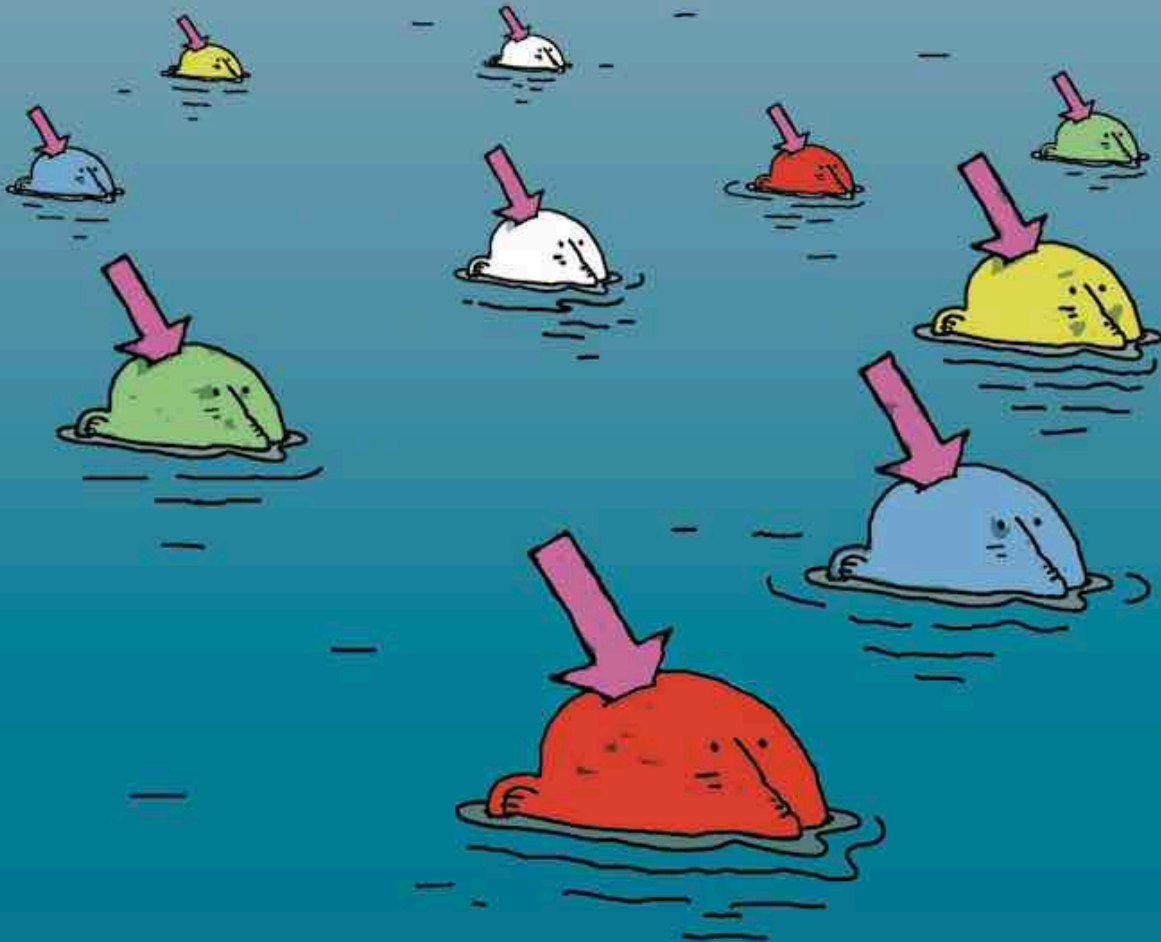


Twynstra

Management Consultants

AT LEAST

TEN ISLANDS OF LEARNING



*At least ten islands of
learning*

In Search of Corporate Learning

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Amersfoort, August 1999

Colophon

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Preface

People learn, all the time and everywhere. Most people seem to agree with this statement. Yet it seems we all have our own images and ideas about what learning actually is. More importantly, we all seem to have our favourite approaches to learning, which we call upon whenever a learning situation arises.

In our consultancy practice we have noticed people often are not aware of their own implicit images and ideas about learning. We have been witness to some very confusing discussions about how to best approach learning in a particular organisation. As an example of this, the potential use of a corporate intranet for learning springs to mind.

