

The Learning Camp: A Quick and Useful Overview

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Credo of a learning organization

We continually seek to improve; we haven't cornered the market on good ideas; our existing systems, methods, and ideas are continually open to change; positive change is good and we welcome it; we continually look outside ourselves for fresh inspiration; we freely adapt and adopt the most useful ideas we find; we want to meet and beat the best known performance in any process.

Preface

It is as trite as it is true to say that the human experience is one of constant learning. Young children often look up to adults and think, "They know everything!" When those kids become teenagers, that shifts to, "I know everything." As adults, we are well aware that there is plenty we don't know, and that it is only by plunging the depths of our ignorance that we can see the extent of our own knowledge accurately.

This resource is simply a discussion, delineation, and tool to help camps understand what they know, what they don't know, and to what degree. With that knowledge, you will be able to transform your camp from good to great (see the "From good to great" resource). After reading through this resource, you'll understand if you are good or great.

It is certainly true that, more often than not, camps and individuals have some sense of where they are strong and weak. What large and small organizations alike have found out is that the specifics are difficult to grasp without a clear framework and method of assessment. Perhaps R.D. Laing said it best in a piece from his book called *Knots*: "The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds."

A nod certainly needs to be given to Senge's (1990) book "The Fifth Discipline." Organizational learning was certainly around before him as a point of discussion and research, but he put the concept on the map. As good as that book (and his subsequent works) was, his framework was still both fuzzy and incomplete. In the decade since then, people around the world have been working diligently on the idea of learning organizations and much has been gleaned. That learning in the form of refinement, expansion, and utility is reflected here.

A view from the mountain tops and foothills is the scope of this chapter. Including very specific details about how to increase a camp's ability to be a learning organization would make this resource a very long book. Teaching you how to fish and providing fish are both valuable. Some of the "in-the-trenches" learning camp specifics are covered in other resources. For example, if you are interested in improving the team learning dimension, the "Knowledge management" resource is very specific and valuable.

Again, *developing a learning camp is left to other resources* (see references), namely: culture, the art and science of making mistakes, benchmarking, knowledge management, and innovation and continuous improvement. Secondly, the resources on process modeling and evaluation will be quite helpful.

Creating a "Very high" or "Extremely high" learning camp is very hard, but exceptional camps settle for nothing less. By reading, understanding, and applying this information, I know you want to create an even better camp. Let's go.

Introduction

Camp Learningstar

Imagine: At Camp “Learningstar” . . . There is a knowledge center called OWL, which is short for Orchestrating Wisdom and Learning. At this spot, staff can find information they need to learn about an activity, find out what they can do on their time off, see how certain behavior problems have been handled well in the past, and almost anything else they would need or want to know. The staff can use the center to make better decisions faster and to take more intelligent action. Every year, Camp Learningstar seeks out how to do a few things better by systematically examining other camps and industries until it finds and implements the best practice. Within the camp, the staff generate about eight ideas each over the course of the summer. Those ideas are carefully tracked and managed with the best 10% getting implemented. Staff are encouraged to try out new ideas and see how they fly. If they don’t work out, but were done in good judgement and with good effort, staff receive the “Exalted Order of the Extended Neck” award. When staff do make mistakes, they are viewed as but one link in a long causal chain. The administration tries to understand all the factors that contributed to the error occurring, and the responsibility is appropriately distributed. These “Postmortems” are standard practice. Camp Learningstar hears its share of negative feedback from staff and campers, but it handles the complaints in an emotionally intelligent manner. The camp explains its perspective, addresses the concerns, or makes significant changes as necessary. People feel free to offer the feedback without threat of reprisal, and they know they’ll get a fair hearing and walk away understood, if not satisfied. Performance reviews are something the camp takes seriously. They are done twice a summer, with more informal sessions occurring at least every week. Development plans are created, which sometimes utilize alumni or outside sources. Staff also have a personal mission statement, which includes their goals for the summer. Supervisors facilitate and check on those goals in the same way they would for campers. Camp Learningstar recently had to give up some cherished, longstanding ways of doing things. They didn’t go without a fight, but in the end, the changes were determined to be the best course of action. The changes were shepherded through a careful transition process. The camp knew these changes were necessary, because of a rigorous evaluation of its processes and outcomes. Camp Learningstar has a long-range plan for carefully, thoroughly evaluating what impact it is having on its campers and staff. It understands that its own perspective is biased and limited, so several methods are utilized to assess the current state of effectiveness. The camp used to rely on well thought out personnel policies in order to communicate the boundaries of staff behavior and what staff should and should not be doing. It shifted to a set of core principles with only a handful of policies, because they allowed for greater freedom, which consequently resulted in better performance.

Camp Learningchallenged

Meanwhile at Camp “Learningchallenged” . . . The same questions from staff keep getting asked and answered year after year all throughout the summer. The new head chef came in and got the tour and explanation from the director. There had been a dozen chefs throughout this camp’s history, but very little of their learning – good and bad – had been captured and passed on. The way most things are done at this camp are not open for discussion or change, regardless of the evidence marshaled. The way things run is how they’re going to run, because the administration feel they are right – period. This camp gets a couple suggestions per staff member every summer, but staff notice very few changes. A lot of how the staff really feels isn’t communicated to the administration, because they don’t feel its safe to offer such frank feedback. The administration is unaware of the extent to which it isn’t receiving complete and honest feedback. Personnel evaluations are done every summer, but not much happens as a result of them, unless there is something really bad. The staff have a general understanding of what the camp experience is supposed to accomplish, but if hard pressed to take out a blank sheet of paper and write out the key outcomes as well as how they individually fit into each one of them, the results wouldn’t be very complete. When things go wrong, individuals receive consequences, but rarely is the fault distributed to policies, structures, processes, and the culture. Counselors are not involved in administrative meetings (through a representative, for example). The staff come to camp with a variety of skills, but a catalog of those skills is not kept, or readily shared with the entire staff on a continuous basis. When campers and staff don’t come back, there is no systematic attempt to really find out why. They are not surveyed or interviewed in an effort to continuously improve and understand the needs and expectations of these groups. Personal staff mission statements have never existed in any real way. Camp Learningchallenged has no real, clear idea about the number of campers impacted through its program, how long that impact lasts, and how much time at camp it takes to achieve those changes. They are certain they are doing wonderful things and can point to some mostly fuzzy information to back their claims, but they don’t have a clear idea, and they don’t understand what quality research has determined is average for camps.

What’s the key difference?

In this case, the key difference is that Camp Learningstar has an “Extremely High” learning capacity, while Camp Learningchallenged is just “Moderate.” These designations, as well as a more specific delineation of what makes up a learning camp, are fully explained in this chapter. Onward.

What is “organizational learning”

First, it is important to note that organizational learning is examined from a cultural perspective. While the book “Organizational culture at camps” doesn’t need to be read to benefit from this resource, it would certainly be helpful. For now, suffice it to say that culture is the shared norms, values, beliefs, assumptions, and patterns of behavior alive at your camp. It is the stated, unstated, conscious, and unconscious rules for behavior. Whether in terms of a learning individual or a learning camp, it is the beliefs about learning that, to a large degree, determine what, when, and how things are learned.

In this resource, “organization learning” or “the learning camp” refers to the focused acquisition, creation, evaluation, and dissemination of vital knowledge about organizational effectiveness and the use of that knowledge to improve it (Davidson, 2001). The acquisition must be from both internal and external sources.

Okay, that’s a nice, general definition¹, but let’s get down to brass tacks. Following are the 8 meta-dimensions of a learning organization/camp. These will be discussed and further broken down into a total of 26 subdimensions later. The summary table provides a quick overview of all of them on one page.

- (1) personal mastery
- (2) mental models (no sacred cows: challenging and testing all deeply ingrained assumptions)
- (3) shared vision
- (4) team learning
- (5) systems thinking (grasping the complex causes and effects responsible for various outcomes)
- (6) external and future scanning
- (7) organizational innovation and experimentation
- (8) systematic evaluation of successes and failures

Why should you care

S e r v e c a m p e r s b e t t e r

Learning camps are better at exceeding campers’ and parents’ *expectations*. However good you are, imagine that you are capable of reaching a quantumly higher level. A central tool on that journey is being a high learning camp.

Expectations are one thing, but meeting campers’ and parents’ *needs* is often an entirely different animal. It’s the difference between providing satisfaction and providing value plus satisfaction. As much as we understand the power of a camp experience, parents and campers don’t have that same complete vision. They often don’t understand what a valuable experience camp can be . . . how much it can really offer. The learning camp is an exceptional one, because it has many of the tools necessary to achieve its core outcomes to a large degree.

R e t a i n p e o p l e l o n g e r

Return rates go up, because campers and staff are empowered, committed, and learning a lot themselves. In a high learning camp, campers and staff feel that they are able to set high goals and achieve them without running into too many stumbling blocks. *When people are able to achieve valuable goals they care deeply about, they are committed to their job and the camp.*

A n t i d o t e t o a s t r o n g c u l t u r e

A learning culture is the antidote to a strong culture (see the culture book resource). Briefly, you bring in people who are a good fit with your camp via your excellent hiring and enculturation (socialization) process. These folks are then placed in a situation that encourages certain behaviors and thoughts. Through this process, the camp gets a uniformity that helps create a consistent experience for all concerned.

The downside is that innovation, creativity, and new ideas can be difficult to consider and implement. Typically, a strong culture with a solid enculturation process believes that it has great innovation and good room for new people to maneuver. Within the world view of those in the environment, that is probably true. The problem is that the world view is purposely and often effectively limited by the strong culture and thorough enculturation process. People at the camp can’t see how they are constrained and limited, because in their minds, they aren’t. The very nature of the enculturation process limits the diversity of thought, experience, and behavior the camp will experience. The culture resource explains this more fully.

¹ For the interested reader, please see the appendix on definitions for several other takes on conceptualizing organizational learning.

I've painted the picture as an extreme, when in reality it is more a question of degree. Through a comprehensive cultural assessment (see the culture book resource), the level of encapsulation present can be discovered. The antidote is to create a true learning organization.

F i n a n c i a l p e r f o r m a n c e

A careful study of the learning ability of camps matched to financial performance has yet to be done. However, there is ample evidence (see references) that small and large organizations alike are more profitable when they are highly learning entities. There is also copious evidence that the long-term survival of organizations is strongly related to the degree to which they are learning.

In this context, let me offer the evidence from large corporations that implemented *just one* of the 26 subdomains of a learning organization – knowledge management (see that resource) under good cross-team communication.

- Texas Instruments saved roughly \$1.5 billion in two years in their chip plants alone
- Ernst & Young experienced a 10-fold growth in revenue
- Chevron reduced operating costs from 9.4 billion to 7.4 billion - \$2 billion in savings
- Buckman Laboratories – operating profit per associate up 93%
- Siemen's realized a return on investment ratio of 10:1

S e l f - e v i d e n t

Once you understand the dimensions, it is self-evident that they are positive things which can lead to gains on numerous levels, including those mentioned above.

The four problems

K n o w l e d g e

Most camp people don't know what the 8 dimensions of learning organization are, let alone what the 26 subdimensions are. Certainly, folks tend to have an intuitive sense of these elements, but by making them explicit, they can be better assessed and improved.

W e ' r e o k a y – w e ' r e a d e c e n t l e a r n i n g c a m p

If you've got a decent level of self-esteem and natural pride, you're going to think you're good to great on each dimension. In other words, virtually everyone thinks they are a learning individual and that their camp is a learning one. Why? Besides natural psychological processes (pride, self-esteem, self-serving bias, etc.), chances are you think you're doing well enough because you've got some evidence.

You've looked around and can likely bring to mind several instances that demonstrate your camp is a learning one. If your evidence is solid (see the appendix on "Issues with evidence") and *representative*, then you are a learning camp. The rub is that learning is a question of degree and domain. Every camp is learning something, but how much? In which domains? In what way? What happens to the learning? How do you know? Examine the summary table for a quick, visual representation of this.

It turns out that organizations tend not to be the best judges of their capabilities. Really low learning organizations are usually aware of their capacities, as are businesses at the very high end of the range. However, even highly learning organizations benefit from a careful, representative analysis based on all the dimensions, because it helps them reach new heights. The vast middle range (the other 70% -- a decent majority) tend to be pretty poor predictors of their learning ability. Some are correct, and some aren't (see the summary table), but the results are only a little better than you would expect by chance. Evidence garnered from the survey in this resource bear out these results in the camping industry as well. For the middle group, the only way to know is to evaluate their capacity, which is the eighth element of learning organizations.

View the appendix on "Stages of organizational development and the learning camp" to try and gauge your camp's level of development by reading short, one-paragraph descriptions. The self-analysis and survey tools provided are also helpful means.

N u m b e r 8 = K e y t o t h e k i n g d o m

Research has determined that the linchpin of learning for small to medium² organizations (less than 200 staff) is the eighth dimension – systematic evaluation of successes and failures. This dimension is the one camps tend to do the least about. Quite a statement, but check yourself against these five questions: How many campers are impacted (gain in the core outcomes desired)?; What is the magnitude of the impact (effect size)?; How long does that impact last?; How many weeks/sessions/summers are necessary?; and What are the characteristics of campers who do well, stay the same, and do poorly?

