Learning as an Organization

Organizational Readiness Assessment

An effective housing professional recognizes that change is an inherent reality of the work and commits to removing outdated policies, procedures, and practices that prevent students from accessing the support and resources needed for their learning. Housing organizations must be centered as learning organizations that accept the consistency of change, learn from past mistakes, and embrace future considerations.

Centering housing in operational learning is vital because not only does it allow housing and residence life departments to meet current challenges, but it also prepares individual staff and the organization as a whole to meet future challenges as they emerge; potentially even proactively averting them before they occur. To achieve this benchmark, departments must begin their work from a solid foundation, be aware of external factors that can affect their work, find assistance from available resources, and instill a culture of trust, flexibility, and a willingness to accept change. The following definition establishes a goal for housing and residence life departments and begins the process of moving toward it.

Learning as an Organization

A thriving housing and residence life department commits to being a learning organization that creates an exceptional experience for both team members and students. Fundamental to creating a true learning organization is a commitment to individual and collective exploration centered by a clear vision and purpose. The culture of a learning organization fosters growth by creating spaces for ongoing dialogue, offering a variety of opportunities for individuals to learn, and intentionally structuring time to engage in learning activities. Housing and residence life learning organizations hold ongoing feedback as a core principle. Everyone on the team is heard and valued, the team is committed to inclusivity, and it utilizes intercultural contexts to guide and support their work. Actively gathering feedback from all voices in the organization and utilizing feedback loops ensure that learning is not static.

Obstacles are viewed as opportunities and failure is viewed as an additional opening to learn, evolve, and improve. Having a growth mindset is integrated into planning, programming, and supervising. There is intentionality in paying attention to organizational conditions that advance fiscal, facility, and programmatic decisions that align with institutional values and data-informed approaches. Members of HRL learning organizations are curious, dynamic, nimble, and embrace focused and intentional change.

Learning Organization Readiness Assessment

The following assessment questions evaluate where individuals and organizations are regarding intentional learning. The recommendation is to complete this assessment tool in two parts. The first instrument is for a department or unit. This can be an immediate office, a building, a department, or a division. Repeat as needed to broaden the community or environment being assessed. The word "organization" is used broadly in this assessment. The second instrument is for individual members of the organization. There are tips after the assessment on the practical application of the results.

There are six areas included in this assessment:
- Mission, Vision, and Purpose
- Learning and Engagement
- Feedback and Communication
- Inclusivity and Intercultural Understanding
- Growth Mindset/Innovation/Openness to Change
- Supervision

Use the following rating scale for your assessment.
- (1) Strongly Disagree
- (2) Disagree
- (3) Neutral
- (4) Agree
- (5) Strongly Agree
- (N/A) Not Applicable

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Organization – Mission, Vision, and Purpose	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The word 'learning' is explicitly included in the Mission, Vision or Purpose of our organization.						
The Mission, Vision, or Purpose of our organization is centered around learning.						
Our organization has defined what learning means in our work.						
Our organization uses our Mission, Vision and Purpose to guide decision making.						
Our organization's Mission, Vision, and Purpose is an accurate reflection of the work we are doing.						
Everyone in our organization is aware of our Mission, Vision, and Purpose.						
Our organization's Mission, Vision, and Purpose is reflected in a strategic plan (or similar).						
The word 'learning' is explicitly included in the strategic plan.						
The Mission, Vision, or Purpose of our organization is centered around learning within the strategic plan.						
Our strategic plan has been updated within the past 3 years.						

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Future of the Profession

Organization – Learning and Engagement	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Professional development opportunities are offered to our staff.						
Collectively, we discuss professional development as an organization.						
Staff meetings are used as a tool within our organization to learn from other team members.						
Informal opportunities exist (shared meals, information office discussions) to share ideas or discuss learning opportunities.						
It is an expectation that staff members that participate in professional development share what they learned with others.						

Organization – Feedback and Communication	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
There are formal systems in place to provide feedback about the organization.						
There is an indication that feedback is incorporated into the work of our organization.						
There are intentional opportunities to 'debrief' if something critical happens or there are trends/situational factors/environmental changes that directly impact our work.						
There is an organizational culture that encourages all voices be heard and valued.						
There is regular communication about decisions that impact everyone.						

Organization - Inclusivity and Intercultural Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Our organization is intentional in recognizing marginalized voices and ensuring they are heard.						
Our organization prioritizes cultural competence as a part of professional development.						
Our organization prioritizes that all levels of staff have cultural competence.						
Our organization ensures that all are welcome, valued and included regardless of the political climate that surrounds it.						

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Our organization welcomes feedback from external stakeholders about the culture and environment we create.						
Our organization examines physical environment to ensure all are able to be included.						
Our organization is data-driven in how we meet the current needs of students.						
Our organization is data-driven in how we meet the current needs of staff.						
Our organization includes the observation, anecdotes, and general expertise of the staff as an important part of data collection.						
Organization - Innovation	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**N/A**
Our organization regularly evaluates systems and processes to determine what is outdated or needs to change.						
There is *not* a strong mentality of 'we have always done it this way' within our organization.						
The organization has retained a competitive edge.						
Our organization takes advantage of opportunities for change.						
Our organization refers to change as a positive thing.						
Our organization encourages and rewards innovative thinking and planning.						
Our organization is committed to being innovative and forward-thinking.						
Our organization studies demographic data and student characteristics to make decisions about the future.						
Our organization uses lessons learned from COVID reaction planning and uses it to plan for unexpected challenges.						
Our organization is more proactive than reactive in planning.						

