



Learning culture and sharing of knowledge

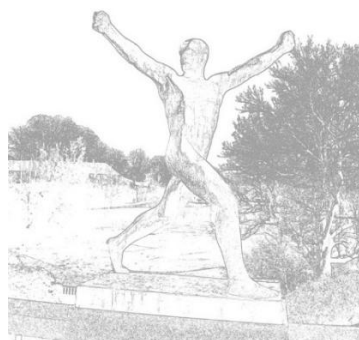
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Abstract

Culture is everything that structures our behaviour and a key for capacity building in statistical organisations. Culture is often defined as ideas, customs, and social behaviour. Technological development has made training more available than it used to be, and the key restricting factor in enhancing capacity today is our motivation to learn and exchange knowledge among ourselves.

This paper will draw attention to four areas key to enhance a learning culture. The first is the *environment*, both the social environment; the interaction among us, our fears, and what drives our intrinsic motivation. And the physical environment; that training is available and that it is possible for staff to engage in it. Second, *managers are important*. If top management give their support to something, it increases the chance it will actually happen. Immediate supervisors must find out what skills are needed, in cooperation with staff members. Third, time is essential for the learning process. If staff are overwhelmed in other work, there will be no time for training.

Fourth, learning should always be *guided by the needs on the ground*. The decision on what training to initiate should depend on the needs of the individual staff member or team doing the job. When staff members are encouraged to reflect on their own strengths, how they can best contribute and what skills they need to do so, they envision having interesting tasks, autonomy and a future career.



Living by "den nordiska andan"

This can be achieved by giving staff responsibility for own careers, learning, well-being and motivation, and to enhance their commitment to colleagues and managers. As Nordics we all live by «den nordiska andan», and have similar potential for building a learning culture.

Keywords: Learning culture, sharing knowledge, capacity development



1. Introduction

Statistical organisations face rapid changes. Methodological development, growing data availability and increasing expectations from society make it necessary to update skills continuously. At the same time, learning has become more easily available than before, making it possible to acquire skills outside the formal classroom setting. We learn from online tools, shared experiences, discussions with colleagues and, first and foremost, from doing the job. Organisational capacity depends not only on formal training but on continuous learning embedded in everyday work. Research on organisational learning emphasises that sustainable competence development requires shared norms and practices that support reflection, feedback and experimentation (Argyris and Schön, 1978; OECD, 2017; Roll-Hansen and Rustenbach, 2021). A learning culture thus becomes a strategic asset for national statistical offices.

This question is particularly relevant in a Nordic context. The Nordic countries have long emphasised democratic participation, broad education and responsible citizenship, creating favourable conditions for trust-based learning cultures. However, education and professional competence do not automatically lead to knowledge sharing. In statistical organisations, knowledge is often specialised and embedded in production processes, methodological choices, quality routines and experience with data sources. The challenge is therefore not only to educate competent individuals, but to transform individual expertise into shared organisational capacity.

This challenge becomes more visible with the introduction of new technologies in statistical production. New technology may support faster development, more efficient production and easier access to knowledge, but it may also increase differences between staff members if only some are able to use the tools effectively. For statistical offices, the key issue is how new technology can be combined with methodological knowledge, production experience and shared responsibility for quality and comparability over time. The article therefore draws on theories of organisational learning, psychological safety and knowledge creation to discuss how statistical organisations can strengthen learning cultures in practice (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Edmondson, 2018; Illeris, 2018).



2. What Is a Learning Culture?

Culture is commonly understood as ideas, customs and social behaviour that guide how members of an organisation think and act. In a learning culture, learning is institutionalised and internalised: employees are intrinsically motivated to acquire and share knowledge. Illeris (2018) stresses that learning is both cognitive and social, shaped by organisational structures and interpersonal relations. From a knowledge-management perspective, learning culture also implies moving from seeing knowledge as individual power towards recognising it as a shared and expandable organisational resource (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

3. Key Areas for Strengthening Learning Culture

3.1 Environment Supporting Learning

The environment for learning comprises both social and physical dimensions. Psychological safety is a foundational social condition for learning. When employees feel safe to ask questions, express uncertainty and share mistakes, collective learning is enabled (Edmondson, 2018). Conversely, environments characterised by fear or strong competition tend to suppress knowledge sharing and experimentation. Leaders should actively counter a 'knowledge is power' logic by recognising sharing, rewarding collaboration and making it safe to ask for help.



A psychologically safe social environment can foster learning

The organisational environment must also make learning feasible in practical terms. Access to relevant training opportunities, including in-house courses, communities of practice and e-learning, is essential.



3.2 Managerial Commitment and Support

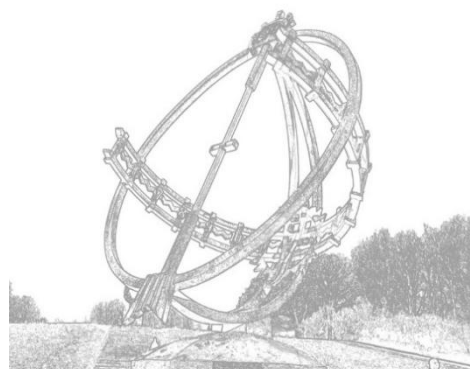
Managers play a decisive role in shaping learning culture. Support from top management signals that learning is legitimate and valued, thereby influencing priorities throughout the organisation. Research shows that managerial endorsement significantly increases participation in training and development activities (OECD, 2017).

Immediate supervisors are particularly important in translating strategic ambitions into practice. By engaging in dialogue with staff about competence needs, allocating time for learning and granting autonomy, managers help foster intrinsic motivation (Illeris, 2018). Such practices align closely with Nordic management traditions emphasising trust and responsibility.