These questions are not the only ones to ask to determine the degree to which a camp is effective on the 8th learning dimension, but they are critical ones. It is possible to assess those questions – see the evaluation resources. Also note that a learning camp assesses these things periodically, because continued performance cannot be assumed. If a camp had this information, it would be able to improve the impact it has in incredibly meaningful ways!

Although camps don't often have the answers to those questions, virtually all camps evaluate their effectiveness. Camps gather things like satisfaction and suggestion surveys from campers, parents, and staff. Evaluations of staff are done. Return rates for campers and staff are computed and studied. Letters from parents, conversations with campers and staff, and observations from years at camp are all grist for the evaluation mill that helps camps understand where they are, and how they might be better. While such data has value in its own right, all those sources of evidence are not enough to rest on comfortably. The appendix "Issues with evidence camps often rely upon" carefully describes the problems with those methods and what should be done. *Learning camps must understand these critical points.*

People read the eight dimensions and 26 subdimensions and report that they largely have such elements operating in themselves and their camps. As is discussed in the evaluation section, don't just take your own word for it! Practice the eighth key and thoroughly assess your camp's abilities. The appendix on organizational development includes important information on this as well.

I t ' s d i f f i c u l t

If being a very high capacity learning organization was easy, they'd be a dime a dozen. In reality, meeting the standards necessary to get the designation of a "very high" learning camp is quite difficult. Creating the norms, values, policies, structures, and processes necessary to be an exceptional learning camp on most dimensions is a very high hurdle. There's a lot to it – it requires staff, expertise, money, and the invaluable time. Learning also requires people to try things that are unfamiliar, difficult, and sometimes very uncomfortable. Virtually regardless of your situation, it is possible to achieve the lofty goal (see "From good to great" resource).

Creating a culture of learning is as difficult as it is vital. Camps should assess where they are using the tools provided (self-analysis, survey, the summary table, and stages of development appendix) and shoot for being at least "Good," which is average. It may certainly be likely that the result is already a learning designation of "High" or "Very High" (see survey analysis for explanation of levels). If not, and if the resources, desire, and determination are present, continuous improvement should be the means of achieving a higher level of learning, as well as all the benefits therein.

The vision of the future with higher learning designations can be a powerful motivator. The appendix on "Stages of organizational development and the learning camp" includes a very short description of the benefits and nature of a camp at higher levels.

I appreciate the following quote by Henry Miller: "In this age, which believes that there is a short cut to everything, the greatest lesson to be learned is that the most difficult way is, in the long run, the easiest." Put his quote, or your favorite about embarking on a difficult but worthy journey, on your bulletin board and strive forward.

²

Incidentally, for large organizations, the linchpins are numbers five and eight – a compensatory pair.

The learning camp

Note: Some people find it useful to read the related self-analysis and survey questions immediately after reading each domain. It certainly isn't necessary, but a few have found it *very helpful*. Again, this resource is an overview and explanation, as opposed to a detailed "how-to" on creating a very high learning camp. The sample questions and reflections should not be viewed as exhaustive, but rather illustrative. Simply trying to improve scores on the questions offered falls into the same trap of teachers "teaching to the test" – the outcome isn't well-rounded students (learning camps). Thus, take the principles listed here as guiding lights on your journey and the questions as landmarks.

Personal mastery

P e r s o n a l v i s i o n

In essence, this refers to the pursuit of high and inspiring goals. It will come as no surprise to you that people who are passionate about a challenging vision of what they want to achieve are inspired to create the means to realize it. Easy goals and very difficult ones are not very inspiring, but realistic goals inspire motivation, performance, and satisfaction. It turns out that problem solving releases a chemical in the brain that makes us feel good – people are wired to desire and work toward challenging goals.

When people are stretched (not broken) and given the tools (time, training, cultural facilitators, etc.) to achieve valuable (in their minds, not yours) ends, they will give it their all. The synergistic benefit is that confronting problems grow your staff, which in turn grows your camp's ability to achieve. The resulting culture attracts and retains better staff, which further enables the camp to reach higher levels of performance.

S e e i n g r e a l i t y o b j e c t i v e l y

If you're human, please stand up. Everyone's got a problem with this learning subdimension. Psychologists have come up with scores of terms to describe people's ability to ignore or skirt the truth, for example: self-serving bias, defense mechanisms, actor-observer bias, the fundamental attribution error, high self-esteem, dissonance, pride, etc. Normal people give themselves the benefit of the doubt and are optimistic. If they didn't, they would be depressed.

Getting back to the point, this subdomain refers to relentlessly examining (within our ability) the ways in which we limit or deceive ourselves. It is constantly challenging the "way things are." It's examining quality and performance using methods that will get us as close to the truth as possible (not looking solely to the "Issues with evidence camps rely upon").

In practice, excellent personnel performance evaluations are used. Everyone is evaluated – including the people at the very top – using tools such as 360 degree assessment (see separate resource). According to Scriven (1991), people must understand that they are poor evaluators of their own performance, and they must recognize the value of the "external eye." Beyond the staff side, process and outcome evaluations (see those resources) should be conducted in order to ascertain details like how many benefit, how much, for how long, and under what conditions. The eighth learning dimension of evaluation goes into this in more detail.

C r e a t i v e t e n s i o n

Creative tension refers to working with the gap between the goal and reality. The gap needs to be noted and proactively dealt with. When creative tension is managed well, inspiration, drive, and innovation result. When it's not, goals can be abandoned, depression can set in, or limited effort is expended. While creative tension is often thought of on a personal level (Senge, 1990), it is also true on an organizational level (or sometimes just team) in the shared perception of the performance gap.

Mental models

N o " s a c r e d c o w s "

Of course, there's nothing wrong with having a sacred cow, as long as you're willing to slaughter it if absolutely necessary. In other words, there may be valued elements and tried-and-true practices that are extremely unlikely to change, but the idea of changing them must not be rendered to "never, no way." The undiscussable must be made discussable in an open and honest way.

Traditionally, killing the very sacred cow is something that is rarely done, and rarely necessary. Instead, less sensitive practices are usually held up to the chopping block. A good rule of thumb is to carefully and completely examine 20% of the norms, values, policies, processes, and structures every year. Nothing may be changed, but being open to the idea of change and systematically evaluating your practices is the key here. If a sacred practice does need to change, the culture resource offers a good plan of action.

V a l u i n g d i v e r s i t y o f t h o u g h t

Challenges to long-standing camp practices often come from people whose perspectives differ from those that have historically been predominant in the camp. While not always true, it is often so. Numerous studies of companies that have been around more than 50 years reveal that one of their key characteristics is a tolerance for eccentricities and outsiders.

One of the ways organizations try to insure this diversity of thought is by creating teams that are diverse in terms of experience, age, role, background, and ethnicity. Camps can incorporate some of that, but often diversity of thought comes from sources completely outside the camp in the form of books, articles, conference presentations, internet listservs, benchmarking, and consultants.

The purpose of diversity is to start creative abrasion. This rubbing will create friction as people question and challenge each other. That process generates options, and the more options you have, the better the eventual course of action usually is.

O p e n n e s s a n d t r u s t

Trust is an expectation of how someone else will behave. In the largest study of organizational climate (how it feels to work someplace), Levering (2000) found that the linchpin for an exceptional place to work was the level of openness and trust. When employees said they felt they could be open and honest and that their workplaces were characterized by trust, they were more productive, stayed longer, and were happier. People felt they could express their views and that disagreement and debate in a constructive manner were accepted and applauded. They knew they could show weakness (preferably ahead of time) and get support. These companies trounced the general competition in performance (see culture resource).

S h a r e d v i s i o n

S h a r e d , i n s p i r i n g p u r p o s e

Although quite similar to personal mastery (personal vision subdimension), this differs in that it is the organizational vision that is (hopefully) shared by others. The personal vision and organizational vision should be the same, but they usually don't overlap completely. For example, camps sometimes create personal mission statements for staff in regards to what they hope to get out of the experience.

Specifically, the shared, inspiring purposes are the outcomes you hope to achieve for your campers, parents, and the camp. For one, staff have to know what the outcomes are, and you'd be shocked by how many often don't understand the full extent of the outcomes of a camp experience. Second, staff need to know how the camp plans to go about achieving those outcomes and their place in that plan – see the process modeling resource for detailed information. They should have a clear understanding of their individual role.

Beyond that critical understanding of what and how, staff can vary in their level of real dedication to those ends (see attitude portion of staff training best practices resource). They might be firmly committed, compliant, apathetic, or noncompliant. A learning camp knows what each staff member's attitude is (see the culture strength section of the culture resource).

S e n s e o f s h a r e d i d e n t i t y

In this case, having read the culture resource would be useful. Essentially, this subdimension refers to the camp having a core set of principles (espoused values) that are truly present and alive in the everyday life of camp (artifacts). People know what the camp stands for, and those ideals guide the behavior of individuals and groups. These principles are applied to organizational learning because they are the necessary soil upon which learning takes root.

E x e r c i s i n g o w n j u d g m e n t / S h a r e d i n t u i t i o n

One indicator of a learning camp with a strong culture is the brevity of policies, rules, and reminders present. Instead of covering the many eventualities of poor judgment and acts that violate the principles (espoused values) on which the camp stands, there is a short and simple list of values that serves as the guiding light.

So, how does this apply to the learning camp? When novel situations arise, staff are used to thinking in terms of principles instead of rules and act in the best interest of those values. That autonomy/latitude/range of action helps learning organizations.

Similarly, people are given the freedom to experiment within the bounds of those values to be creative and innovative in working toward valued outcomes. The camp rewards those who experiment in the spirit of the shared vision, and doesn't punish those who (a) make genuine mistakes, (b) try something and it goes badly, or (c) are simply unlucky.

Team learning

True dialogue

The team must adopt the mental models addressed earlier (no sacred cows, diversity of thought, and trust). When a team identifies problems (part of their job), they must also address what factors were in place that allowed the problem to occur. Those discussions need to take place in a space where judgment about issues raised by others is initially suspended. When brainstorming solutions to the problem, sacred cows and the “undiscussable” issues should be allowed to come to the surface.

The learning camp must build a “conflict-positive” culture. Conflict should be appropriately produced, and not just managed. Such an environment produces a diversity of open thought that leads to more intelligent action. Alfred Sloan, who built General Motors, would say to his team, “Is there any debate around this issue?” And if there was none, he'd say, “Then we haven't looked at it hard enough. I'm putting this discussion off until next week.”

Team intelligence / Synergy

High-performance teams have the ability to harmoniously work together toward mutual goals through coordinated actions. No major innovative idea can be adequately critiqued without the help of others, nor can it be implemented across the organization by an individual acting alone (Senge, 1990). When the team works together well, they can see more, achieve more, and have more fun doing both than any member would be able to accomplish alone.

This attribute is often likened to a musical jam session or top sports teams. When teams learn effectively, they become a powerful environment for the creation and incubation of ideas. Furthermore, they are essential for the dissemination and implementation of those ideas. People are often aware of this level of performance, but it is very difficult to achieve without a culture that facilitates it, which would include the other elements of being a learning camp.

Good cross-team communication

Staff usually participate in several teams. They are likely members of their cabin, their unit, their activity area, and the camp. In addition, people are often put on ad-hoc teams, such as for a special event or project. At some point, someone else is going to need to know what an individual (or collective team) has learned. That learning is shared through two main communication practices, which the learning camp has systematized.

One way people learn is through explicit means, such as reading, listening to a lecture, participating in a discussion, or watching videos. Transferring knowledge in an explicit manner is very effective for knowledge that is appropriate to such transmission (see staff training best practices resource). The most common tool for capturing and sharing knowledge is a “Knowledge Management” system, which is explained thoroughly in another resource.

The other way people learn is through tacit means, which is to say they learn by doing it with the help of someone else. Although modeling may be sufficient if the task is relatively easy, coaching (scaffolding) is usually far more effective. The “Staff training best practices” resource goes into this method in great detail. This hands-on communication of knowledge is part of the normal way of doing things at a learning camp. Thus, people don't have to reinvent the wheel, or go through the school of hard knocks to accomplish a goal.

Systems thinking

Seeing systemic causes

People have a fundamental need for control. In an effort to meet that need, people often search for the most obvious problem and simple or elegant solution to it. Sometimes, that's just what the doctor ordered, but sometimes it will also kill the project or camp. “Small” or micro problems can be the focus, when the macro issues are often the ones that need to be addressed. In this case, many problems are “solved,” but the pattern and the larger solution that would prevent the cascade of smaller symptoms is not discovered *or implemented*.

The learning camp rigorously searches for the systemic causes that might underlie the symptoms being noticed. When things go wrong, it is extremely rare for individuals or teams to be held solely accountable, because there are almost always larger issues and other individuals that facilitated the error. The goal is to create truly effective solutions that reduce or eliminate the symptoms and will stand the test of time. A learning camp needs both intelligent individuals and intelligent systems.