In this booklet we attempt to arrive at a common language for talking about learning in organisations. To this end, we introduce the metaphor of mapping the 'archipelago of learning'. We hope this helps people become aware of their own particular approaches to learning.

This booklet has grown out of the discussions during the Twynstra workshop on Corporate Learning, 12 and 13 January 1999. We thank all our colleagues present for their contributions.

Léon de Caluwé
Hans Vermaak
Jos van der Woude

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1 What is Learning?

There are many meanings for the word 'learning'. For sake of clarity, we adhere in this booklet to the following definition¹:

Learning is:

- a consciously guided process
- by which knowledge, skills and/or attitudes
- of people change in such a way
- they are better prepared
- for a study, a trade, a profession, or life itself.

Even with this definition in hand, many different approaches to learning are possible. In fact, in our experience, people often have very different ideas about what learning actually means and consequently about what type of learning is important or relevant.

In order to help clarify the discussion about learning in organisations, in this booklet we describe ten different approaches to learning. For each approach we list the vision, the attractions and pitfalls, typical activities and who does what.

Organisations seldom exhibit one dominant approach to learning. The learning taking place within organisations almost always is a mix of the ten different approaches to learning. In fact, we propose a definition of Corporate Learning, based on this observation.

¹) Thanks to Huub Vinkenburgh who came up with this wonderfully concise and clear definition.

Corporate Learning is:

- a consciously guided process
- within a specific organisation
- consisting of an optimal mix of the ten approaches to learning
- by which knowledge, skills and/or attitudes
- of people change in such a way
- that they are better prepared
- for the challenges facing their organisation.

In order to stress the strategic importance of Corporate Learning the physical or virtual place where corporate learning takes place is often referred to as a (Virtual) Corporate University.

2 *Ten islands of Learning*

2.1 *Knowledge Management island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus is on what is increasingly regarded as the key asset of organisations: knowledge. To increase the return on investment, management attempts to create some form of planning and control on this aspect of the organisation. The consecutive activities often relate to a knowledge value chain and have a continuous and cyclic character. These activities are: determine knowledge needs, create inventory of available and desired knowledge, create and distribute knowledge, apply knowledge and evaluate knowledge.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the Knowledge Management approach lies in the fact that a key aspect of organising gets both the attention it deserves and a systematic approach to manage it. Knowledge is no longer the exclusive domain of professionals, evading the grasp of management.

The pitfall of the Knowledge Management approach lies in overlooking the (often) irrational human factor. People, for a plethora of reasons, may not be willing to share their knowledge in a systematic way with others in the organisation or work together to create new knowledge.

Typical things to do on this island

The activities are tied to the consecutive steps in the cyclic process:

- knowledge needs are determined using a checklist and strategic models and are recorded in a Strategic Knowledge Plan

- an inventory of available knowledge in 'heads' and 'cupboards' is drawn up using data collection methods (explicit knowledge) and questionnaires (tacit knowledge)
- necessary knowledge is developed, distributed, applied and evaluated.

Who does what on this island

It is the primary responsibility of managers to:

- take the initiative
- translate the cyclic process into procedures, to oversee and to facilitate
- involve and motivate the professionals/employees
- assess the outcomes.



2.2 *Data collection island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on the collection of factual information. The assumption is that after having learned all relevant facts, better decisions can be made regarding some relevant issue. The assumption is also that factual data are always lost when not painstakingly recorded, archived and made accessible. This in contrast to e.g. general skills, attitudes, insights, theories, et cetera professionals are much more able to retain or memorise.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the Data Collection approach lies in the objectivity of the method. If the numbers clearly favour a particular choice or decision, who is to argue that? Also databases, once recorded, can at a later time prove invaluable when combined or contrasted with new data. The cumulative effect can be a substantial competitive edge in knowledge not otherwise attained or retained.

The pitfall of the Data Collection approach lies in overlooking the (often) irrational human factor. The human factor will most likely hardly ever be reflected in the numbers. Also the effort involved in building good databases is substantial. For instance, when formats are not rigorously kept and well thought through, the data loses much of its value for later use.



Typical things to do on this island

Instruments used in the Data Collection approach are:

- benchmarking
- databases
- profiling
- comparative studies.

Who does what on this island

In the Data Collection approach learning takes place by collection of data by means of measuring, administering questionnaires, etcetera. The initiative lies with the person interested in the data: this person sets up the formats, arranges budgets, formulates the goals, etcetera. Ongoing collection, archiving and other implementation activities can often be delegated to less senior staff.