A practical way to make this systematic is to use development talks and competence dialogues as a yearly planning tool: agree on tasks, define learning objectives, decide how competence will be built (on the job, with others or through courses), and clarify who is responsible for follow-up. Written agreements make learning expectations concrete and support continuity across busy periods (Noe et al., 2023).

3.3 Time for Training

Time is a critical resource that turns intention into learning. When workloads and deadlines crowd out reflection, even motivated staff will postpone training and knowledge sharing. Protecting time for learning, both formal and informal, should therefore be an explicit managerial responsibility and part of unit planning.



Time is essential for training

Without time and space for reflection and development, even highly motivated employees will struggle to engage in learning activities (OECD, 2017).



Most competence development happens in daily work through problem solving, collaboration and feedback, complemented by interaction with colleagues and targeted courses (Illeris, 2018). Practical measures include scheduling training in quieter parts of the production cycle, using in-house courses, establishing communities of practice, and ensuring that new skills can be applied soon after training to strengthen transfer to work (Noe et al., 2023). Making time visible, for example through agreed learning hours in the calendar, signals that learning is not an optional activity, but a normal part of producing high-quality statistics.

3.4 Learning Processes on the Ground

Learning initiatives should be grounded in the realities of daily work. Competence needs are best identified where production takes place, through joint discussions between teams and immediate supervisors. This reflects principles of strategic competence development, where organisational goals and individual development are aligned (OECD, 2017).

Empirical studies consistently show that most learning occurs informally. Learning on the job and through interaction with colleagues represents a substantial share of competence development, while formal training plays a complementary role (Illeris, 2018). Recognising and supporting the informal learning processes is therefore crucial when building a learning culture.

Learning also depends on simple organisational supports: shared documentation, standard operating procedures and 'knowledge banks' (intranet pages, handbooks, templates and code repositories) that make good practice easy to find and reuse. Regular arenas for sharing, like short team debriefs, methods sessions and communities of practice, help turn individual experience into collective competence and reduce vulnerability when staff change roles (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Noe et al., 2023).

3.5 Motivation

Motivation is increasingly the main limiting factor for capacity development: training resources are more available than before, but learning and knowledge sharing depend on staff wanting to invest effort. Research on human resource development indicates that intrinsic motivation—driven by autonomy, competence,



relatedness and self-esteem—tends to sustain performance better than economic incentives (DeVoe and Iyengar, 2004; Sheldon et al., 2001). For statistical organisations this means designing work that feels meaningful and professionally rewarding, with opportunities to master methods and tools and to influence how tasks are solved.

Managers strengthen motivation when they combine demanding goals with enabling conditions: interesting tasks, competence development and recognition for work well done, alongside fair and transparent rewards (Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999; Combs et al., 2006; Verburg et al., 2007; Kuvaas, 2008). Development talks and competence dialogues help align organisational needs with individual aspirations and identify what support and training are needed. Incentives should nevertheless be designed carefully: when allowances or other external rewards dominate, staff may focus on what pays rather than what strengthens quality and institutional resilience (Noe et al., 2023).

3.6 Individual Development and Self-Management

A sustainable learning culture depends on active employee participation. When staff are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, career development and well-being, motivation and engagement increase. Argyris and Schön (1978) highlight reflection on one's own practices as a key mechanism for deeper, double-loop learning.



The joy of learning

Self-management also benefits organisations by reducing dependency on close supervision. Mutual commitment between colleagues and managers strengthens trust and facilitates knowledge sharing, which is particularly important in expert-driven organisations such as statistical offices (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).



4. Nordic Perspectives - Learning culture and den nordiska andan

Statistical offices need learning cultures because knowledge is specialised, production-based and increasingly affected by new technologies such as new data platforms, cloud-based solutions and artificial intelligence (AI). Developing a learning culture is a collective and long-term process. Nordic working life traditions, in this context referred to as *den nordiska andan*, are characterised by relatively flat hierarchies, high trust and strong cooperation between management and unions. These features create favourable conditions for psychological safety, autonomy and shared responsibility, all of which are central to learning cultures (Edmondson, 2018; OECD, 2017).

The Nordic tradition of trust, participation and broad education provides favourable conditions for learning cultures, but it does not automatically lead to knowledge sharing. Following Argyris and Schön (1978), organisational learning requires that individual insights are translated into shared routines, reflection and changes in practice. This is particularly important in statistical organisations, where knowledge is often embedded in production processes, methodological choices and quality routines. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge is useful here: much statistical competence is tacit and built through experience with data sources, production systems and quality assessments. A learning culture must therefore support practices that make such knowledge shareable through documentation, mentoring, communities of practice and joint problem solving.

AI may challenge a learning culture, as it supports faster development, more efficient production and easier access to knowledge, but if only some are able to use the new tools effectively, it may divide staff. If staff cannot ask questions, admit uncertainty and experiment without losing status, it can restrict their psychological safety (Edmondson's, 2018). Further, AI cannot replace professional judgement, knowledge of methods or understanding of production processes. Rather, quality statistics depend on combining technology with experience, subject-matter knowledge and shared responsibility for comparability over time. This makes knowledge sharing even more important: staff are not only users of tools, but custodians of institutional knowledge and jointly responsible for the statistical product.



5. Conclusion

As artificial intelligence and new technologies become more integrated in statistical production, the ability to combine tools, methods, experience and shared responsibility will become an even more central feature of learning cultures in statistical organisations.

Learning culture is a critical enabler of capacity development and organisational resilience. By focusing on supportive environments, managerial commitment, time for learning and relevance to operational needs, statistical organisations can move beyond ad-hoc training towards sustainable systems for learning and knowledge sharing. Empowering individuals while providing structural support creates a virtuous circle of motivation, competence and collaboration.

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