Common tools of this discipline are “After action reviews” or “Postmortems,” where a team will get together and take the time to carefully examine the symptom(s). Brainstorming, interviews, and evaluations often get turned into process models (see that resource), which are then utilized to address the larger issues responsible for the symptoms. Outside perspectives are often invited on issues of great significance.

Understanding interdependence

In essence, this refers to the problem-solving team's ability to think about how changes or problems will impact areas not directly influenced. There might be side effects, or the problem might get shifted to another part of the overall system. Another example would be creating a solution that shifts the problem into the future. These three contingencies are carefully examined in learning organizations.

External and future scanning

Scanning the current environment

This element has two main components. The first is scanning the current external environment for things like competition, and the nature of reality for campers, parents, counselors, and other camps. What has changed for them and what has stayed the same? Instead of being just a thought experiment, learning organizations conduct systematic research (data gathering and creating new information) so that they can have confidence in their conclusions.

The second element is seeking out best practices (benchmarking) in other organizations. There is an entire resource on benchmarking available (see references), but briefly it is: a systematic and disciplined process of examining your own processes, finding who is better or best, learning how they do it, adapting it to your camp, implementing it, and doing it continuously. Benchmarking is the process of continuous improvement without reinventing the wheel. When using this tool, the camp needs to think about going outside the camping industry to find best practices wherever they may be.

Scanning and probing the future

Death, taxes, and change are the three guarantees in our lives. People often don't plan very well for any of them. Learning organizations consider the future in ways that extend beyond normal strategic and master plans. They probe the future systematically, assuming that the environment won't remain stable, and that their ability to see the future accurately is limited.

To cope with those assumptions, learning organizations come up with four or five limited strategic plans based on different contingencies. The benefit of such an approach is two-fold. If a different future unfolds from the one that was deemed most likely, they may be prepared. Also, these organizations have their antennae out for changes in the environment, because they've already considered them. Some people call this kind of thinking "memories of the future." The human brain is better equipped to detect events it has already experienced or rehearsed as possibilities.

A common practice in learning organizations is to convene meetings of "futurists." Within the organization, diverse groups of interested parties (administration, counselors, parents, and campers) are gathered to think about what the future holds. While these different groups are sometimes brought together as a whole, usually each specific group meets with like members. The second common use of futurist meetings is to gather a diverse group of camp directors together to discuss what the trends and patterns are, will be, and how they will influence their operations. In either case, knowledge that exists from places such as magazines, books, camp associations, and the like are brought to the table as fodder for discussion.

Acceptance of change as a natural part of organizational life

The board, directors, key administration, and general staff need to be psychologically open to change in order for the camp to be open to its environment. Portions of the program that work (usually most of it) need to be kept, but elements that don't work or have ceased working as well in the changing environment must be appropriately addressed. As the title indicates, the key here is to view change as natural, normal, and positive. This element is similar to the "Mental models: No sacred cows" characteristic which addresses being open to changing anything if absolutely necessary, while more generally being open to change is the focus here.

Organizational experimentation

Marketplace for ideas

While "learning by looking" comprises much of organizational development, "learning by doing" is equally important. To that end, experimentation is necessary. The first key is a marketplace for ideas. While quantity does not equal quality, a rough rule of thumb is to have 6 – 9 suggestions per staff person over the course of a summer. Good learning camps keep records of suggestions and could show you the categorized list offered in a given year – several hundred. One thing to look out for is the number of suggestions generated from different levels of the camp hierarchy, so as to make sure the contributions are coming from all levels and areas.

The key to generating a marketplace for ideas is what happens to the suggestions. Certainly not all suggestions get implemented, and indeed the rough rule of thumb appears to be about 10 – 15%. Shooting down brainstormed ideas, offering ill-founded objections, and not recognizing and valuing people for their suggestions (or even having them fearful of making them) are excellent methods for limiting input. It takes significant time and energy to generate a marketplace for ideas, but learning organizations settle for nothing less.

S u p p o r t f o r r i s k - t a k i n g

Honest mistakes are taken as development opportunities, instead of fodder for punishment or consequences. Of course, careless mistakes and lapses of judgment are appropriately addressed within the framework of “Systems thinking: Seeing systemic causes.” Learning camps sometimes institute an award like “The Exalted Order of the Extended Neck” to indicate that there is public recognition and support for promising ideas that didn’t get off the ground. See “The art and science of mistakes” for more information. If the award/failures don’t occur several times over the course of the summer, the pace of learning is probably too slow.

D i v e r s i t y o f m e t h o d s a n d p r a c t i c e s

While tried-and-true methods of doing something are wonderful, learning organizations are willing to try promising ways of doing something different, because it might be better. Quite often, such experimental measures are conducted on a small scale or one-shot basis, instead of revamping the whole system on the hopes of something better. In this manner, competing structures, processes, and policies can be pitted against each other to determine which is superior. Learning-impaired camps have few or no competing systems at any given time.

S t r e a m l i n i n g a n d c o n s t a n t i m p r o v e m e n t

The Japanese call continuous improvement “Kaizen.” Over and over again, the principles espoused by that method have proven to be integral parts of truly successful organizations. Rather than try and summarize the key points here, the reader is referred to the separate resource on innovation and continuous improvement.

S y s t e m a t i c e v a l u a t i o n o f s u c c e s s e s a n d f a i l u r e s

T r u e v a l u e f o c u s i n p e r s o n n e l e v a l u a t i o n

The measure of a personnel evaluation system is whether or not it accurately assesses those aspects of performance that represent true value to the camp. A 360 degree evaluation system (see separate resource) is one tool that helps in this endeavor. Briefly, it is combining feedback from people above, below, and on the same level as the person being evaluated. Using “SMART” (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) objectives is also good, but it isn’t enough. The problem with SMART goals is that they often measure things like if the children got to bed on time, or if the bathroom got cleaned, but they less frequently assess the quality of those actions.

Getting at true quality is the bane of most personnel evaluation systems, because quality is relative depending on who is doing the rating. An accurate judge must be *competent/skilled/knowledgeable* enough to offer an accurate assessment, and have enough *exposure/opportunity/information* to rate the person in question. It is quite difficult to meet those criteria. An excellent staff person at one camp could be rated as average or unacceptable at another, similar camp with a different rater. The use of 360 degree evaluations is one attempt to take into account the subjectivity of ratings.

The use of behavioral anchors for exceptional, average, and poor performance is another method of coping, as long as the anchors represent the true range. The performance evaluation system in place should be carefully examined against best practices. Beyond that step, having an external judge examine the validity of the data is as rarely utilized as it is valuable. The appendix “Issues with evidence camps often rely upon” offers some rationale for why high performance ratings should not be taken as a measure of actual performance on outcomes.

F l e x i b l e u s e o f g o a l s

As discussed in the “Personal mastery: Personal vision” section, goals are highly motivating. Ultimately, every camp wants to achieve its desired outcomes. The goals are the intermediate steps that need to happen to achieve the outcomes. In setting goals for staff, there are some important pitfalls to be wary of.

Measuring performance against goal attainment versus goal failure usually doesn’t take into account the nature of the goal. The difficulty, quality, and relevance of the goal need to be assessed. Thus, a near miss on a high goal should be considered better than easily clearing a more modest goal.

Although high goals are more inspiring than moderate ones, they need to be achievable. Unachievable goals tend to be uninspiring, because people usually refuse to commit to something that can’t be accomplished. Goals that are high enough to be in the realm of visions will be motivating as long as performance isn’t rigidly evaluated against them.

Another problem with goals is that they can spark an obsession with achieving them at the expense of other important areas of work. The camp might provide staff with their evaluation criteria at the outset, which often gives them a myopic view of their role and what they should focus on. Everything can't be evaluated. We see this problem in schools when teachers "teach to the test." When the staff are of a high enough quality that evaluations can be used primarily for development (and they see it that way), and the staff are aware of the ultimate desired outcomes and their role in them, this limitation tends to melt away.

Finally, the inflexible use of goals can lead to people not looking at alternative uses of the available resources to more effectively achieve outcomes of equal or greater value. In other words, very targeted goals tend to place blinders on people, which are the enemy of creativity and innovation. Those blinders may also, for example, cause people to ignore unintended effects.

U s e o f m u l t i p l e p e r s p e c t i v e s

There is no doubt that external critics help individuals, teams, units, and entire business organizations/camps improve (Sathe & Davidson, 2000). Internal evaluations can be just as valuable as external ones, but the mistake that learning-handicapped organizations make is in assuming that they are the same (or nearly the same) thing. The "external eye" offers a point of view that can't be duplicated by those within the system. The culture resource goes into this point in much more detail.

The other key element of multiple perspectives is using a variety of methods to examine the same thing. This is especially the case when there isn't a hard metric like a financial audit. For example, when assessing the outcomes of a camp experience, it is valuable to gain the camper, parent, and counselor perspective using reliable and valid data (see appendix on "Issues with evidence camps often rely upon"). Likewise, using just a survey would offer a limited window. Combining that method (survey) with interviews, focus groups, and behavioral data would yield a richer and more accurate assessment. Of immediate relevance is the survey provided in this resource. While the survey will be helpful, it is not something to be relied upon as the only source of data.

F i n g e r o n t h e p u l s e o f c u s t o m e r n e e d s

Virtually all camps evaluate their effectiveness. Camps gather things like satisfaction and suggestion surveys from campers, parents, and staff. Evaluations of staff are done. Return rates for campers and staff are computed and studied. Letters from parents, conversations with campers and staff, and observations from years at camp are all grist for the evaluation mill that help camps understand where they are, and how they might be better.

While such data has value in its own right, all those sources of evidence are not enough to rest comfortably on. The appendix "Issues with evidence camps often rely upon" carefully describes the problems with those methods and what should be done. *Learning camps must understand these critical points.*

A learning camp goes beyond surface measures to get at the truth about the outcomes the camp is providing. The focus is on providing true value to the customer. That value might be conscious, subconscious, in the present, or in the future.

For example, learning camps can answer the following questions for their campers *and* staff.

- How many campers are impacted (gain in the core outcomes desired)?
- What is the magnitude of the impact (effect size)?
- How long does that impact last?
- How many weeks/sessions/summers are necessary?
- What are the characteristics of campers who do well, stay the same, and do poorly?

In order to improve on the above metrics (as well as others), the camp must also intimately understand its processes. For now, a process is the activities, structures, and policies that are in place to yield a given outcome. The process modeling resource discusses this in detail. A complete and accurate view of the processes involved is fairly rare in the camping industry, but common in large organizations. A good job of process modeling is invaluable to camps, and present in all highly learning-enabled organizations.

Benchmarking quality against competitors and best practices

The astute reader may be wondering how this is different from benchmarking mentioned earlier in the section “External and future scanning: Scanning the current environment.” The answer is that the point there was to find best practices, study them, and implement them in your own camp. In this case, the point is to examine benchmarks, which are indicators of where you should or could be compared with others. It’s comparing your performance against others.

Learning camps actively gather information about all key performance areas and update them frequently. A camp might examine benchmarks on such diverse things as: food costs, insurance fees, return rates, percentage of participants influenced over what period of time, staffing ratios, supervision practices, marketing success rate, hiring practices, and almost any other area you’re likely to see as a conference presentation topic. The learning camp is rigorous and systematic about these endeavors. Thus, outcomes, programs, change initiatives, policies, and people are not evaluated in isolation, but they are constantly compared to others inside and outside of the camping industry.

Summary table

This table summarizes the learning dimensions and subdimensions for easy reference. Both the self-analysis and survey results can be graphed and then compared for insight. In one page, areas of strength and development can be quickly scanned.

Hypothetical Example

Dimension	Subdimensions	Performance ³				
		P	OK	G	VG	Ex
1. Personal mastery	➤ Personal vision (High, inspiring goals)	█	█	█	█	
	➤ Seeing reality objectively	█	█			
	➤ Creative tension / Performance gap	█	█	█		
2. Mental models	➤ Valuing diversity of thought	█	█	█	█	█
	➤ No “sacred cows”	█	█	█		
	➤ Openness and trust	█	█	█	█	
3. Shared vision	➤ Shared, inspiring purpose	█	█	█		
	➤ Sense of shared identity	█	█	█	█	
	➤ Exercising own judgment	█	█			
4. Team learning	➤ Team synergy/intelligence	█	█			
	➤ True dialogue	█				
	➤ Good cross-team communication	█	█	█		
5. Systems thinking	➤ Understanding interdependence	█	█	█		
	➤ Seeing systemic causes	█	█			
6. External & future scanning	➤ Scanning the current environment	█	█	█	█	█
	➤ Scanning and probing the future	█	█	█		
	➤ Change seen as natural	█	█	█	█	
7. Experimentation	➤ Marketplace for ideas	█	█	█		
	➤ Support for risk-taking	█	█	█	█	
	➤ Diversity of methods and practice	█	█	█	█	█
	➤ Streamlining and constant improvement	█	█	█	█	
8. Practicing the discipline of evaluation	➤ Value focus in personnel evaluation	█	█	█		
	➤ Flexible use of goals	█				
	➤ Use of multiple perspectives	█	█	█		
	➤ Focus on customer needs	█	█	█	█	
	➤ Benchmarking quality	█	█			

³ P = poor; OK = adequate/satisfactory; G = good; VG = very good; Ex = excellent

Evaluating your camp's learning ability

After all this talk about learning camps, I know you're itching to figure out how you score on these dimensions. As the "Use of multiple perspectives" subdomain indicates, there must be several examinations of learning ability in order to have the confidence necessary to act on the information accurately and intelligently.