2.3 *Research island*

Vision on Learning from this island

Conducting scientific research is the only known rational approach to learn about the as yet unknown. The essence is the discovery or creation of new knowledge. Collecting data usually is part of this approach, in which theorising, formulating and testing a hypothesis all play important roles. Research is an investigative approach to learning.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the Research approach lies in the degree of control it allows. Once something is thoroughly understood in a scientific sense, it can be manipulated, moulded and made to suit the learner's own purposes. A second attraction is the professional feeling of breaking new ground, investigating the unknown. The creation of new insights and concepts can also give the researcher and its organisation status among its peers and clients.

The pitfall of the Research approach is that not all which is 'knowable' is rational and/or scientific knowledge: research can take this into account to some degree (social sciences), but the empirical approach is still very much favoured and most readily acknowledged. A second pitfall is that the attractiveness of breaking new ground can make an organisation forget to give proper attention to updating, dissemination and usage of the existing knowledge. In short: prima donna behaviour can hurt what's good for the organisation.

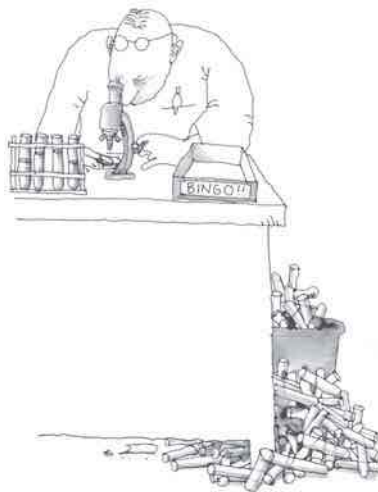
Typical things to do on this island

Instruments used in the Research approach are:

- theorising
- formulating a hypothesis
- data collection
- testing a hypothesis (conducting experiments).

Who does what on this island

In the Research approach learning takes place by means of theorising and testing of new ideas (hypotheses). The initiative lies often with the person interested in the outcome, but the management of an organisation can also decide to formulate a strategic research assignment, allocate budgets and ask specific people to take it on.



2.4 Information and Communication Technology island

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on making all relevant information available by means of Information and Communication Technology (ict). The idea is that people will do better work when they have lots of relevant information, especially in knowledge intensive organisations. The assumption is that users of the technology, 'the learners', will be able and willing to search and retrieve the information supplied and will be able and willing to use the information in their working activities. It is a supply-driven approach.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the ict approach lies in the fact that learners are provided with easy access to huge amounts of information, ready at their fingertips.

The pitfall of the ict approach is that it is left to the learners, to integrate the information into some meaningful perspective. A second pitfall is that the learners can regard the whole systems as a 'not invented by us' approach as the supply is predominantly determined by the (formats supplied by the) ict department.

Typical things to do on this island

Instruments used in the ict approach are:

- intranets
- extranets
- Internet.



Who does what on this island

It is the primary responsibility of managers to take the initiative and provide the necessary funds.

It is the responsibility of ict staff to:

- install, maintain and operate the necessary infrastructure
- guarantee the quality of the information provided
- provide means for users to search information.

It is the responsibility of users, 'the learners', to find the information they need.

2.5 *Learning Communities island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on a self organising learning community in a virtual networked environment. The Learning Community is a complex and dynamic system in which learners interact with other learners in an information rich environment without detailed guidelines and rules at the start. As part of the process, the community often develops its own guidelines, rules and indeed culture over time. The growth and success of the Learning Community hinges on learner generated content and the presence of a stimulating facilitator.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of on-line Learning Communities lies in the fact that a networked environment is ideally suited for a Learning Community to 'live' in, because it provides the following necessary (albeit not sufficient) conditions:

- all learners can easily interact with all other learners
- there are little or no indications of (power, colour, gender, et cetera...) differences among the learners i.e. all learners are 'equal' at the outset
- all interactions are stored and can be analysed and commented on at a later stage by the learners i.e. a 'history' of the Learning Community is available to learners and can be used as a feedback loop
- it brings learners from very different backgrounds, workplaces and geographical locations together in a time and place independent manner.

