

This is Joe. He's sad, disappointed and frustrated. He's done all the right things – great education, solid employee, thoughtful and diligent – yet the company he worked for didn't succeed. Reflecting upon his path to this point, he knows that he wants more... he's seeking a more fulfilling job, where his contributions will make a difference. He wants to take this opportunity to find a great place to work.

He conducts research; visiting the library, talking to his network – friends, past-colleagues and mentors. Using his meeting notes, he builds a word cloud and finds interesting words bubble up: feedback, systems thinking, learning organizations, collaboration, agile, lean, generative learning, experiments, curiosity, silos, hierarchies, sensors, and questioning. The most prominent term is “learning organizations” and a quick search reveals a definition from Peter Senge: “...the basic meaning of a ‘learning organization’ – an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future” (Senge, ,p.14). Joe recognizes the name as he had also received recommendations to read books including the Fifth Discipline by Peter Senge and one called Reinventing Organizations by Frederick Laloux.

He reads the books and starts a daily routine of researching and thinking about learning organizations and where he wants to work. Over the course of a few weeks, his dedicated regiment leads him to five potential opportunities and some evaluation ideas.

To evaluate the companies, he reads reviews of the company from past and current employees, and interviews from the company's leadership. He's looking for a company that places in the “green” or ideally the “teal” level of consciousness as described by Laloux.

At the first company, he finds that:

- The company is driven by their leader. He's the boss and what he says goes. The organization appears to be driven by the power of the boss and overall it appears to be very authoritarian.
- There have been challenges to the company and they do seem reactive, but he hasn't been able to discern any changes to how they operate.

These characteristics don't appeal to him. He thinks that their level of consciousness is “red” and that this is a “zero learning” organization. They might succeed (against all odds), but he knows that this isn't the place for him.

At the second company, and he finds that they:

- Have a “right-way” of doing things.
- Focus on efficiency, driving down costs, and higher levels of production via specialization and standardization.
- Quite a few of the employees have stated that the leadership is controlling and not very trusting

- There is some learning, but it only occurs when there is a gap between what is expected and what is observed. The organization is willing to adjust the standards, but no one questions the underlying assumptions of the standard.

Again, this doesn't seem like the right fit. He flags their level of consciousness as "amber" and that this is a "single-loop learning" organization.

The third company has some more promising characteristics:

- The employees and the organization realize that there are multiple ways of doing things. Some work better than others.
- There's more focus on effectiveness rather than just efficiency.
- People talk about being able to question the way that things are done, discuss innovation, change and being recognized for achievements.
- However, there is a big focus on goals, objectives and "winning."

Joe sees this as an "orange" organization and that they have "double-loop learning." This is promising, but he worries that the narrow focus on goals and achievements are not a good fit. He suspects that such a focus may prevent experiments and worries that "failure" would be seen negatively.

Joe's started to feel like he's the living embodiment of the "Princess and the Pea!" However, the fourth company, gives him hope that he's getting close.

- Everyone talks about the culture of the organization. They share that there is more to life than just success or failure and the need for having a sense of community. In addition, people discuss cooperation, feelings, learning and even consensus.
- The leaders talk about the importance of bottom-up processes, empowerment and even decentralization.

There's not only "single-loop" and "double-loop" learning, but also a focus on reflection and learning to learn. He's sure that this is a "green" organization and is an example of the type of organization he'd consider.

He carries forward, evaluating one last company. He finds that:

- Everyone talks about making the "right" decisions and being true to themselves.
- He reads about being "authentic" and personal mastery.
- The organization has a YouTube video that describes how they don't really have a formal structure, they're flexible, adaptive and organize and re-organize as needed. They discuss the trust in the organization, the willingness and high value that is placed on experimentation and learning. In addition, there is a focus on transparency and sharing.

He excitedly recognizes that this is a "teal" organization, a full learning organization and sees that they have "triple-loop learning." Joe applies and gets hired!

A year later, he looks back fondly on his experience. He's never felt so engaged and fulfilled in a job before. He's learning something new every day – and the approaches to learning are like nothing he's experienced before. The world is his classroom and laboratory – he learns from his experiments and interactions with colleagues, partners and customers. There is a dynamic network of learning that he is able to contribute to and leverage. Each day, he finds that people share discoveries and ideas via blogging, micro-lessons, lunch and learns, YouTube, instant messaging and a healthy dose of mentoring and pairing.

....and he lived happily ever after!

References

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