The importance of using multiple methods simply cannot be overstated. It must be recognized that the culture within the camp can't be fully seen by those within it. Rather than repeating the discussions already fully contained with the culture resource (see "Assessing culture" section and the "Do-it-yourself" appendix) and the introduction of this resource, it will simply be noted that a learning camp must not settle for anything less than the picture that is as close to the truth as possible.

By evaluating your camp's learning ability, an opportunity is created to improve the camp's learning capabilities. By means of assessment, a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses can be obtained. By targeting specific areas for improvement, the camp will become an even better learning organization, and consequently become more effective.

The overwhelming desire is to engage the "do-it-yourself" model of assessment. In the spirit of that method, a self-analysis and survey instrument are provided for your use. Although the results of those endeavors will be interesting, they must be combined with three other methods. Conducting interviews and focus groups are two more ways of getting at learning ability. The last method is an external review of your camp. The order of assessment should be self-analysis, survey, interviews, focus groups, and then external review. Each of those methods is addressed in turn.

Self-analysis

This reflective exercise is in the form of questions, comments, and checklists. Far from being comprehensive, the self-analysis will just provide a general overview. It is a tool to get the juices flowing. The point isn't to be carefully scientific, but rather to arrive at a general sense of your camp's learning capacity for each of the 26 subdomains. Items are composed in different ways (i.e., positively, negatively, questions, statements, etc.) to generate more diverse thought and reflection.

For each of the subdomains, you can give yourself an overall score. To keep with the framework in the previous table, try fitting your answers into one of the five categories listed below. Those values can then be *roughly* compared with the survey data to assess similarities and discrepancies. Also, if an external reviewer is utilized, the responses to these items will be very helpful.

Having a few appropriate people complete it and then comparing answers is usually very fruitful. When combined with the other methods, a more accurate and complete picture of your camp's learning ability will emerge. From that data will come the wisdom to act intelligently toward the creation of a higher learning-enabled camp.

Excellent	There is very little room to meaningfully improve. We are doing extremely well.
Very good	While there is some room for improvement, exceptional performance and practices are already in place.
Good	The camp is doing a solid job of learning and adding value. There is still a long way to go, but the camp learns an enormous amount and makes significant improvements. Experts would rate our practices as slightly above average on an absolute scale, instead of a comparative one with other camps.
Satisfactory	There is much room for improvement. Our practices and performance are functional, but their weakness limits our ability to learn, grow, and become more effective.
Poor	Nothing substantial is in place, or the existing process or practice is poorly executed and it adds little <i>real</i> value to the camp.

Personal mastery

Personal vision (High, inspiring goals)

- What are your (the camp's) near and moderate-term goals? Categorize them into easy, difficult, and very difficult goals.
- What are the facilitating and limiting elements that influence the attainment of those goals?
- Does each staff member have a personal development plan?

Seeing reality objectively

- What elements of your (the camp's) work have you had critiqued by experts capable of rendering an accurate judgment?
- Who conducts your (the camp's) performance evaluation? Is it done by multiple people from above (if applicable), below, and on the same level (peers)? What's missing from the evaluation criteria?
- For informal feedback, what kinds are you (the camp) receiving and what kinds do you (the camp) rarely receive?
- What happens to people who give you (the camp) negative feedback?

Creative tension / Performance gap

- We (I) have a good sense of our strong and weak points.
- There is a plan in place to maintain our (my) strengths and improve our (my) weak points.
- The camp (I) knows what its areas of weakness are and the camp (I) can point to steady, meaningful improvement.
- Modeling, coaching, and facilitating learning is an ongoing practice that works well at camp.

Mental models

No “sacred cows”

- When people challenge the camp’s sacred practices, we are at least open to thinking about changing them.
- Over the last five and ten years, have some of the camp’s more sacred practices changed?
- Every year, we carefully, completely examine 20% of the norms, values, policies, processes, and structures.

Valuing diversity of thought

- What happens to the people who think “outside the box?” What about if it is in regard to a long-standing practice and the person has a rationale? Is there honest discussion where both sides are really heard? Is changing left on the table, or does the person just get humored?
- The teams at camp have staff from different levels and areas offer input on a regular basis.
- Camp administration sometimes seeks out ideas *that are different than their own* in the form of books, articles, conference sessions, and other professionals.

Openness and trust

- Staff feel that they can be open and honest. They know it is safe and that our ear is really listening.
- When people voice disagreements appropriately, both parties come away feeling heard and safe.
- There are no formal or informal consequences for speaking your mind appropriately, even if it is something we strongly disagree with.
- Staff operate from a spirit of cooperation, rather than competition.
- Staff generally trust their managers or supervisors.
- People will admit when they don’t have the answer.

Shared vision

Shared, inspiring purpose

- If the staff were asked what the outcomes of an experience at this camp were, they would be able to give intelligent and complete answers.
- Staff understand their specific, individual role in achieving each one of the outcomes.
- For each staff member, we know their level of commitment to achieving the outcomes.

Sense of shared identity

- There is a uniform sense of community that is alive at camp.
- There are core values that people at camp subscribe to. People take those values seriously.
- At camp, it isn’t about status, power, or me. People are dedicated to the camp.

Exercising own judgment

- People understand what their job is and how to do it. More importantly, staff understand the mission, outcomes, and values of the camp well enough that they are very likely to act in the camp’s best interest in new or uncertain situations.
- When people make mistakes in the spirit of trying to do the right thing, they are provided with education and understanding instead of punishments or consequences.

Team learning

Team synergy/intelligence

- People enjoy being part of teams, because the work is often fun, and they can get more done with higher quality than if they were working alone.
- At camp, teams of supervisors, group leaders, counselors, or ad hoc groups would agree that they support each other mentally, physically, and emotionally.
- Staff tend to work collaboratively with each other.

True dialogue

- In teams, we often have good conflicts where people speak their mind freely without fear of personal, emotional, or job retribution.
- On teams, people sometimes disagree on issues, but they’ll bite their tongue.

Good cross-team communication

- Once people learn something useful, it is readily transferred to other people who need to know it. Sharing knowledge is the way we work – period.
- There is a place where people can go to look up useful information related to a problem they are having, or to improve an area of interest. Books are wonderful, but they are raw information. Valuable information has already been distilled and digested so that it is very relevant, concise, and useful. This knowledge management center is a living thing that grows, evolves, and is continually referenced by people in all roles at camp.
- People don’t “reinvent the wheel.”

- The same questions and problems don't pop up year after year.
- People are recognized and rewarded for sharing knowledge.
- If someone needs to know something that can't be learned from paper, they know who to go to for that area, they have the time, and the skill is transferred (or the process is begun).
- Leadership is enthusiastic about knowledge sharing and puts money, staff, and time resources behind it.

Systems thinking

Seeing systemic causes

- When problems pop up, we treat it as a symptom and look for the causes.
- "After action reviews" or "Postmortems" are standard operating procedure.
- Sole individuals almost never take the blame for a problem/mistake entirely. Instead, the long causal chain is examined and responsibility is distributed appropriately.

Understanding interdependence

- When solutions are considered, we explicitly examine how they will influence other parts of camp.
- Sometimes, people just move problems around from group to group, or area to area.
- It seems like people will rig up a temporary "solution" that just pushes the problem into the future.

External & future scanning

Scanning the current environment

- Every year, we conduct a satisfaction survey of our parents, campers, and staff that is in accordance with best-practice methods. The data we get are as relevant and valid as possible. Broken out by categories, we know the reasons people chose to return and not return. When we get the information, we carefully analyze it and act upon it.
- Going beyond the obvious, we examine issues that are facing our customers and staff and take those into account.
- For several camps that are similar, we know what they are doing, and how they are doing. That information is thoroughly updated every year.
- Every year, we engage in the benchmarking process in at least a couple major areas, and a few more minor ones.

Scanning and probing the future

- We have a strategic plan that we feel is the best and most likely course of action.
- We also have strategic plans in place for other eventualities that may occur in the future. These plans are shelved unless the future changes from our expectations and they are needed.
- Every year, there are opportunities for people who know our camp well to sit around and talk about nothing but the future – immediate, intermediate, and long term. While these meetings may become philosophical, they are also quite structured and meaty. Similarly, these kinds of meetings occur with a small group of camp directors every year. We have an excellent idea of the possible changes that might occur in the next five – seven years.

Change seen as natural

- Frequent, constructive change is viewed positively as a regular part of life in this camp. There doesn't appear to be undue resistance to positive change just because it is the way things have always been done.
- Most attempts to change things in this camp are greeted with cynicism and resistance.

Experimentation

Marketplace for ideas

- Although many of them are repeated, during the course of summer, we receive about 6 – 9 suggestions per staff member. This is true on all levels.
- We keep a record of the suggestions offered every year. That current year's record is categorized and examined again at the end of the year.
- Only a small number of suggestions are actually implemented, but every suggestion is acknowledged and given serious consideration.

Support for risk-taking

- When people try something and fail, they aren't punished as long as the failure was in generally sound judgment. Careless mistakes receive education and perhaps consequences, but it is done within the framework of "Systems thinking: Seeing systemic causes."
- There is public recognition for those who stuck their necks out, failed, and learned from the experience.

Diversity of methods and practice

- Even when the accepted method is not optimal, everyone here still does things in much the same way.
- A lot of our improvements come from people trying variations on the usual procedure.

Streamlining and constant improvement

- We aren't done with anything. Everything is open to small, continual improvements. It's difficult to think of things that haven't steadily, meaningfully improved over the years.
- When big projects come up, we take it in small steps and work through them systematically.

Practicing the discipline of evaluation

Value focus in personnel evaluation

- We do both upward and downward evaluations. For key personnel or specific situations, we utilize 360 degree evaluations.
- Our personnel evaluations have been measured against best-practice methods, and we have continued to update them as better practices have come to our attention.
- Staff take the time to ask themselves how they are doing, what they can do better, and what is working.

Flexible use of goals

- People are given realistic, high goals.
- These achievable goals are not rigidly held as the only ones of value. People can and do go outside the lines to add value to the camp. Examples of this readily come to mind.

Use of multiple perspectives

- Staff on the same level will formally check up on each other and offer constructive and supportive feedback. This occurs in activity areas and in interactions with campers.
- Outside of formal performance evaluations, supervisors offer constructive and supportive feedback at least once a week to each staff member.
- Knowledgeable people from outside the camp will observe staff on all levels and formally offer constructive and supportive feedback at least once during the summer.
- When process or outcome evaluations are conducted, more than one source of data is utilized.

Focus on customer needs

- Under “Scanning the current environment,” conducting satisfaction surveys was addressed. Other elements along these lines are return rates, letters from parents, and conversations with parents, staff, and campers. Those sources can help determine what the people are telling you their needs are. What does that list look like this year? What did it look like three, five, and ten years ago?
- From your expert vantage point, what is your opinion about the needs of people who come into contact with your camp? What is of value to them? How well do those things match up with your outcomes?
- Learning camps can answer the following questions for their campers and staff.
 - How many campers are impacted (gain in the core outcomes desired)?
 - What is the magnitude of the impact (effect size)?
 - How long does that impact last?
 - How many weeks/sessions/summers are necessary?
 - What are the characteristics of campers who do well, stay the same, and do poorly?
- We are fully aware of the problems with information listed in the appendix “Issues with evidence camps often rely upon” and we have taken concrete steps to insure that the data we collect are both accurate and useful.
- We intimately understand our processes (see process modeling resource). Staff understand our processes. We have evaluated our processes in accordance with best practice methods and know that they are the best they can be.

Benchmarking quality

- When we review our programs, policies, processes, and structures, we routinely compare them with the best practice in other industries as well as our own. It isn’t difficult to think of several recent examples of this right now.
- We benchmark our products and services against those of our competitors. It isn’t difficult to think of several recent examples of this right now.
- Some examples might include: food costs, insurance fees, return rates, percentage of participants influenced over what period of time, staffing ratios, supervision practices, marketing success rate, hiring practices, and almost any other area you’re likely to see as a conference presentation or magazine topic.

Overall

- If you were to give your camp a grade (A-F) for how well it's learning, what would you give it?
- What do you think it would take (or, what are the problems you need to solve/breakthroughs you need to make) to push it up to an A?

Survey

The survey for staff appears on the next page. It isn’t in the form in which it would actually be given to staff, but rather it is in a form that facilitates an understanding of the questions and instrument. Notes about the use of the survey appear immediately afterwards.