The pitfall of the Learning Community approach lies in the fact it only works if all learners are motivated, trust each other and have a positive mindset to overcome possible conflict of interests over a substantial period of time. Some learners find the on-line environment itself an additional hurdle to overcome. In this approach, learning is geared to the acquisition of knowledge where one is aware of one's own learning goals and/or incompetences. The pitfall in not realising this, is to disregard the importance of feedback to become aware of incompetences, the importance of developing communicative skills, etcetera.

Typical things to do on this island

Typical activities in the Learning Communities approach are:

- formulating and realising the technical, organisational and planning requirements for the virtual network environment
- discuss and agree on the ground rules and mission of the community
- find out about opinions and views from a wide variety of (cultural) backgrounds
- bring problems, questions, experiences to the table
- contribute own expertise
- create content in collaboration with others.

Who does what on this island

There is no specific role for a manager in the context of a Learning Community other than stimulating the formation of a network by giving it the necessary visionary or financial support. The learners determine their own goal and path to reach this goal.

The facilitator of the community has a very specific role and is responsible for:

- facilitating the process by means of 'feedforward'
- removing blockades
- focus on the chosen mission/subject
- various 'housekeeping' tasks.



2.6 *Individual Learning island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on a self motivated and self-directed Individual Learner. The learner reaches into his own inner depths, examines and analyses in order to gain some valuable 'insight'. The assumption is that learning is essentially an individual process that always takes place, but can be greatly enhanced by increasing learning skills and learning focus. A typical example is the 'reflective practitioner' as put forward by Argyris.



Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the Individual Learning approach lies in the fact that the insights gained in this approach are directly related to the Individual Learning goals and are often also related to the working practices of the individual concerned.

The pitfall of the Individual Learning approach lies in the fact that the insights gained in this approach may not generalise to the world outside the learner: he may not be able to translate insights into action toward others or the environment. For this approach to work the learner also has to be able to formulate learning goals for himself and be able to understand the learning process. If not, learning will not take place very efficiently. Also, where the learner is not aware of his own incompetence, chances are he will not focus his learning on these areas.

Typical things to do on this island

Typical activities in the Individual Learning approach are:

- introspection
- reflection on one's own behaviour
- conversation with one self
- verbalisation of what one is doing.

Who does what on this island

The learner is the only actor in the Individual Learning approach.

2.7 *One-to-one Learning island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on the teacher-participant interaction. The idea is that an optimal learning climate can be created as a result of a social contract between these two. This can vary from a coach who listens well and asks the right questions to a teacher who actively shares his knowledge and insights. The assumption is that the teacher takes full professional responsibility for his coaching as does the learner for his learning and that they are together able enough to determine when this ceases to be the case.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the One-to-one Learning approach lies in the fact that the teacher has only one participant to concentrate on. The process can be optimally tuned to the participant's individual learning needs. The learning

methods can also be fine-tuned both logistically (time, place) and personally (content) to the individual's need. Also the approach allows itself to be used for personal growth issues which are sometimes harder to tackle in other approaches due to e.g. confidentiality.

A pitfall can be dependency of a participant on his teacher, especially when the social contract is open-ended.



Typical things to do on this island

Typical activities in the One-to-one Learning approach are:

- participant and coach/teacher make a social contract regarding, depth, content, length etcetera of the One-to-one Learning
- conversations/discussions between coach/teacher and participant
- homework assignments for the participant
- evaluation meeting.

Who does what on this island

In the One-to-one Learning approach the participant takes the initiative to find a coach/teacher and takes responsibility for learning, the teacher takes responsibility for a professional way of supporting this learning. The teacher holds all relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills to support learning either on the level of content or on the level of the learning process, taking the participant's individual capacity for learning into account.

2.8 *Group Learning island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on the interactions in a group of learners, often supported by a facilitator. This facilitator can however be one of the learners who fulfils this function for a few meetings at the time. The facilitator represents knowledge, attitudes and skills on creating a setting for learning (didactics). He can, but

does not have to, function also as a teacher on specific subjects. The participants learn from the facilitator and from each other.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attractions of the Group Learning approach are:

- efficient use of scarce teaching resources
- participants learn to work in teams
- participants learn social skills as well as content skills.

The pitfall of the Group Learning approach lies in the fact that it is not possible to attend to all participant's individual learning needs. There is a danger, especially in larger groups, that an individual participant 'hides' behind his fellow participants and does not learn optimally. Also the typical setting for group learning is one of safeness, which especially in long standing groups can sometimes impede learning where confrontation becomes desirable.