Organization - Supervision	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
There are clear expectations for supervisors on how to coach and support staff members.						
Both supervisors and supervisees have the opportunity to provide honest feedback of the process.						
There is both summative and formative evaluation occurring in the evaluation process for staff.						
There is a process to address mistakes quickly that both acknowledges the problem and suggests a process for growth and improvement.						
Those in leadership in my organization model positive behavior.						
Our organization creates learning outcomes and includes them in discussion to evaluate programs, processes, and overall climate.						

INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT

Individual – Mission, Vision, and Purpose	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I have access to the Mission, Vision, or Purpose of our organization.						
I fully understand the Mission, Vision or Purpose of our organization.						
I use our Mission, Vision and Purpose to guide my decision making.						
Our organization's Mission, Vision, and Purpose is an accurate reflection of the work I am doing.						
I center my work around learning.						
I have access to our organization's strategic plan.						
I fully understand our organization's strategic plan.						
I am clear on my personal Mission, Vision or Purpose.						
I have a clear definition of learning.						
My personal values align with those of my organization.						

Individual – Curiosity and Being Learning Centered	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I take advantage of professional development opportunities.						
I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings or similar environments.						
I seek out informal opportunities to learn from other members of the organization.						
I am open to new ways of thinking based on learning new information.						
I share new things I learn with others.						
I help people learn without judgement.						
My environment supports me being a learner.						
I am able to objectively recognize what I do not know and can develop a plan to learn or gain knowledge.						

Individual - Inclusivity and Intercultural Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I recognize marginalized voices and ensure they are heard.						
I prioritize cultural competence as a part of professional development.						
I ensure that all are welcome, valued and included regardless of their background or point of view.						
If I don't know something about a culture, identity or background, I seek information and ask questions to learn more.						
I understand the differences between diversity, equity and inclusion.						

Individual – Growth Mindset	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I regularly evaluate systems and processes to determine what is outdated or needs to change.						
I take advantage of opportunities for change.						
I view change as a positive thing.						
I am committed to being innovative and forward-thinking.						
I am comfortable navigating unexpected change.						
I am more proactive than reactive in planning.						

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I am able to learn when things do not go as planned.						
I view failure as an opportunity for growth						
Individual - Supervision	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**N/A**
I recognize how I learned to be a supervisor.						
I know how to coach and support staff members.						
I provide those I supervise with the opportunity to provide honest feedback of the process.						
I allow people to make mistakes.						
I model positive behavior.						
I am confident in my ability to supervise someone with different identities than me.						
I create an environment for learning among my team.						

Post Assessment

What next? If you marked mostly agree or strongly agree, congratulations! There is demonstrated behavior that you are a contributor to and a member of a learning organization. If you marked mostly disagree or strongly disagree, here are a few things you can do to add the elements of a learning organization as an individual or a team.

As a leader of a team:
- Purchase *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge for your staff for a book study.
  - o If that is not feasible or you don't have the funds to do so, there are articles about Senge's work, including Building a Learning Organization in Harvard Business Review (July-August 1993).
  - o If you are looking for something shorter (or if you want more supplemental information), the following videos are on YouTube:
    - Peter Senge Introduction to Organizational Learning link
    - How do you define a learning organization? By Peter Senge link
    - The (Emerging) Science of Learning Organizations – TEDx Talk – By Benjamin Riley link
- Examine the opportunities you have when you interact with your staff. This can include regular meetings, retreats, 1-on-1 meetings or even informal conversations.
  - o Either throughout the meeting (if appropriate) or at the end, ask team members to reflect and then share what they learned that week and how that learning may have changed them as a person or as a professional.
- Change your scenery.
  - o Student affairs professions are working in an environment where learning is expected and encouraged. Ask if you can reserve a classroom for a staff meeting and picture

yourselves as learners. If your library has the space, host a small group discussion or 1-1 meetings with staff. Send members to find different books or resources in the library as a way to discuss how everyone can learn new things.

As an individual:

- Develop a professional growth plan.
  - Identify someone you admire professionally and identify what skills or knowledge they have that you would like to learn more about and incorporate into your skill set.
- Develop a professional development plan.
  - What type of position would you like to have in 3-, 5-, and 10-years? Is there concrete knowledge or skills that would better position you to make that a reality?
- Search ACUHO-I and other professional associations for low or no cost learning opportunities.
  - As you participate, take notes on what you learn and how you can use that knowledge to become a more effective professional.
- Visit the library!
  - Higher education professionals have access to free books, journals and other resources that are the envy of the world. Take advantage and check out books on learning, leadership, or anything else that piques your interest.
- Attend lectures and educational or cultural programs on your campus.
  - These are usually at no cost or are available at a discount and available several days a week. If your division of student affairs (or even your school of business or educational leadership) offers a student leadership program, they likely host speakers on skills that may be valuable.
- Find out the educational benefits your college or university offers.
  - You may be able to audit courses, attain a certificate or even get another degree at little or no cost.