Survey of Your Camp's Ability to Learn

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Average / Okay	Agree	Strongly agree

Instructions:

For each of the items below, write in the number that best represents *your opinion based on your experiences*, and not on how you think other individuals would answer, or your camp's official policy or intent.

On some of the items, you may feel that you don't have enough information to render an accurate judgment. If you aren't at least 80% sure of your answer, just leave it blank. It usually takes 45 – 60 minutes to carefully complete this survey; please take your time.

The survey is anonymous. Please don't include any identifying information unless it doesn't matter. All responses will be averaged and written comments combined so as to protect individuals. Responses will be tallied by an honorable person outside of the camp.

Use the full range of the scale. If something rarely happens or is not often true, mark it as "Strongly disagree." When something is true much of the time, mark it as "Agree" or "Strongly agree." "Strongly agree" should indicate little room for substantial improvement. Please answer carefully, using the full range of the scale.

You have been asked to take the time and energy to fill out this survey, because your camp really wants to know how well it is learning and performing. If the questions spark comments you'd like to make, *please do so* where indicated at the end of the survey.

Personal Mastery

Personal vision

1. This camp effectively supports people with ambitious ideas for improvement.
2. Most of the people I work with achieve very high standards.
3. Supervisors (administration) model the importance of learning through their own efforts to learn.

Seeing reality objectively

4. People here are resistant to having their work critiqued by someone else. (R)
5. The best "role models" we have in this camp really seek out criticism of their own work.
6. Supervisors in this camp receive honest feedback about their people management performance.

Creative tension / Performance gap

7. The people I work with have very different opinions about where the camp needs to improve. (R)
8. People know where the camp is good and where it needs help.
9. Modeling, coaching, and facilitating learning is an ongoing practice that works well at our camp.

Mental Models

No "sacred cows"

10. Newcomers to this camp soon learn that it is not safe to suggest changes for some policies and practices. (R)
11. Any problematic practice or assumption can be challenged, no matter whose it is, or how long it has been in effect.

Valuing diversity of thought

12. In this camp, we pay serious (good) attention to the opinions of people who think differently from everyone else.
13. For all the talk about "diversity" here (if any), the reality is that we really only listen to people who "think the way we do." (R)
14. The teams at camp have staff from different levels and areas that offer input on a regular basis.

Openness and trust

15. Anything negative you say around here is likely to have consequences later on. (R)
16. It is safe for us to speak our minds, even if it means disagreeing with superiors.

Shared vision

Shared, inspiring purpose

17. Every camp has elements/benefits it wants participants to walk away with in the end. Some examples include fun and self-esteem. Please list all the camper outcomes you know the camp really works hard to influence.
18. For each of the outcomes listed above, what is your role in bringing it about? Please be as thorough as possible in your *list* of activities that contribute to outcomes being realized.
19. Personally, I am dedicated to doing my absolute best to achieve the camper outcomes.
20. I really feel like my work makes a difference in people's lives.
21. I am excited about the work that I do here.

Sense of shared identity

22. People here are deeply committed to the long-term survival of this camp as a community.
23. When staff talk about this camp, they quite often say "we," rather than "the camp" or "they."
24. People who work here have a strong sense of "shared identity" (i.e., what it means to be "one of us").
25. There are core values that people at camp subscribe to. People take those values seriously.

Exercising own judgment / Shared intuition

26. People here don't need a lot of instructions; they usually know instinctively what to do, even in a new situation.
27. Many performance problems here are caused by a lack of clarity about how the job should be done. (R)

Team learning

True dialogue

28. We have fruitful, constructive debates about new ideas.
29. People here often go along with decisions they don't really agree with. (R)

Team intelligence / Synergy

30. When we work together in groups, we often achieve a level of efficiency that makes us more productive than we would be as individuals working independently.
31. Groups I have worked with in this camp usually come up with far more insightful ideas than any of the individuals in the group could have thought of by themselves.

Good cross-team communication

32. Lessons learned by individuals or groups in this camp are quickly shared with coworkers who can use them.
33. There is a knowledge center that allows me to learn what I need to know, when I need to know, so that I can do a better job.
34. We spend a lot of time "reinventing the wheel" because people don't share their ideas enough. (R)

Systems thinking

Seeing systemic causes

35. When faced with problems, we usually only look for causes in the obvious places. Wide ranging and systematic searches for the root problems is unusual. (R)
36. When we have a recurring problem, we look critically at our processes/systems in order to find where the real cause lies.
37. Sole individuals almost never take the blame for a problem entirely. Instead, the long causal chain is examined and responsibility is distributed appropriately.

Understanding interdependence

38. People here are very conscious of how changes in one part of the camp can affect other parts.
39. People around here have little awareness of what is happening outside their immediate work areas. (R)
40. Sometimes, people just move problems around from group to group, or area to area. (R)

External and Future Scanning

Scanning the current environment (ADMINISTRATION ONLY)

41. We are highly sensitive to our external environment, enabling us to pick up cues about trends and emerging opportunities.
42. A lot of people I work with seem to have no idea where we stand relative to our competitors. (R)

Scanning and probing the future (ADMINISTRATION ONLY)

43. We are actively planning in anticipation of how our markets might change over the next several years.
44. We seem to spend most of our time on day-to-day matters, leaving little time to think about the future. (R)

Acceptance of change as a natural part of organizational life

- 45. Frequent, constructive change is viewed positively as a regular part of life in this camp. There doesn't appear to be undue resistance to positive change just because it isn't the way things have always been done.
- 46. Most attempts to change things in this camp are greeted with cynicism and resistance. (R)

Organizational Experimentation

Marketplace for ideas

- 47. I often see people in this camp ignore very good ideas. (R)
- 48. We have excellent new ideas coming from all levels of the camp.

Support for risk-taking

- 49. You are more likely to be given more responsibility here if you are a bit of a risk-taker.
- 50. The real 'heroes' in this camp are the ones who 'stuck their necks out' and took a few calculated risks.

Diversity of methods and practices

- 51. Even when the accepted method is not optimal, everyone here still does things in much the same way. (R)
- 52. A lot of our improvements come from people trying variations on the usual procedure.

Streamlining and constant improvement

- 53. When developing a new program, activity, or system, we keep it flexible enough to incorporate improvements right up to the last minute.
- 54. When developing something new, we tend to make a detailed plan, and then stick to it quite diligently. Once it's done, there's no changing it. (R)
- 55. It is clear that the camp works hard to make small, continuous improvements in every area.

Systematic Evaluation of Successes and Failures

True value focus in personnel evaluation

- 56. I've seen weak performers in this camp still do well in their performance reviews. (R)
- 57. The way people's performance is evaluated reflects accurately the value they add to the camp.

Flexible use of goals

- 58. If individuals or groups neglect a pre-set goal in order to achieve something that adds more value, they are usually rewarded for their initiative.
- 59. In this camp, there is (stated or unstated) incentive for us to set our goals low enough to make sure they can easily be achieved. (R)

Use of multiple perspectives

- 60. Staff on the same level will formally check up on each other and offer constructive and supportive feedback. This occurs in activity areas and in interactions with campers.
- 61. Outside of formal performance evaluations, supervisors offer constructive and supportive feedback at least once a week to each staff member.
- 62. Knowledgeable people from outside the camp will observe staff on all levels and formally offer constructive and supportive feedback at least once during the summer.

Finger on the pulse of customer needs

- 63. The people I work with continually find new ways of meeting the needs of their campers.
- 64. We routinely go well beyond looking at 'customer satisfaction' when we evaluate the way we do things at camp.
- 65. Customers' comments often lead to changes in the way we do things at camp.

Benchmarking quality against competitors and best practices (ADMINISTRATION ONLY)

- 66. When we review our programs, policies, processes, and structures, we routinely compare them with the best practice in other industries as well as our own.
- 67. We benchmark our products and services against those of our competitors.

Commitment to the camp

- 68. I feel a strong sense of loyalty to this camp.
- 69. I am proud to tell others I am part of this camp.

Perception of performance

- 70. Which of the following do you think best describes the performance of your camp?
 - performing below satisfactory levels (F, D)
 - performing at satisfactory levels (C-, C, C+)
 - performing very well (B-, B, B+)
 - performing excellently (A-, A, A+)

71. Some work environments allow people to really add value in their positions, while other environments hinder people's ability to substantively contribute. Bearing in mind the scope of your job, which of the following best describes the extent to which you are able to impact the performance of the camp? [Scale numbered 1-9, anchored at odd numbers as follows.]
- severely hampered in my efforts to get my job done (1)
 - constrained; able to achieve minimal performance requirements, but only barely (3)
 - adding value – able to support the camp quite well (5)
 - able to have a definite positive impact on the camp (7)
 - truly enabled to maximize my impact on the camp's performance (9)
72. Which of the following best describes your job category?
- Senior manager (director, assistant director)
 - Middle manager (unit leader)
 - First-line manager (group leader)
 - Counselor
 - Junior counselor
73. If you feel comfortable answering, how long have you worked for this camp? _____
74. Do you intend to return next summer (leave blank if returning isn't possible)? [Scale numbered 1-9, anchored at odd numbers as follows.]
- Not a chance (1)
 - I'd consider it (3)
 - Maybe. It could happen (5)
 - Pretty likely (7)
 - Most definitely (9)

Suggested improvements

75. What feasible changes do you think would most help the camp improve the impact it has on its outcomes? Write your answer here.

Notes on the use of the survey

Permission

The survey may only be used if the data are transmitted to Randall@visionrealization.com in the form of an electronic spreadsheet – e.g., Excel. That is the copyright license. In this manner, the survey may be continually improved upon based on statistical analysis of the results and comments on its use. Please contact me for an Excel template and a formatted survey.

Considering that camps would have to pay \$2,000 - \$5,000 (depending on size) for this survey and service, free use based on this one condition is a very good deal. I've made this special arrangement with the survey author to provide this service for the good of the camping profession. Take advantage of this exceptional generosity.

General notes

- The formatted survey is just a list of questions in random order. There are no other indications about the questions' intent.
- Anonymous responses are necessary in order to have confidence in the accuracy of the data.
- Although every staff member can be asked to fill out the survey, if half the staff were to do it, that would be enough. In that case, the selected staff would have to be chosen randomly. Every other person alphabetically by last name is a good method.
- The survey should be given half way through the summer so people have enough exposure to answer the questions. The end of the summer would be okay as well, but there probably wouldn't be time to act on the data. For number 75, treat responses as suggestions and try and find patterns in the responses.
- Respondents need to have the time and motivation necessary to complete the survey as accurately as possible. Insure that the staff are not rushed, doing it under duress, or completing the survey instead of meeting some other important need. Garbage in = Garbage out.

Analyzing the survey

Analysis of the survey responses should be as follows:

- Enter the data into Excel. Reverse score appropriate items (R). 5=1, and 4=2.
- Double check the raw data to correct for any entry errors
- Compute averages, medians, and standard deviations for each item. Look for errors/outliers.
- Number 17 is calculated as the percentage correct. For 17 & 18, examine the pattern of things included and excluded.
- Optional, but helpful: Graph the distributions for every question and examine them carefully
- For each subdomain, average each individual's responses. That is each person's scale/subdomain score.
 - Compute averages, medians, and standard deviations on those subdomains
 - Graph the distributions for each of the 26 subdomains
- For each of the eight learning domains, compute that domain score by averaging the corresponding subdomains.
- Create a summary table and graph using the below rubric.

Merit Level	Corresponding Evidence
Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear example of exemplary practice on this dimension. • Median scale score at least 4.5 on a 5-point scale; almost all scores above 4.0.
Very Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear example of very good practice on this dimension, although improvement is possible on some minor aspects. • Median scale score generally between 4.0 and 4.5 on a 5-point scale; almost all scores above 3.0
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promising performance in many respects, but some non-trivial areas for improvement. • Median scale score generally between 3.25 and 4.0 on a 5-point scale; almost all scores above 2.5; very few higher than 4.0.
Satisfactory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate performance – some fairly substantial areas for improvement. • Median scale score generally between 2.75 and 3.25 on a 5-point scale; almost all scores above 2.0, very few higher than 3.75.
Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear example of below satisfactory performance – evidence of serious weaknesses that hinder the organization's ability to learn. • Median scale score generally below 2.75 on a 5-point scale; almost all scores below 3.5.

Survey validity

No matter how good a survey of this kind is, there are severe limitations that make it useful *only* when it is one tool in the box. The culture resource details the numerous problems with these kinds of surveys, but that discussion won't be repeated here. As one note, this instrument is similar to a satisfaction survey. The problems that can plague those are detailed in the appendix on "Issues with evidence." Thus, use the survey tool for some insight, but don't take the results as gospel, because they aren't.

Final step in analysis – summary judgment

In reality, there are two missing steps in the analysis of an organization/camp’s learning capacity. Those steps involve conducting a careful, hierarchical needs assessment of what organizational learning domains are vital, and combining that information with interviews, focus groups, and survey data to come up with a more accurate and complete assessment for each of the eight learning domains. Such a complicated analysis procedure is well beyond the scope of this resource. When those steps are in place, a more multifaceted assessment can be utilized to determine overall learning capacity.

