

## Chapter 3: Studying work and organizations

### OB in focus

#### *Developing organizational learning in the National Health Service*

Learning has been identified as a central concern for a modernized National Health Service (NHS). Continuing professional development has an important role to play in improving learning, but there is also a need to pay more attention to collective (organizational) learning. Such learning is concerned with the way organizations build and organize knowledge.

The recent emphasis within the NHS has been on the codification of individual and collective knowledge – for example, in guidelines and National Service Frameworks. This needs to be balanced by more personalized knowledge management strategies, especially when dealing with innovative services that rely on tacit knowledge to solve problems. Having robust systems for storing and communicating knowledge is only one part of the challenge. It is also important to consider how such knowledge gets used, and how routines become established in organizations to structure the way in which knowledge is deployed.

In many organizations, these routines favour the adaptive use of knowledge, which helps organizations to achieve incremental improvements in existing practice. However, the development of organizational learning in the NHS needs to move beyond adaptive (single-loop) learning, to foster skills in generative (double-loop) learning and meta-learning. Such learning leads to a redefinition of the organization's goals, norms, policies, procedures or even structures. However, moving the NHS in this direction will require attention to the cultural values and structural mechanisms that facilitate organizational learning.

**Source:** Sandra M. Nutley and Huw T. O. Davies (2001) 'Developing organizational learning in the NHS', *Medical Education*, 35 (1): p. 35 (ref. 45, p. 35).

