



Creating a Learning Culture of Innovation and Performance

Dr. Debra France, Talent Strategist for Innovation
W. L. Gore & Associates

*It is not necessary to change Survival is not mandatory. ...
Learning is not compulsory ... neither is survival.*

W. Edwards Deming



A low-
hierarchy
Lattice
Organization

Known for
Sustained
Innovation



**FAST COMPANY'S
BEST WORKPLACES FOR
INNOVATORS
2021 HONOREE**



Today we will:

- Learn how Gore has refined learning through experience over 60 years
- Review learning models and practices that *you* can apply to increase both learning and innovation in your organization
- Explore a case study of experiential learning for developing some of the most difficult to develop executive skills



An enterprise designed for innovation

- Relatively flat, “lattice” organization to promote communications and idea sharing
 - Privately held with Associate stock drives a sense of ownership
 - Creating life-changing products energizes with a sense of purpose
 - Natural leadership and self-commitment generate an experience of autonomy
 - The focus on innovation drives continuous learning and discovery
-



Innovation = Learning

Gore is a team-based innovation company

- Innovating requires continuous experimentation and pivoting
 - Gore innovation practices require iterative reviews and constant engagement with experts and stakeholders
 - Team members are supported in learning by each other, their leaders, and sponsors
 - “Freedom Principle: We believe in each other, and we will allow, help, and empower our fellow Associates to grow in knowledge, skill and scope of responsibility.”
-



Models and practices
that drive learning
through our work



— Marsick and Watkins, 1990

Forms of organizational learning

- **Formal** – Classroom based and highly structured
 - **Informal** – Control of the learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner
 - **Incidental** – A byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning
-
- How can you create conditions for informal learning?
 - How can you increase the likelihood of incidental learning?



W. Edwards Deming

“We don’t learn from experience ...”

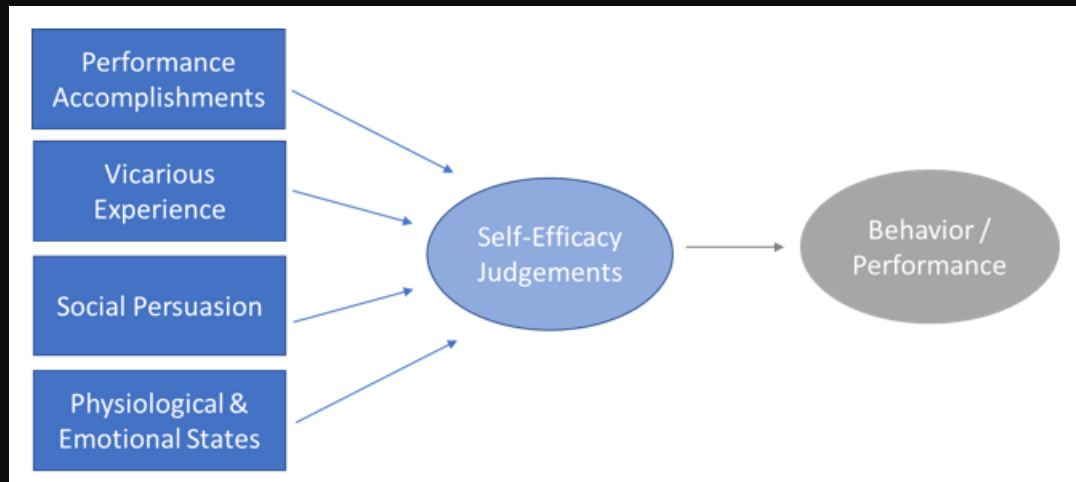
“We don’t learn from experience; we learn from experience plus theory.”

- How can you stimulate more reflection in your organization?
- Who could help provide “theory” to help your people convert experience into learning?



Not just learning – self-efficacy!

- Competence and confidence
- “I know I know!”



- How can you provide attractive role models?
- How can you provide partial or parallel experiences?

— Parker and Fisher, 2022

Creating learning-rich work experiences

Five aspects of work design to increase learning through experience:

- Job autonomy or job control
- Feedback about effectiveness of work behaviors
- Job complexity – mental demands requiring aptitude, skill, training, thought, creativity and judgement
- Relational aspects of work – social contact, social support, task interdependence, interaction with people outside the organization relevant to the job
- Psychosocial job demands, including workload and emotional demands, social and organizational elements that require effort and physiological and psychological ‘costs’





A Case Study of Learning through Work: Creating a Custom Futures Forecast to Influence Enterprise Strategy

A Case Study in learning through work: Developing Futures Skills

Objective: Develop a custom Futures forecast and develop the next generation of enterprise leaders

- Partnership with the Institute for the Future
- Three team leaders – with three coaches
- Highly ambiguous organizational research
- Connecting IFTF findings with Gore issues and opportunities
- Teaching *their* leaders and teams about Futures
- Creating and presenting recommendations to the Gore leadership team: “If I were CEO”
- “Let them create the strategy they will inherit”