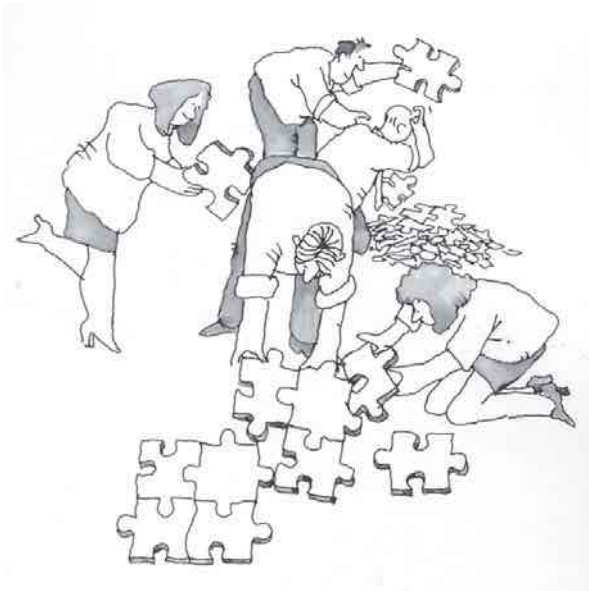
Typical things to do on this island

Typical activities in the Group Learning approach are:

- defining general goals of a group learning programme
- defining target group and levels of competence
- defining didactic principle, work methods, participant composition
- participative programming
- preparation of modules
- implementation of modules
- evaluation of modules.

Who does what on this island

In the Group Learning approach the teacher/facilitator often takes the initiative after being invited to do so by a manager or the group itself. He also arranges facilitation of the learning process of the participants and uses the interactions among participants to accomplish this goal. The participant learns from the teacher and from working with other participants. He also takes responsibility for the programming and adjustments of the programme.



2.9 *Human Resource Management island*

Vision on Learning from this island

In this approach, the focus lies on effective management of the human resources in an organisation. The activities are centred around intake, development and exit of personnel and their talents.

Attractions and Pitfalls of this island

The attraction of the Human Resource Management approach lies in the belief it can help to create a (near) perfect match between the needs of the organisation and the skills, talents and wishes of individual people. It tries to accomplish this goal in a transparent and fair way.

The pitfall of the Human Resource Management approach lies in trying to seduce and persuade people who might really not be inclined to join in. Personnel, especially professionals, can be hard to motivate for learning when directed by organisational needs instead of their own.

Typical things to do on this island

Instruments used in the Human Resource Management approach are:

- formal job description, assessment and remuneration methods
- job rotation schemes, career ladders/paths, outplacement
- 360 degree feedback questionnaires, job coaching, performance talks
- job interviews & exit interviews
- human asset assessment.

Who does what on this island

In the Human Resource Management approach the manager is primary responsible and takes the initiatives, sometimes assisted by the personnel manager.

The manager 'suggests' learning topics based on the needs of the organisation.



2.10 *Treasure island*

An archipelago is not complete without an as yet undiscovered island. This island represents new and/or unknown approaches to learning and might very well contain most exciting learning 'treasures'.



3 *Maps of the Learning Archipelago*

3.1 *Introduction to Learning Maps*

In geography many thematic maps can be produced of the same geographic region, each concentrating on some specific issue. There are climatic, political, economic, and road maps, to name but a few.

We propose the following thematic maps for the learning archipelago:

- Map of Learning Activities
- Map of Colours
- Corporate Learning Maps.

3.2 *Map of Learning Activities*

Learning Activities can be mapped onto the islands of learning. This can be done for Learning Activities in general, as below, or for the Learning Activities used in a specific organisation. If the latter method is used, it functions as an inventory of learning methods of a particular organisation and can be used to determine a possibly dominant 'learning styles' of the organisation. Obviously this is not meant as an exhaustive list of all possible Learning Activities.

Table 1 *Map of learning activities*

Learning activity	KM	DC	Research	ICT	LC	IL	OtO	GL	HRM
(self) assessment						••			•••
Benchmarking		•••							
Clinic								•••	
Coaching							•••		
Competence Management									•••
Gaming								•••	
Intranet				•••					
Introspection						•••			
Job rotation									•••
Knowledge Centre	•••	•							
Learning by doing						•••			
Lecturing								•••	
Multi client Study		••	•••						
Online Community				••	•••				
Personal Commitment Statement						••			•••
Quality Handbook	•								•••
Synergy day								•••	
Workplace analysis		•							
Writing a paper						•••			

Key to Table 1 showing the strength of the association:

- irrelevant
- little
- moderate
- strong

3.3 *Map of Colours*

In 'Thinking about change in five colours' five concepts about change are distinguished². These five concepts are shortly stated here and a relation with the ten islands of learning is suggested.