For present circumstances, an incomplete look at the overall rating can be garnered with available information. This rating should be deemed preliminary and perhaps inaccurate, because the other information might shift the final judgment up or down a notch. In some circumstances, the rating might shift even more. For example, if the camp scored “Poor” on a learning domain that was deemed to be critical, the overall rating would automatically be “Learning Impaired.” To get more specific, if a camp didn’t have reliable and valid evidence of its performance on outcomes (if, how much, how many, etc.) and other 8th dimension elements, it would likely get a poor rating on a critical dimension. See the appendix on “Issues with evidence” for the rationale.

Organizational Learning Rating	All Learning Culture Dimensions
Extremely High Learning Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No ratings below Good • At least six Excellent ratings
Very High Learning Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Poor Ratings • At least six ratings in the Very Good to Excellent range • At least a good rating on the 8th dimension
High Learning Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least six ratings at Good or better
Moderate Learning Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than two Poor ratings
Learning Impaired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than two Poor ratings overall.

Interviews

In general, interviews have more benefits than limitations. Their primary problems are that they are time consuming, discussions are filtered through the interviewer's biases, individuals may not have accurate information, and a thorough job can only be done on a very small subsample of the population. The benefits of interviews are discussed below.

By taking the group element out (as with a focus group), the social pressure to say certain things and not others can be removed. A level of rapport and trust can be built up with someone outside of the culture, and more honest answers and opinions can be offered. It is far less likely that true and complete answers to sensitive questions would be given to someone inside the camp. Representativeness across and within job levels is the goal, so as to get a well-rounded perspective.

Focus groups

What holds true for interviews largely holds true for focus groups. The main drawback is that people in a group are less likely to offer comments that may hurt the camp, themselves, or their coworkers. Other social phenomena, such as social inhibition and the complex interpersonal dynamics that the focus-group leader can't really know about, further complicate the message. Anonymity can help, but it isn't enough.

On the plus side, more people can be tapped much faster. Also, focus groups offer the potential for people to encourage each other, because they feed off responses and ideas.

External review

Another non-acquainted director, a consultant, an uninvolved alumnus with appropriate skills, a board member with skills, or some other fitting external evaluator is brought in to evaluate the camp's learning ability. This person has an *intimate* knowledge of what encompasses a learning organization, and has a *very good* sense of what to look for. It is extremely desirable for the reviewer to have knowledge of best-practice learning camp methods from other organizations.

Because the external reviewer isn't caught up in the life of the camp, s/he can see what is going on better than those enmeshed in the environment. That ability combined with their special knowledge often yields critical insights. Those insights provide value to the camp that likely wouldn't be available otherwise.

In terms of process, the external evaluator first studies all the data gathered with the other methods. After that, a careful examination of structures, processes, and policies is conducted. Preferably, the reviewer would conduct some more interviews and observe the camp to round out the data. Often, this is the person who conducts the interviews and focus groups in the first place. A final synthesizing report is tendered with suggestions on how to improve areas that are sub par.

Conclusion

Let me be clear that the criteria set forward are very difficult to achieve. "Extremely high" learning designations are not impossible to achieve, but they are exceedingly difficult. If a camp has such an ability, it should proclaim it from the mountains and invite others to benchmark its practices. In the realm of large corporations, such entities charge a lot of money for tours and access. They write books and sell a lot of them. I, for one, would definitely ante up to see more examples of an exceptional learning camp. Certainly, they are out there.

The reason to strive for such a lofty (but possible) goal is because the resulting performance is very impressive. For camps, performance means influencing the outcomes of value for campers, staff, and parents. Highly learning organizations tend to have strong cultures in line with outcomes, which is remarkable to witness and take part in (see the "Introduction" in the culture resource). As was noted at the outset, a learning organization is centered around its culture, and that resource is vital to the creation of a highly learning camp. Also, see the "From good to great" resource.

Use the assessment methods provided. Celebrate your strengths and work on your areas for development. Creating a "Very high" or "Extremely high" learning camp is a difficult benchmark, but exceptional camps achieve them. Because they achieve them, they are exceptional. It is causal.

References

Special note of reference and thanks

Dr. Jane Davidson is conducting some of the most ground-breaking work in the area of organizational learning. Her research (2001) was instrumental to the preparation of this chapter. Indeed, the survey and analysis rubric are her work (used by special permission), although I have revised them to be applicable to camps. The self-analysis piece is entirely my own work. The learning dimensions were also categorized by Dr. Davidson, but beyond that, the entirety of the text and descriptions throughout this resource are my own work.

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Related resources

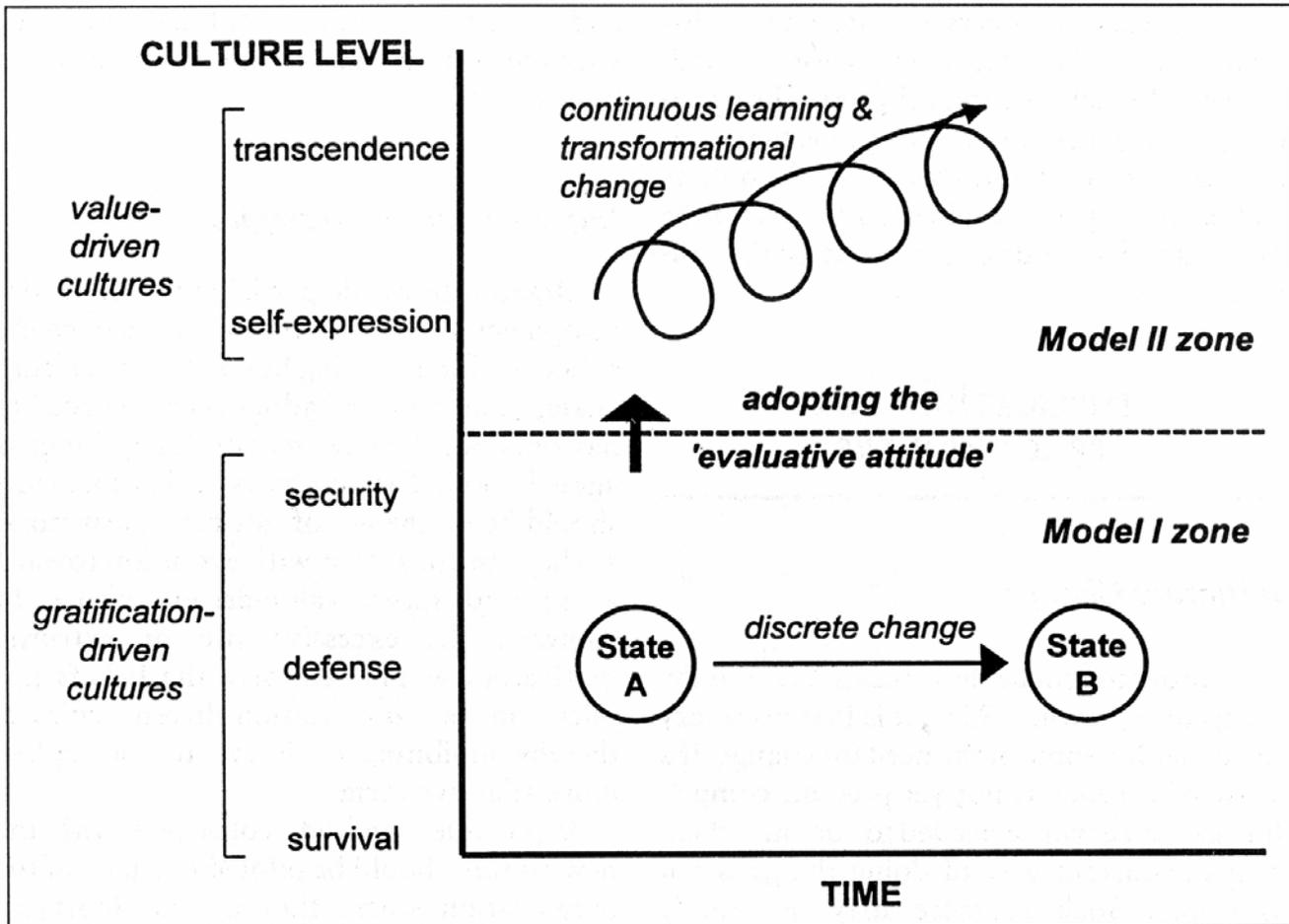
Other Vision Realization Resources

See www.visionrealization.com for even more resources

Evaluation 101	Provides an overview of the evaluation process. This resource should be the first one viewed as the others build off of it. If you're thinking of doing an evaluation, you'll get up to speed quickly here. The slide show combined with the audio annotations offers a thorough introduction.
Process maps	Utilizing this knowledge will help you understand and communicate what your camp does in an unprecedented way. The staff and campers will benefit enormously from this knowledge. View this slide show with audio annotations and reach a new plateau of understanding and effectiveness. This is not just about "evaluation."
360 degree evaluation	Follow the Fortune 1000 in using this tool to develop your staff. You will get an overview of 360 degree evaluation, understand why it is so beneficial, understand how to conduct them, and become aware of the pitfalls and stumbling blocks. Material to create your own is provided. Part of the material is in slide show format with audio annotation.
Knowledge management	Knowledge management will save you time, money, be a staff perk, and help you achieve your mission much more effectively. Simple idea, difficult to implement well, profound results. More specific implementation advice and lists are provided as well as models to help organize efforts. Slide show with audio annotation. Once you engage this tool, you'll wonder how you ever did without it!
Benchmarking	Benchmarking is the process of identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices from any organization to help your camp improve it's performance and outcomes. Follow the Fortune companies in profiting from this tool. Also includes the American Productivity and Quality Center's process classification framework in detail. Audio annotation is included.
Staff training best practices presentation	Learn how to take your camp training from good to best practice. Understand how to convey information so that it will be remembered and used. Learn how to capture the heart in addition to the mind. Understand how to make in-the-trenches training as effective as possible - includes guidelines for supervisors. Fortune 500 leadership training, Parent Effectiveness Training, and camp orientations don't achieve their objectives at an alarming rate. Learn why orientations, special trainings, and in-services fail and what to do about it.
Organizational culture at camps	From a fuzzy and nebulous concept to a concrete, useful framework. Understand clearly what makes a camp culture and how far reaching it is. Determine how yours rates. Discover best practices in creating an exceptional culture. Learn how to develop or change your current culture without hitting the land mines. Understand why Bob Ditter called this approach "the next level" in camp performance.
The art and science of mistakes	Directors, staff, and campers all make plenty of slip-ups. Learn the differences between mistakes and failure and how to find the humor and wisdom in life's disappointments. Teach children, staff, and your organization how to "fail forward." There isn't a single aspect of organizations or personal life this doesn't apply to!
Innovation and continuous improvement	What, Why, and How. From the fuzzy to the concrete: Gain a useful framework of what makes up these nebulous concepts. Understand how to use these tools to help campers, counselors, yourself, and your camp make positive changes that will stick.
Believing and doubting game	This is a useful "game" to play when you are having almost any kind of controversial discussion, or are trying to increase creativity. Place the one-page description in front of everyone at the meeting, allow everyone to read it, and get ready to have a more open, creative, and, ultimately more productive discussion/meeting.
From good to great	Only 1 out of 130 businesses ever manages to go from good to great. By reading this resource, you'll understand the 7 key elements that enables them to make the leap. These principles were discovered via the largest single scientific research endeavor on this topic of our time. You'll also be able to assess where your specific camp is (alive, okay, good, pretty good, great), and receive the detailed knowledge of how your camp can move up a notch, or all the way to great.

Stages of organizational development & the learning camp

Graphic: Sathe, & Davidson, (2000), pg. 293



Description of graphic Levels & models

Think of the levels as being similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Survival, defense, and security are gratification driven camps. To elaborate, these camps are usually primarily interested in themselves, as opposed to the campers and staff they serve. They certainly care about the campers and staff, but their first allegiance is to their own comfort, security, and way of life. The exception is when a camp is in one of these stages, but is trying to move up to the value-driven levels. Although camps on this level would deny it to their last breath, they usually aren't looking to provide *true* value to the customer beyond fun and satisfaction. If true value were their goal, they'd just be passing through "security" on their way to "self-expression."

Perhaps confusingly, the "self-expression" level indicates that the camp has turned the tables and put the campers and staff above the people who run the camp. What happens at camp is determined by whether or not structures, processes, and policies add value to the campers and staff. Model II organizations are usually "Very high" or "Extremely high" learning entities. They have a laser-like focus on true value for everyone who comes in contact with them. Everywhere the careful, informed observer looks, there is evidence of it. On the transcendence level, the camp has reached the "great" or "exceptional" level where value is experienced to a very high degree for all concerned.