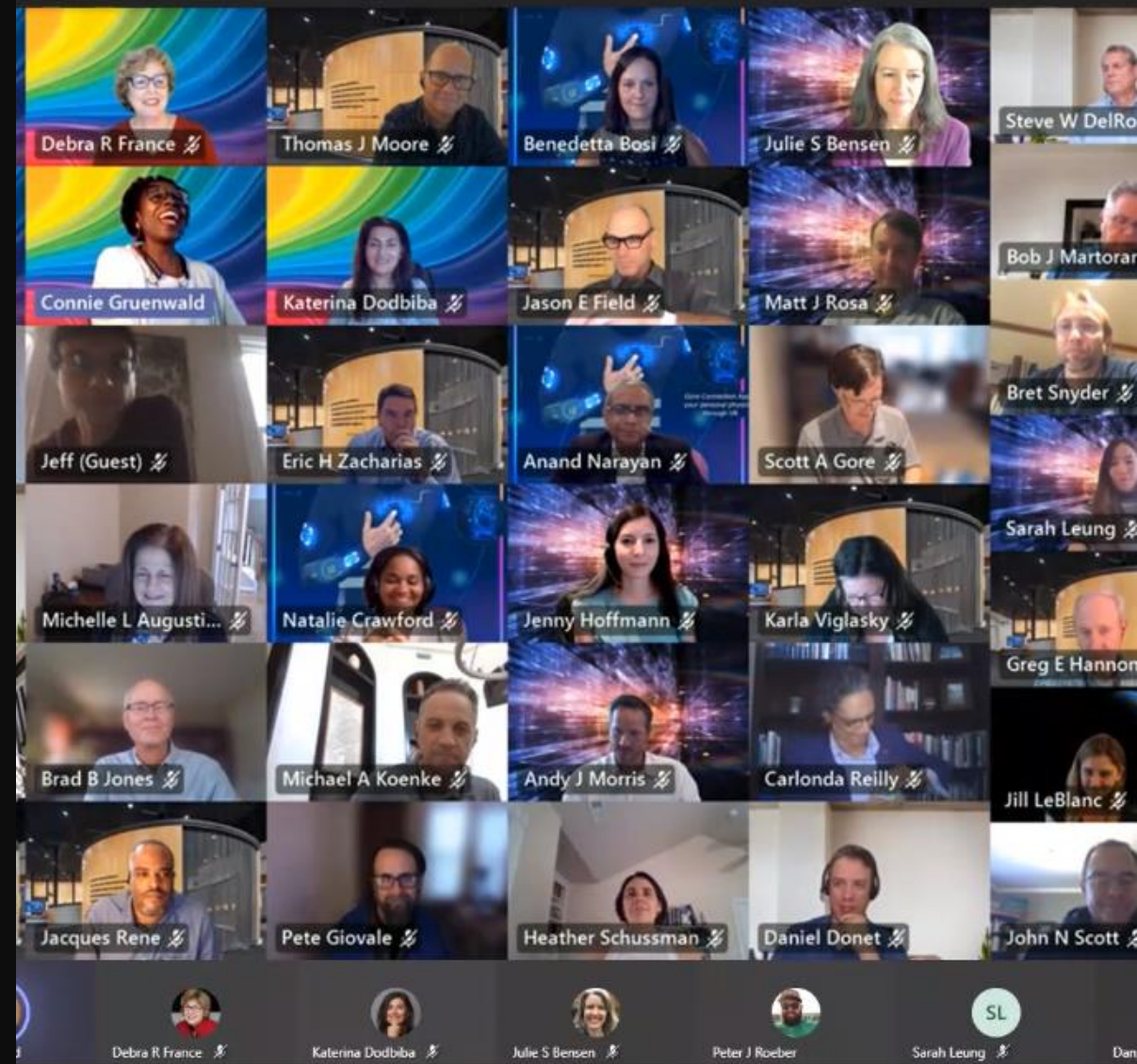
Roles that the 2014 team members have grown into

- Fabrics Division Leader
- Chief Technology Officer – Leading R&D and Innovation
- Division Business Execution Leader
- Division Sales and Marketing Leaders
- Division Operations Leaders
- Division HR Leader
- Leaders of largest and most complex businesses
- IT Transformation Leader
- Regional Leaders – Europe and Asia
- CEO and Board Chairman



2020 Revising the Gore Futures Forecast

- Objectives: Work with the Institute for the Future to revise Gore's custom Futures forecast and bring outside-in intelligence to the Board and Executive Team for their strategy session
- Create an Intensive Leadership Development Experience
- Greater diversity: Cross-functional, cross-divisional, cross-regional team – earlier career
- Two team leaders with two designer/coaches
- Joined by a 70-person global “Futures Network” to weave new relationships during the pandemic
- Team members taught futures skills to the Gore executive team and Board of Directors
- Curated and presented recommendations to the Board based on their research



Building executive skills in candidates before they are in executive roles

Teams presented their Recommendations to the Board and Enterprise Leadership Team driving several capabilities required for their next roles:

- Strategic Thinking
 - Systems Thinking
 - Critical Thinking
 - Managing Ambiguity
 - Leading through Complexity
 - Leveraging Diversity
 - Leading through Vision and Purpose
-




Unexpected benefit of learning futures skills:
Increased Optimism



Designing Learning through Experience

- Choose work that is meaningful, visible and important
- Optimize the informal and incidental learning potential
- Facilitate relationship building to support *learning together now and leading together later*
- Ensure the work is challenging – a real stretch – and provide just enough support through coaching
- Design a final convincing performance



Creating a Learning Culture of Innovation and Performance

Dr. Debra France, Talent Strategist for Innovation
W. L. Gore & Associates

dfrance@wlgore.com

Photographs from W. L. Gore & Associates and iStock