

74. Learning as a Shared Responsibility: Insights from a Series of Dialogic Workshops with Practitioners, Leaders and Researchers

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For some time now, the wildland fire community has been interested in 'organizational learning' as a way to improve safety and overall performance. For instance, in the US, federal agencies have established and continue to support the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center, sponsored several national conferences and are currently considering how incident reviews might be used to further organizational learning. To assist in this effort, we embarked on a Joint Fire Science Program-sponsored research project, to understand what organizational learning - even simply 'learning' - looks like currently, and to explore what facilitates or impedes learning. Results will serve as a benchmark upon which strengths, opportunities and challenges may be assessed and addressed.

In this presentation, we summarize results of a series of workshops with the US interagency fire community, concerning existing and potential learning in the context of escaped prescribed fire reviews. In 2011, we held 5, 2-day workshops at various locations around the US. Each drew an interagency audience with representation from all facets of fire management, from ground personnel to local line officers, regional and national positions. Over the course of these 10 days of discussion, we developed a rich dataset and conceptual models to describe the existing and potential learning cycle in wildland fire. This pragmatic approach, based on the interaction of theory and practice, leads to some clear, concrete suggestions for improving individual, group and organizational learning. The results have implications for both organizational structure and culture. For example, the widespread support for consideration of all outcomes, not just when something goes wrong, could manifest itself in new interagency guidance that can take advantage of current 'best practices'. However, improving learning has as much to do with how a review is conducted (leader's intent, review team's approach and tone, local atmosphere of trust) as it does with the type of review. Organizational level learning also depends upon effective transfer of lessons across time and between units. We present these findings through the lens of a comprehensive model of learning and performance.

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