Change

Discrete change is somewhat similar to the “doom loop” described in the “From good to great” resource. Camps here make changes, but they often don’t amount to the kind of transformational change that makes a dramatic improvement on the outcomes over time. Things might be better in a sense, but rarely quantumly or categorically better. Transformational changes are ones which make a substantial difference on the outcomes people experience.

Where are you?

Below are some *gross generalizations* that might help with the distinctions. It is certainly possible for some of the higher-level elements to be present in lower levels, but it is uncommon.

Survival

At this stage, the camp is fighting to stay alive, or reach that point where it can rest easy about meeting numbers. Finances are usually a big concern and a lot of effort is spent trying to fill beds/slots and increase return rates. A camp in this stage wouldn’t have the luxury of reading this information, let alone have the time or resources to act on it. Heroic efforts by a small group of people are the norm here.

Defense

A moderate degree of success has been achieved. There is no pressing danger or concern, but overall, things are still somewhat precarious. Higher order activities like careful evaluation of processes or outcomes, benchmarking, creating good knowledge management centers, and focusing on the heart of customer value instead of satisfaction/declared needs are rarely if ever done. When they are, transformational change seldom (but not never) occurs. Talk of return rates, satisfaction, nuts and bolts operations, and finances takes up a lot of time. People here often collect lots of ideas and throw them into the stew hoping for the best, although they don’t see it like that at all. These camps might be achieving some of their outcomes, but the number influenced and the duration of impact is exceedingly below their potential. Culture change and improvement usually isn’t possible on this level.

Security

Staying afloat isn’t a problem now, nor is it likely to be. Camps on this level may even be wildly successful in terms of money, return rates, and satisfaction. Average return rates, or a little above, are common. Sometimes extremely high return rates are possible. These camps often have quite a few raving fans. Things look very good from this level – people are generally happy and the lands are filled with milk and honey. Life is good. Evaluation and the focus on value are still not present to a large enough degree to make a substantial difference, although camps on this level often believe (without sound evidence) that they are achieving near miraculous feats in terms of their outcomes. These camps are usually quite satisfied with their performance – they look out over their domains and smile. What they don’t fully realize is the scope of their potential – how much they could be accomplishing and achieving beyond their current point. It is on this level that many camps seem to be stuck. They believe they are great. These are the good camps that need the good-to-great principles (see “From good to great” resource) in order to transition to great.

Adopting the evaluative attitude

“Almost every aspect of organizational learning relates in some important way to high-quality evaluation of the organization’s personnel, policies, programs, products, processes, and/or practices” (Davidson, 2001). It is for this reason that evaluation, the 8th learning domain, can be viewed as the key to the kingdom. The evaluative attitude is “the relentless pursuit of the truth about quality and performance” (Sathe, & Davidson, 2000). It goes beyond the accountability-focused function (control, measurement, and monitoring) to determine the degree to which the organization is making the best use of available resources to achieve outcomes of maximum possible value (Scriven, 1991).

Evaluation focuses the attention in an unbiased (as much as possible – see evaluation resource) manner. It can also shed light on areas in the shadows or that were completely unseen. With that light can come the action necessary to improve performance. Indeed, major organizational change is evidence that the camp has failed to create enough continuous change and improvement. As a result, the current way of doing things has been rendered ineffective, defunct, or perhaps even dangerous. The ensuing overhaul is often quite traumatic in terms of money and/or emotions. However, good (security) level camps can stride happily along without any “need” for great change. It is when the need is realized that the ensuing change is often a lurch.

Self-expression

This camp has *at least* a “High” learning designation with a mandatory “High” on the 8th domain of evaluation. It knows precisely what the main factors are for campers and staff that do and don’t return. It has taken a healthy stab at rigorously evaluating its outcomes, processes, and structures. The camp takes small comfort in financial success, return rates, satisfaction measures, and the like. It is focused on providing true value to the customer beyond satisfaction (see “Issues with evidence” appendix). An enormous amount of thought has gone into its practices and values, and they are reflected in its print and virtual materials, the actions of its people on a day-to-day basis, and in what camp looks and feels like. This camp has at least an implicit view of organizational culture and is focused on developing it with a holistic view of outcomes in mind. The knowledge management center (OWL) is in the fourth stage of development, which propels the camp forward. This camp is a safe place to make mistakes, learn, and speak your mind. Instead of episodic changes, the camp on this level relies on continuous change on a smaller scale, which is smoother and often more effective. There is no doubt that this is a good place to work and that staff are almost uniformly saddened to leave.

Transcendence

This camp has a “Very high” or “Extremely high” learning organization rating. It rigorously conducts process and outcome evaluations so that it knows where it stands based on best-practice methods and measures. It can answer most or all of the outcome questions – e.g., how many, after how long, for how long. This camp utilizes those results to improve the value it provides to its customers via process, structure, policy, and sometimes mission changes. Rather than conducting one-time evaluations, there is a systematic evaluation schedule that takes years and repeats itself. Leadership is based on values and commitment, not power. Level 5 leaders are very common here (see “From good to great” resource). Rules and policies have been largely replaced with guiding values. Internal, rather than external, bases of power are utilized to shape behavior. This camp has a very strong culture (see culture resource) in line with valued outcomes. Selection and enculturation processes are consistently strong. The camp is open to change, instead of being a victim of its strong culture. Systematic and effective best-practice searches occur every year as part of the strategic process. The knowledge management center (OWL) is usually in the fifth stage – full implementation. People are always busy, but they really do have time for the important things. Most notably, a camp that’s been on the transcendence level for a few years is an exceptional one that achieves its outcomes at a level and to a degree unknown to those on lower levels. Sometimes these camps act as black holes for staff and campers, because they don’t want to leave a place that is so *truly* valuable to their development.

The introduction stories in the culture resource should also be very instructive.

More definitions and a credo

More definitions

“Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization’s behalf . . . In order to become organizational, the learning that results from organizational inquiry must become embedded in the images of the organization held in its members’ minds and/or in the epistemological artifacts (the maps, memories, and programs) embedded in the organizational environment.” (Argyris, & Schön, 1996)

“Organizational learning is a continuous process of growth and improvement that: (a) uses information or feedback about both processes and outcomes (i.e. evaluation findings) to make changes; (b) is integrated with work activities, and within the organization’s infrastructure (e.g., its culture, systems and structures, leadership, and communication mechanisms); and (c) invokes the alignment of values, attitudes, and perceptions among organizational members.” (Preskill, & Torres, 1999)

“Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.” (Senge, 1990)

“Organizational learning can be either exploitative (focused on refining and improving existing knowledge and practices; Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) would be examples of this), exploratory (focused on creating completely new ways of thinking and doing), or – ideally – a combination of both . . . an organization’s current viability comes from its capabilities in exploitative learning (continuous quality improvement), while its future viability derives from exploratory learning (innovation).” (Davidson, 2001)

“Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.” (Fiol, 7 Lyles, 1985)

Credo of a learning organization

We continually seek to improve; we haven’t cornered the market on good ideas; our existing systems, methods, and ideas are continually open to change; change is good and we welcome it; we continually look outside ourselves for fresh inspiration; we freely adapt and adopt the most useful ideas we find; we want to meet and beat the best known performance in any process.

Is it all good?

Camps are the 4th largest, organized intervention for children in America

That's quite a statement, isn't it? I strongly believe it's true. The first is school, the second is church, the third is the Y, and the fourth is camps – serving roughly 9 million children a year. Some people are uncomfortable with the word intervention, but it simply means to intervene. Camps intend to intervene in their camper's lives by changing them in some way – social skills, self-confidence, learn a skill, or increase happiness. By the end of camp, it is hoped that the children will be different in some way. If your hope is that the children are no different after they leave, then you aren't an intervention.

So far, rigorous evaluations done well (see evaluation resources) have not generally provided evidence that camps are effective in the long run for social outcomes – see below. Before presenting that evidence, I want to make it very clear that I know camps can make a difference in people's lives. Exceptional camps do so all the time. But, I believe it takes an exceptional camp to influence several outcomes for a sizable portion of its population.

The garden path

First, you're likely doing a good job in a lot of areas – e.g., fun, safety, etc.

Second, consider, just consider, that you might not be achieving everything you're trying to and that an evaluation may offer you some surprises. Consider that for mathematics, 90% of schools judge themselves as above average, and yet in 1999, the United States was below average compared to other industrialized nations. Opinions of relative success aren't much to stand on. This result is especially interesting because schools get annual evaluative information presented to them, which they have to ignore to believe they are above average.

Camps generally think they are doing an okay job when push comes to shove. There's nothing really wrong. "Culture audits, process evaluations, and outcome evaluations would be useful and interesting, but nothing really groundbreaking would likely result." Both excellent and poor camps often hold this belief. How do you know if you have holes, where they are, and how big they are? See the evaluation resource for more on this.

The lack of thorough, rigorous evaluations can result in stagnation. It can also create group think⁴. Competitive forces that normally operate in the marketplace don't work very well in camps. Fun and satisfaction are the two main elements customers evaluate, but since those are quite relative (see appendix on assessing satisfaction), they aren't a very good measure of outcomes. Camps that are doing poorly (see next section) in terms of the outcomes they want to achieve have been filling up for decades. The evaluation resource has more information about how to assess outcomes and why parents are often not very good at it.

If you think you're pretty good and have little room to improve (without thorough, rigorous evaluations of all your outcomes) and have no REAL problems to solve, then stop reading here. At this point in time, there is little hope for change and growth. There's no point in conducting culture or outcomes evaluations, because the results are a foregone conclusion. Do see the resource on learning camps though and the Fortune article (2001) on the dangers of ego.

⁴ don't evaluate the evidence and make decisions in a careful, rational way; strong cohesiveness, isolation, closed leadership style, and decision pressure; limited amount of information; illusion of invulnerability; illusion of superiority; and illusion of morality

The scientific evaluation of 41 camps

A nationally known camp in existence for over 100 years with an Eleanor Eells award had only 15% of its campers walk away with a few of the 17 essential outcomes they hoped to influence. This was true even after three years of consecutive attendance.

A meta-analysis is the cumulative examination of quantitative, scientific studies in a mathematical manner. Just such a study⁵ was done of 37 different (conducted by different people, at different camps) scientific evaluations of camp's ability to influence self-esteem. That was all the evidence since before 1999. In scientific parlance, know that an effect size is a universal metric for the influence of, in this case, camp on, in this case, self-esteem. The range is: .3 = small, .5 = medium, and .7 or higher = large. For example, you'd want your headache medicine to be at least .7, and the influence of commercials on your behavior to be less than .3. The overall results of this study was an effect size of .1. That number is so small it is essentially meaningless. Considering the study largely didn't examine self-esteem after camp, where self-esteem is likely to drop some (see self-esteem resource), is further evidence of that. Exceptional camps in this study had an average effect size of .2.

At a prestigious camp with a nationally known leader in operation for over 90 years, one of its most fundamental objectives was not met to a degree deemed even close to acceptable.

After examining an outcome using qualitative (camper, counselor, and parent written comments) data and quantitative data via a valid and reliable scale, the qualitative results indicated the camp was very successful. Those results also offered numerous reasons why. The quantitative measure that had been carefully developed over decades revealed little effect. Subsequent evaluations confirmed these results.

One camp that had been around for over 65 years discovered that it needed to drastically reorganize its program in order to make the impact it desired. The changes were positively viewed by funders, campers, and staff, because it was evident that they would improve the quality of the experience for everyone.

Implications for evidence camps often rely upon

Virtually all of these camps had the following evidence that they were doing well before they really took the time and effort to check in a rigorous way using formal logic. They had **good return rates**. They had books or **walls of letters** stating how much the summer had meant to campers and staff. The staff at these camps had very **warm and positive feelings about their program and impact**. They had **satisfaction and fun surveys stating that they were doing a very good and sometimes excellent job**.

Most certainly camps do make a difference in people's lives. More than likely, you're doing an excellent job on some outcomes, and could stand some improvement on others. The questions camps need to be asking using an evaluation method that is reliable and valid are:

- How many campers are impacted?
- What is the magnitude of the impact (effect size)?
- How long does that impact last?
- How many weeks/sessions/summers are necessary?
- What are the characteristics of campers who do well, stay the same, and do poorly?

The evaluation resources include more information about the questions to ask and how to ask them. Camps that don't achieve almost any of their outcomes except a degree of fun and safety remain in business for decades. They don't change because the reason to substantially change has never been convincingly offered (see evaluation resources), or because they get caught up in a defense, fear, or an inability to institute a means to change that works well (see change model). Conduct an "educational audit" of your program in addition to the financial and safety audits. With that information, you'll be able to change lives more effectively than you are now.

⁵

Marsh, P. E. (1999). What does camp do for kids?: A meta-analysis of the influence of the organized camping experience on the self constructs of youth. Unpublished master's thesis, Indiana University.

Why satisfaction surveys don't tell you what you need to know

Most surveys essentially ask for people's opinion about how satisfied they are about various elements of the camp. Satisfaction surveys are fuzzy for three very closely related reasons.

One, they usually aren't objective.

Two, expectations vary.

