Who did it?

This is one of the most perverse questions one can ask in any process aimed at learning and innovation because it triggers a cycle of blame.

The purpose of looking for a guilty person is punishment. Although this action may satisfy the need of a supervisor to demonstrate authority, in reality, the consequence of this action will be an unproductive solution and the lack of incentive to any initiative of innovation.

The cycle of blame
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An error is the trigger which begins the cycle of blame. The supervisor looks for someone to blame. The person who was in error feels afraid of punishment. More errors continue to occur because the problem remains unsolved. As the employees know what will happen, the first reaction when they realize they made an error is to hide it. At this point, the whole process is undermined, creating conditions for new errors to occur. There is a missed opportunity for learning from mistakes. As this *"who did it"* environment is consolidated, employees will demonstrate less initiative and will be less willing to take risks to do something different. At this point, the environment will never again generate innovation, as fear is the worst enemy for the kind of learning that generates innovation.

Learning environment

The search for continuous learning has been a constant for people who are more interested in changing the world than describing it. Learning means to increase the capacity to generate desired outcomes.

In the traditional definition, learning means acquiring a detailed description of the world and then applying it. Traditional knowledge does not stimulate innovation and creativity. On the other hand, we live in a world in which answers cannot be indefinitely replicated, as the unusual problems and dilemmas we face are constantly changing.

Competitive advantage

According to many authors and corporate consultants, creating a work environment capable of attracting, developing and retaining talent is the only way to generate a competitive advantage.

Of course, the professional environment is determined by management's actions. The faster an organization generates and maintains a learning culture, the higher its chances for success.

Steps to generate a learning environment

1. When an error is detected, instead of asking who did it, explore what happened and the conditions which allowed the error to occur. Is there a foreseeable pattern, and therefore is it possible to prevent?
    An employee new to the job, or new to a particular task, most probably will face difficulties which will lead to errors. In these situations, it's important to develop a constructive environment to find the root cause of the problem as it happens, by stimulating this employee to foresee problems and avoid new errors. This empowered employee will feel comfortable approaching his supervisor to discuss further development needs. In other words, a partnership built on trust.

2. As we understand what caused the error, we then need to share the precautions and

actions that are needed to prevent such errors in the future. At the completion of a project, it's fundamental to analyze what went well (so as to consolidate the learning points) and what didn't (so as to leverage the experience that the adversities have brought to the team).

3. Constantly reflect about the state of the art for your business. Reflecting upon it takes us to establishing an objective, breaking paradigms, and change. Current business environment requires new solutions, a new mindset, and new answers. Be proactive. Don't wait for market demands. Don't wait for competition to move ahead. Don't be run over by new technologies or disruptions in the market. Learning is not only about replicating effective answers. It's about finding new ways.

4. Celebrate achievements, stimulate new ideas and encourage employees to move out of their comfort zone. When self esteem is strengthened, there is a higher willingness to assume risks to innovate, to bring solutions and to increase expertise.

In short, instead of asking "Who did it?"ask "What have we learned from this mistake?"

MAPA Consulting can help you and your team to develop these competencies.

See you next time. As always, we welcome your feedback.