In 'yellowprint thinking' it is assumed that people will only change if their interests are taken into account or if they can be forcibly changed.

In 'blueprint thinking' it is assumed that things will change if beforehand a clear end result is specified, if all the necessary steps to attain the result are carefully specified and if both the result and the process to reach the result are controlled.

'Redprint thinking' assumes that people or organisations change if correct human resource management tools and procedures are used. People change by 'rewarding': promotion, salaries, bonuses, status or 'punishment': demotion, absence of bonuses or status.

In 'greenprint thinking' the concepts of change and learning are very close to each other. People change if they are motivated to learn, if they are put in effective learning situations and if they learn to learn themselves.

In 'whiteprint thinking' the dominant image is that everything changes by itself. 'Panta Rei'. If there is energy, things or people change. Change happens and one has to look for seeds for renewal or creativity.

'Sense making' is a key word.

²) See de Caluwé, L.I.A., *Thinking about change in five different colours*, forthcoming 1999, for a more detailed description.

These five concepts differ in many aspects. Change agents have favourite approaches and styles, but the same is true for managers or organisations! Words by themselves give no clear insight in the way of thinking of a person. We need to be aware of these five concepts and listen ‘between the lines’ to discover one or more favourite ways to think about change.

If we combine the islands of learning with these five colours, we suggest the following relations.

Table 2. *Relation of learning islands and the dominant colour*

Learning island	Blue	Red	Green	White	Yellow
Knowledge Management	•				
Data Collection	•				
Research	•				
ICT	•				
Learning Community				•	
Individual Learning				•	
One-to-one Learning			•		
Group Learning			•		
HRM		•			

Yellowprint thinking is not fit for learning, because in this approach one ‘keeps one’s cards hidden’ in order to be effective. Of course one can learn from a yellow approach, but the learning itself takes place ‘on’ one of the ten islands, and consequently in one of the other colours. The impact of this is that people who find

themselves constantly in a ‘yellow’ world, will not be able to learn. At least they need to step out of this yellow world occasionally for learning to take place.

3.4 *Corporate Learning Maps*

A Corporate Learning Map (or clm) depicts the particular mix of the approaches to learning used in a particular organisation.

As an illustration of this, the emergent clm of the Twynstra Group is depicted below.

Table 3. Corporate Learning Map for the Twynstra Group

Learning island	Used
Knowledge Management	-
Data Collection	••
Research	••
ICT	•
Learning Community	-
Individual Learning	••
One-to-one Learning	•
Group Learning	•••
HRM	••

Key to Table 3 showing the extent of use of the particular learning approach in the Twynstra Group

- absent
- little
- moderate
- extensive

3.5 *Closing remarks*

This booklet started with the observation that people are often not fully aware of their own images and ideas about learning. The same holds true for many organisations. Strategies for Corporate Learning are mostly implicit. This is partly because of the fact that few of these strategies have been rationally designed from the ground up. In fact, most strategies for Corporate Learning today are *emergent* strategies: specific ways of learning that somehow have become dominant within an organisation because ‘that’s the way we do things here’.

The Corporate Learning map for the Twynstra Group illustrates our emergent strategy. Group learning, hr m and individual learning are ways of learning which are very much part of the history and culture of the Dutch Twynstra Gudde company. Data collection and research were not part of this culture, but became part of the group culture as a result of the alliances and take-overs that shaped the Twynstra Group.

We do not know if our emergent strategy is an ‘optimal mix of the ten approaches of learning’, which is how we defined Corporate Learning in the first chapter. Maybe we should add ict, Knowledge Management, and Learning Communities? On the other hand, maybe a focus on specific approaches is what works best and we should stick with what we have?

Similarly we do not have a success formula - an itinerary for Corporate Learning - for organisations in general. But we do feel a lot is gained by having a road map, an

overview of ten possible approaches. In addition knowing where one is at present, a description of one's emergent strategy, is a crucial first step. We hope both can support our readers to find their own way towards Corporate Learning somewhat easier.

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