



Age + Action

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ENCOURAGING SENIOR CENTERS TO BE LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

Jessica Banslaben & Christine Beatty

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Session Overview

- 1) Senior Centers: Current Challenges
- 2) Watkins & Marsick's Learning Organization Model
- 3) **Study Results:** Characteristics of Senior Centers
- 4) **Audience Interaction:** Brief Assessment Tool
- 5) **Study Results:** Senior Centers as Learning Organizations and Practical Applications

Recommendations for Senior Centers

“If senior centers wish to continue to be effective places, they must be flexible and adapt to the changing natures of communities & the aging population by developing new models and approaches that serve both current and future older adults without unintentionally marginalizing older participants.”

Wacker & Roberto

What is a 'Learning Organization'?

A learning organization is defined as
an organization that:

seeks to continuously learn, improve, and transform itself. It proactively learns in a way that facilitates growth for the individual, team, organization, and the community in which it exists.

Watkins & Marsick LO Model

“characterized by continuous learning for continuous improvement, and by the capacity to transform itself”

Learning

viewed as ongoing process to acquire the skills & knowledge for the organization to effectively perform and survive, especially during environmental changes.

results in changes in knowledge, beliefs, & behaviors at the individual level, while enhancing organizational capacity for innovation and growth.

Watkins & Marsick LO Model

The model served as framework for this study. Core components are people and structures.

DIMENSIONS	LEVELS OF LEARNING
Continuous Learning	Individual
Dialogue & Inquiry	Individual
Team Learning	Group/team
Empowerment	Organizational
Embedded Systems	Organizational
Systems Connection	Organizational
Strategic Leadership	Organizational

Individual Level

1. **Create Continuous Learning Opportunities**
 - Opportunities for ongoing growth are made available.
 - Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job (i.e. learn from errors, mistakes, and challenges on the job).

2. **Promote Inquiry & Dialogue**
 - Organizational culture that supports continual learning, questioning, feedback, and experimentation.
 - An employees individual's ability to present their ideas clearly with relevant observations and to listen actively to others.

Team / Group Level

3. **Team Learning: Encouraging collaboration**

- Collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded
- Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking.
- Groups are expected to learn together and work together.
- An organization that is oriented towards team learning will create natural communities of practice to learn together.

Organizational Level

- 4. Empowerment: Empower people toward a collective vision**
 - People are involved in creating, owning and implementing a shared vision.
 - Responsibility is distributed close to decision making to motivate people to learn that for which they are accountable.
 - Empowerment facilitates ownership of the collective vision for the individual who must implement it.

- 5. Embedded Systems: Establishing systems to capture and share learning**
 - Systems of sharing learning are created, maintained, and integrated into work.
 - Organizational memory & knowledge management
 - Knowledge that is embedded after individual learning has occurred
 - and has been successfully transferred to the system level

Organizational Level

- 6. Systems Connection: Organizations are linked to their environments**
 - Organization is linked to its community.
 - People understand the overall environment and use information to adjust work practices
 - People are helped to see the effect of their work on the entire organization.
 - Linkages with the community (both local and global) need to be understood and considered when developing processes and systems.

- 7. Strategic Leadership: Leaders model and support learning**
 - Leadership uses learning strategically for organizational results.
 - Leaders model, champion, and support learning.

Goals of Research

- The goal was to explore senior centers learning culture and assess the extent to which they are operating with learning organization attributes.
- This research sought to enhance senior center leaders' efforts towards organizational change & to develop an active learning organization.

Study Design & Sample

The study design entailed:

- Non-experimental, cross-sectional survey
- Emailed through web-based data collection platform (Survey Monkey) to collect quantitative data

Represented a **purposive, nonprobability, nonrandom** sample of NCOA database.

- **4,057** contacts in the NCOA database
- **240** responders representing **6%** response rate.

Respondent Characteristics

Majority of respondents were:

- Female (91%)
- Executive Directors (77%)
- Held a bachelors degree or higher (59%)

Years of experience. evenly distributed:

- 47% had 16 + years' experience
- 42% had less than 10 years' experience

Participant Profile

Findings indicated the majority of attendees are:

- Female (76%),
- Caucasian (78%),
- between the ages of 65 - 84 years old (78%)

Characteristics

The majority of the senior center were:

- Located in the south (50%)*
 - 31% from Texas and Louisiana
- Rural (43%)
- Nonprofit (70%)
- Operating with a budget under \$500,000 (65%)
 - most frequently occurring budget was under \$100,000.

*

Programs & Activities

Senior centers offered 8 programs and 13 activities typically.

Most popular programming:

- Meals and Nutrition (76%)
- Health and Wellness (71%)

Most popular activities:

- Recreation (80%)
- Health and Wellness (76%)

Community Partners

The five most common community partners:

1. Police department (47%)
2. Hospital (44%)
3. Fire department (44%)
4. State Department on Aging (42%)
5. Library (42%)

Funding Sources

On average, senior centers relied on five funding sources.

The five most common funding sources:

1. Fundraising (55%)
2. Title III-B (39%)
3. Municipal Support (35%)
4. In-Kind Matching Funds (34%)
5. Title III –C1 (33%)

Daily & Annual Attendance

- Daily attendance median was 61
Range 2 – 1000
- Annual attendance median was 699.
Range 18 – 25,000
- Majority of respondents indicated an increase (53%) or no change (27%) in attendance in the past year.

Descriptive Results

Results echoed previous research on senior center attendees, staffing profile, and facility characteristics.

- Respondents were overwhelmingly female, in a leadership position at a senior center, and held at least a bachelor's degree.
- Study participant reported that most senior center attendees are White, females, between the ages 65 – 84 years old.
- Most popular programs and activities reported were: meals and nutrition, health and wellness, and recreational activities.

