components, namely, assessing, designing and implementing the phenomenon, i.e. organizational learning. The merit of the book lies not only in its “wholeness” but also in its “reader-friendly” approach. The main premise of the inventory lies in “validating the responses”.

The most interesting aspect of the inventory is the “case study” section. This part elaborates different aspects of organizational learning as outlined in the previous three sections, i.e. unit’s present state vs desired state, how to resolve team differences, resources available, future planning and consensus building, to name a few. “Action plan templates,” at the end, helps in drafting the unit’s implementation strategy.

This book would benefit units operating in the field of higher education in terms of capturing their learning in terms of learning styles, learning and developmental needs, and action plan for further improvement. The field of higher education is considered to be the backbone of economy. This field is identified with cutthroat competition, dynamic change and everyday fulfillment of stakeholders’ satisfaction, which in turn determines this industry’s sustainability and growth. Thus, this inventory aptly acts as a practitioner’s guide or handbook that contributes significantly toward organizational change, organizational learning and development. Besides practitioners, the book could bring benefit to researchers and academicians. They can add value to the existing research on organizational learning by refining and developing models and/or theoretical frameworks.

One aspect of the inventory which could be a pitfall is the time factor. I guess, it may hinder the interest of the respondents. Nevertheless, the book’s contribution toward organizational competitive advantage through learning overpowers the aforementioned disadvantage.

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