Three, the range of expectations varies, so averages are less meaningful

It is for these reasons that satisfaction measures should never (with the exception of things like fun, a self-esteem scale, and individual satisfaction to some degree) be confused with outcome measures. *Satisfaction does not mean learning, attitude change, or behavior change most of the time.* For example, college students frequently report being dissatisfied with challenging professors, but those same professors are also often the ones where the students learn the most. Let's look at another example in the opposite direction. In one study I conducted, campers who rated the camp as at least very fun and "definitely want to come back" were no more likely to change on numerous outcomes than campers who rated the camp as so-so or not very good. So, you might be a legend in the mind of your campers, staff, parents, and board, but that doesn't mean that you are actually effective at achieving your outcomes. See the "Is it all good?" appendix for several more examples of why satisfaction does not equal outcomes. The evaluation resource provides a thorough rational and explanation for what an accurate assessment really looks like.

1. Satisfaction on anything equals one's reality minus one's expectations ($S=R-E$). While knowing whether or not people are satisfied is interesting and useful (you want to know where people stand and if you met their expectations), it is almost never measured against any kind of objective standard. For return rates, satisfaction measures are vital, but to assess whether or not you are impacting campers to the degree desired, simple satisfaction measures lack validity.
2. Staff at one camp were quite satisfied with one hour off during the day and two hours off at night until they found out that another camp gave two hours during the day and three at night. The relative deprivation caused the staff to become unsatisfied. Take another example. I had the opportunity to know a child at two different camps I attended for the whole summer. When I asked David at the end of the second summer how much fun he had on a scale from 1 – 10, he said it was a 9. I then asked him to rate the previous camp again in light of the current experience, and he gave it a 5. At the end of the previous summer, he had given the first camp a 9. Expectations vary, so satisfaction changes depending on circumstance and the person. Providing a full range in the response set with appropriate anchors along the continuum can help mitigate this limitation, but it won't eliminate it.
3. Each respondent is usually operating by a slightly different standard. In other words, one person's expectation might range from 30 minutes to 2 hours off per day, while another might range from 1 hour to 5 hours. If each person is on a different scale, their expectations have different ranges, *which makes averages less meaningful.* On a case by case level, the person's satisfaction rating is interesting, keeping in mind that it isn't objective and the scale they are using might be different from your own, who is evaluating the response. Providing a full range in the response set with appropriate anchors along the continuum can help mitigate this limitation.

Often, because of the problems with satisfaction surveys noted above, it is difficult to know what important elements a specific camp needs to focus on. The survey may produce false positives, false negatives, or an accurate picture, but opinions of satisfaction won't tell you which is the case. The hope is that the average or trend will give you an answer close to the truth.

Again, it is important to note that satisfaction measures are important for things like return rates and marketing. Satisfaction can help in the prediction of return rates. But, beyond satisfaction, return rates should not be confused with achieving outcomes, as we'll see on the next page.

Looking carefully at return rates

Camps utilize return rates as one measure of how well they are achieving their outcomes. While return rates can be good measures of satisfaction, the “Is it all good?” and “Satisfaction survey” sections should give pause for thought about the validity of that kind of data for outcomes. Beyond those crucial points, there are other reasons why return rates aren’t good measures of outcomes.

Qualitative observations by parents are often suspect

For one, parents are not logical, bean counting psychometricians capable of accurately assessing all outcomes. Two, parents might send their children back to a camp for numerous reasons. Let’s look at the first point now, and cover the second next.

- o IQ is the most frequent assessment in the country, but teachers are poor predictors of it. They’ve had these children for nine months in a focused learning environment where they should have the time and expertise to judge IQ accurately. The truth is that they are not good predictors of children’s actual IQ. It is for that reason that we must assess cognitive intelligence in a valid and reliable manner.
- o Self-esteem is most accurately assessed by the person, not others. Let me offer some specific camp examples to illustrate this point. I had counselors and directors at two different summer camps try and predict children’s self-esteem levels and change. At the first camp, the counselors had over three weeks exposure to the children in a residential setting. At the second residential camp, the counselors were with the children for one week. The campers were given one of the most reliable and valid self-esteem measure available, which has been proven over decades. It turns out that at both camps, the counselors (and supervisors and director) were unable to predict the children’s rough level of self-esteem any better than you would have expected by absolute chance. Furthermore, they were unable to even grossly predict whether the children’s self-esteem went up, stayed the same, or went down any better than chance.

Assume parents are very accurate

Even if parents were accurate predictors of outcomes, the model would be complex and different for every parent and child.

- (A) return decision = .43 fun, .12 self-esteem, .27 safety, .18 liked director
- (B) return decision = .21 fun, .24 extroversion, .55 friends returning
- (C) return decision = .36 environmental attitudes, .41 social skills, .23 creativity
- (D) return decision = .36 fun, .22 liked director, .42 don’t want to pick another camp
- (E) return decision = .75 fun, .15 safe place, .10 liked feeling of camp and director

The items in the equation and their accuracy would vary widely. As a result, there is no way to use return rates as outcomes measures, except for gross assessments of things like relative fun and satisfaction. Also, see the next page on the sins of memory and the following page on socially desirable responding for further concerns about self-report, qualitative data.

What is valid and reliable data anyway?

So, after these sections and the next, you might be throwing your hands up and saying what is the best way to assess outcomes. There are good (reliable and valid) means of finding out how you are doing. They are described in detail in the evaluation resource trilogy. Briefly, let me generally define what valid and reliable mean.

Valid

- o What you are attempting to measure is what is actually being measured
- o The assessment can discriminate between groups and predict future outcomes and behaviors

Reliable

- o When the outcome is assessed again in a short period of time, stable outcomes should remain largely the same (height, locus of control), and unstable outcomes should vary (mood).
- o Independent raters should consistently come up with the same conclusion

It is very difficult to meet all the criteria (outlined in the measures resource), but it is quite possible and doable. Saying that how a person answers a few questions (or others about the child) will predict the person’s current and future psychological state and life and behavioral outcomes is *very bold*. Saying it without meeting all the criteria necessary for a good measure is putting a lot of faith in a holey bucket. *Making decisions on inaccurate information can have devastating results.*

The sins of memory

Sins of memory

The reason to understand these sins of memory is so that you can make intelligent choices in gathering and interpreting the data you need to make the critical decisions regarding your program. The worst-case scenario is to make changes (or not make changes) based on information that isn't accurate.

There are actually "Seven sins of memory"⁶. For present purposes, we'll only very briefly go through a few of them. *Certainly, they are not all occurring*, but if even one of them is present in the data you collect, the information can gum up the works. It is also likely that several of these problems are occurring in ways that are difficult to predict and account for, which is why qualitative information from parents, campers, and counselors can't be used as the only measure of your processes and/or outcomes. Qualitative data needs to be compared to data that is valid and reliable, which in some cases can be other qualitative data.

Transience

Over time, the exact nature and timing of things are often forgotten. When did Jane change exactly? How much did Jane do such and such before camp? What exactly was Jane like before camp? It may seem absurd to you that people can make such mistakes, but it is quite common. For example, thousands of married couples were separately asked if they had had sex within the last 24 hours, roughly speaking. There was only 80% agreement in the responses! Given that the time frame was very short, the event should have been more memorable than when you last opened the refrigerator, and that these people knew each other very well, one would have expected near-perfect agreement.

Absent-mindedness

People don't pay as close attention to things as we might expect. Psychologists often refer to this phenomenon as the "unbearable automaticity of being" or "unintentional blindness." Think about the director whose job it is to monitor all the camp operations. It's an impossible job and much is missed. In contrast, parents are usually present for a very short period of time. The camp program isn't monitored closely by them, so they are unable to assess how well the camp is doing. It is rare that parents are able to reliably identify which outcomes the camp should engender, and which ones are unlikely to be influenced (without prompting). Furthermore, they are very unlikely to be able to identify the elements that go into achieving a given outcome (see process modeling resource) and assess the presence, absence, or quality of those elements.

Misattribution

People misattribute the source and cause of events all the time. Maybe the change occurred at school, through church, from a mentor, or via a friend. Maybe children generalize the euphoria they feel at camp to other areas of their life, but it later doesn't turn out to be true. A very strong example of this is the judicial system. When DNA evidence was new, a sample of cases where the conviction of the person was based solely on eye-witness testimony was retried with the new DNA evidence. It turns out that 90% of those people were innocent. It's amazing that witnesses had to sit next to the judge, look the defendant in the eye, and proclaim that that was the person who did it – send him to jail or put her to death. These witnesses were really, really sure, but they were wrong.

As another example, people often associate beauty with intelligence, even though that is a poor predictor in reality. Along the same lines, commercials also use misattribution for their benefit. They want you to misattribute excitement, sex, or whatever to their product. In a Darwinian sense, the reason commercials use such tactics is because they work.

Suggestibility

Memory can be quite suggestible. When parents receive the marketing materials that were very carefully crafted, visit the web page, and talk with the director, they are being bombarded with suggestions about the nature and outcomes of the camp experience. Quite likely, they believe much of it, and want to believe it. Likewise, campers may get an earful about the benefit of the experience, which could color their responses.

Hypnosis, eye-witness testimony, leading questions, and reinterviewing are all examples of the suggestibility of memory. When it matters (e.g., courts, FBI), suggestibility is taken very seriously as a concern about validity. In mock trials, throwing in a false question like "Mr. Hoffa, how long were you in the mafia?" was enough to throw the outcome even though the answer was "I was never in the mafia!"

⁶ Schacter, D. L. (2001). *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. Houghton Mifflin.

Bias, socially desirable responding, dissonance, and selection threats

These four threats to the validity of the data you collect are certainly not always present. The catch is that you usually don't know when they are or are not operating. If even one of them is present in the data you collect, the information can gum up the works. Qualitative information from parents, campers, and counselors can't be used as the *only* measure of your processes or outcomes. Qualitative data needs to be compared to data that is valid and reliable, which in some cases can be other qualitative data.

Bias

Memory encoding and retrieval are highly dependent on, and influenced by, preexisting knowledge and beliefs. Much of perception depends upon why the parents sent their child to camp in the first place. For example, the parent(s) likes you and confounds that with results/outcomes. Because they like you, they want to believe that what you're saying is true.

Take another example. Counselors' rating of the children under their care is in a way also a rating of their own performance. Believing the data might be used to evaluate them, counselors may adjust their responses to questions. Even if that isn't the case, it may also be true that counselors with high self-esteem (which was likely selected for in the hiring process) will want to believe they are making a difference. People are capable of searching for evidence that confirms what they already believe.

Finally, bias creeps in with something called "post experience euphoria." In other words, when people are happy, they tend to look at the world through slightly more rose colored glasses. When people come out of comedy clubs, they tend to rate their happiness higher than normal, donate more money, rate their self-esteem higher, and view the future as a little more positive than beforehand. Their happiness and joy *temporarily* seeped into other parts of their brain. It happens.

Socially desirable responding

As we all know, sometimes people will tell you what you want to hear (or not tell you what you don't want to hear) to be nice. Sometimes they want you to feel good (a common human drive), and sometimes they just don't have the heart to tell you what they really think. Very similarly, people will often not offer the whole truth, because they don't want to deal with the confrontation and discussion that would likely ensue. Whether it is to be nice or to avoid confrontation, the comments people offer may not always be the whole truth. There is no question that this phenomenon occurs, the question is how prevalent is it and how markedly different are the comments from the true feelings/assessments.

Dissonance

Dissonance isn't a word in most people's vocabulary, but it refers to an inconsistency or lack of agreement. When given a free choice (what camp to choose) and significant effort or money has been expended, people often believe their decisions and attitudes are correct. "I chose that camp and it is a good one." People are inclined to think that their decisions are good ones – especially if it was a difficult one that wasn't made under duress.

Again, as with all of these possible threats to the accuracy of the information that is collected, they aren't always relevant. Sometimes you'll be getting the whole truth, but it is difficult to know when that is and isn't the case without having a valid and reliable means of collecting the information.

Dissonance is a very common phenomenon in everyday life. A recently published book⁷ goes into great detail about how it is relevant to everything from smoking, to diet, to seat belt use, to making decisions and evaluations.

Selection

There are many characteristics of the population you serve that need to be taken into account. The evaluation resource goes over them in detail. For now, I want to briefly address just one general one – selection. More than likely, the people that populate a camp chose (and were chosen) to be there. By that very selection, there is likely something different about those people than the general population or other subpopulations. Those differences might be in attitudes and values, personality, capabilities, geography, religion, socio-economic status, or some other variable.

For example, one camp chose demographically at-risk youth who were positively exceptional in many regards. These children may have flourished with or without the camp experience because of their characteristics. Consider that your population displays, or will display, the positive outcomes you hope to instill.

The question this raises for the evaluation of your outcomes is: will the program benefit any who attend, or is it more likely to benefit those who select your camp or were selected by you? What the received benefits look like might vary drastically depending on the answer to that question.

7

Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. (1999). *Cognitive Dissonance: Progress on a Pivotal Theory in Social Psychology*. American Psychological Association.