Findings confirmed that the demographics & characteristics indicated in previous research from 1975 (40+ YEARS!) continue to hold true.

Learning Organization Findings

Results displayed that a heightened learning organization was found in senior centers with:

- Greater fiscal resources
 - More programs
 - More activities
 - More community partners
 - Larger attendance pools
-
- Through a learning organization lens, those with these traits are more likely to meet the needs of the baby boomer cohort, revitalize programming, to increase attendance, and employ strategies to decrease reliance on public support.

Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire

YOUR TURN!

DLOQ Means

MEANS*	DIMENSION
4.82	Strategic Leadership
4.71	Systems Connections
4.59	Continuous Learning
4.55	Team Learning
4.48	Dialogue & Inquiry
4.46	Empowerment
4.05	Embedded System

***Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree)**

DLOQ Low Scoring Items

M*	Number of Corresponding Question	Dimension
4.19	5. In my organization, whenever people state their view they also ask what others think.	Dialogue & Inquiry
4.16	15. My organization supports employees who take calculated risks.	Empowerment
4.13	16. My organizations encourages people to think from a global perspective.	Systems Connection
4.03	10. My organizations creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance.	Embedded Systems
3.62	12. My organization measures the results of the time and resources spent of training.	Embedded Systems

* Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree

Strengthen These Dimensions

Dialogue & Inquiry

In my organization, whenever people state their view they also ask what others think.

Invite conversations that challenge or question to seek understanding, Provide training in dialogue, skillful discussion, and active listening.

Empowerment

My organization supports employees who take calculated risks.

Beware of extreme risk aversion and an overcautious culture that may lead to conservative behavior and unwillingness to experiment.

Strengthen These Dimensions (2)

Systems Connections

My organization encourages people to think from a global perspective.

Pay attention to potential global effect on their business, global opportunities, or the value of synergies across country offices. Create virtual global teams, align work across global boundaries, create global information resources for all employees, and train in workforce diversity.

Strengthen These Dimensions (3)

Embedded Systems

My organization creates systems to measure gaps between current and expected performance.

Develop system-level measure of desired performance metrics that link to performance and track changes.

My organization measures the results of the time and resources spent of training.

Avoid depending upon perceptions and unsubstantiated data for training decisions. Use of systematic methods for evaluating the effect of training at the individual and organizational levels. The methods used should examine the performance and balanced scorecard effect on the organization.

DLOQ High Scoring Items

M*	*Number of Corresponding Question	Dimension
5.12	17. My organization works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs.	Systems Connection
5.09	2. In my organization, leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with values.	Strategic Leadership
5.07	1. In my organization, people help each other learn.	Continuous Learning
4.88	18. My organization encourages people to get answers from across the organization when solving problems.	Systems Connection
4.88	20. In my organization, leaders continually look for opportunities to learn.	Strategic Leadership

* Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree

Continue These Dimensions

Systems Connections

My organization works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs.

Become involved with local communities; meet with key community leaders, develop joint efforts such as fund-raising, and create joint teams to address organization-related community effects.

My organization encourages people to get answers from across the organization when solving problems.

Eliminate functional silos and barriers to working across organizational boundaries. Improve cross-functional teams, access to information outside one's functional work area, use electronic bulletin boards for organization-wide problem solving, and organization. Create wide opportunities for sharing such as through town hall meetings or teleconferences.

Continue These Dimensions (2)

Strategic Leadership

In my organization, leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with values.

Examine whether actions and values are consistent. Create explicit, stated values or make sure that values drive actions. Hold leaders accountable for modeling the values of the organizations and regularly examine the implications of decisions to ensure consistency.

In my organization, leaders continually look for opportunities to learn.

Provide resources and opportunities for leaders to learn and expect leaders to engage in continual learning. Reinforce the need for continuous learning by setting a minimum amount of time per year for learning, hold leadership retreats, encourage leaders to read and discuss books and ideas relevant to the organizations current situation, make leadership resources available, support leaders' pursuit of further education and reward learning.

Continue These Dimensions (3)

Continuous Learning

In my organization, people help each other learn.

Beware of encouraging individual success at the expense of sharing knowledge. Build systems for learning from one another on the job. Provide recognition and rewards for helping one another learn, reward managers for developing this ability in their staff, ask employees to coach or mentor one another, and reward team and organizational achievement.

Senior Center Leadership

“The first step towards becoming a learning organization seems to be changing leaders’ roles. ...it is also true that people cannot step out and change the way things are done unless they are supported from the top.

Leaders must provide a safe space in which people can take on new behavior and realize that it is expected that they challenge the status quo. The ideal situation is one in which leaders themselves model learning.”

Marsick and Watkins 1999

Resources

- ***Building Excellence, The National Senior Center Self-Assessment Process (includes Standards for Operation)***

[www.ncoa.org/national institute of senior centers/](http://www.ncoa.org/national_institute_of_senior_centers/)

Membership Benefit of NISC (National Institute of Senior Centers)

- ***O'Neil, J. (2003). Participant's Guide for Interpreting Results of the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire.*** *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 5(2), 222–230.

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Contact Information

Christine Beatty
Madison, WI

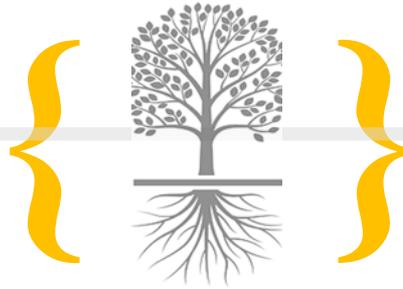
beattyendeavors@gmail.com

608-234-0640

Jessica Banslaben
Phoenix, AZ

jbanslaben@gmail.com

631-338-6582



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