

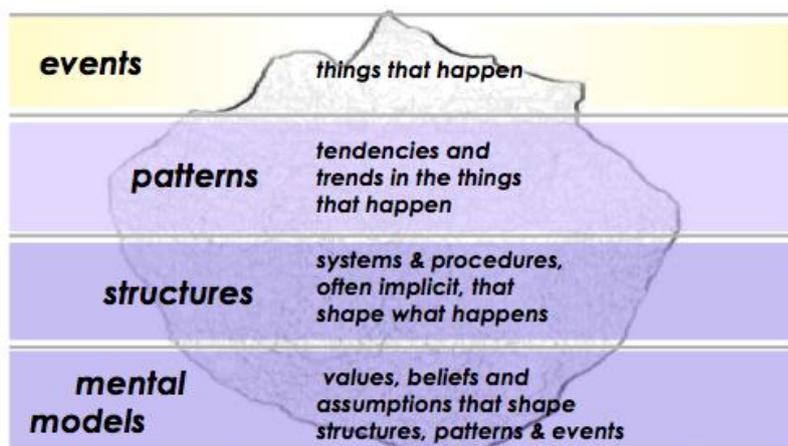


## Resource sheet 2: *Learning Together*

Some starters on how we learn and how to create a helpful environment for learning in a group

### Starters

1. We learn by adding to what we already know. As adults, all of us bring a wealth of experiences, ideas, skills and learning from the whole of our lives, into a new learning situation. This means that when we learn in a group, it is essential for people to be able to share what they already know, or think they know. Only then can individuals feel valued and listened to – pre-requisites for learning.
2. We learn by listening, actively. This is not the same as hearing, but requires a humble approach to other people, remembering and valuing what they've said and referencing their contributions in ours. (Nancy Kline's book *Time to Think* has some excellent things to say about this.)
3. We learn in an environment of trust and safety where there are no put-downs, where getting something wrong is seen as helpful rather than amusing and where the sum is greater than the parts. This is to do with the physical environment as well as the social environment.
4. Einstein said "You only really understand something when you can explain it simply to someone else." Ask any teacher! It is because we learn by explaining our understanding to other people that the first 3 points apply.
5. 'The process is more important than the product.' In other words, listening, discussing, and contributing are more likely to lead to a feeling of mutual purpose than one person knowing 'the right answer' (or what they think is the right answer!)
6. Both learning itself and developing a group identity take time.



The iceberg diagram shows how you may need to go deeper than 'having a nice little chat'!

You might also find the JoHari Window model another useful way to understand yourself in relation to others:

	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
<u>Known to Others</u>	<p><b>Open</b></p> <p>(Public knowledge; what I show to you)</p>	<p><b>Blind</b></p> <p>(Feedback - your gift to me)</p>
<u>Unknown to Others</u>	<p><b>Hidden</b></p> <p>(Private; mine to share if I trust you)</p>	<p><b>Unconscious</b></p> <p>(Unknown; new awareness can emerge)</p>



## The Learning Environment

1. The Physical Environment – lighting (soft or bright), type of furniture (soft or hard) and arrangement of furniture (rows, circle, square), temperature, and air quality can all affect learning.
2. The Emotional Environment – welcome, time given to people, eye contact, and active listening are all important (see Daniel Goleman’s ‘Emotional Intelligence’).

It is also a good idea to mutually agree some ground rules before you start (see the checklist in the LMD Handbook for suggestions here).

## Learning about Faith

1. Learning about faith is not learning about theology. Learning about faith is intensely practical, so much so that one should perhaps be said to be ‘learning faith’, rather than learning about it.
2. Learning faith is a feature of being a disciple (which all Christians are) and is a lifelong revelation (“And all of us ..... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” said Paul in 2 Cor 3)
3. Jesus modelled how he wants us to learn – watch me, now you try, and then we’ll talk about it.
4. Recent studies have shown (reference Roger Walton?) that we develop as disciples best through worship, mission activity and formation in groups like an LMDT
5. Learning is learning. The principles of learning apply to learning about anything, from growing vegetables to learning about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Remember: Most of our faith deepening and development takes place OUTSIDE the church building!

## How people learn differently

Below are just some of the ways in which the ways we prefer to learn vary. None of these is better or worse, just different! You can Google these terms or go to [www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com)

1. Preferred Learning Styles
2. Multiple Intelligences
3. Convergent / divergent thinking
4. Personality type

Within an LMDT, you need to be aware of all these variations but one aspect that’s often overlooked is number 3. This has an impact on how a conversation develops, with one person wanting to explore further options and chew the cud for a while (divergent), and another wanting to draw matters to a conclusion (convergent).

There is also some evidence that people have different *spiritual* styles.

See [www.rootsontheweb.com/support/spiritual\\_styles21](http://www.rootsontheweb.com/support/spiritual_styles21) for more information on this.

The key thing here is that we *expect* each other to be different and don’t fall into the trap of assuming other people take in information like we do or expect them to explain their understanding in the way that suits our own preferences (this is easier to say than to do!).



The following points come from chapter 4 of the book *Creating a Learning Church*, by Margaret Cooling and are, in turn, based on *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* by John Hull, SCM Press

### **What Stops Us Learning?**

Learning is difficult if we:

- think that learning is only for the intelligent
- feel too comfortable where we are and simply defend the stage we are at
- think that we don't have to deal with our own imperfections in relation to learning
- allow our curiosity to be dulled
- keep faith and thinking in separate mental boxes
- think that learning is a low status activity and teaching is a high status activity
- think that the church is only a haven, a place to come for refreshment, not a place to be challenged to learn
- feel insecure in our faith, thinking 'If I start probing or learning, it may disturb my faith or make it fall apart'
- are determined to be vague, thinking 'If I am definite about my beliefs, I might have to live up to them or I will leave them open to being disproved – better to stay vague'
- view things that come through the senses as distractions rather than opportunities to learn
- think that the way we (in our church) understand or do things is the only way to understand and do things

Learning is difficult when a church:

- over-stresses the individual; we learn best in relationships.
- over emphasises authority and passively accepting information rather than genuine learning.
- retreats into an unnecessarily rigid framework of beliefs and feels threatened by beliefs in our plural world.
- focuses on the past rather than the present and the future. Learning is about moving forward on the foundation of the past.
- sets up the notion of an ideal Christian adult.
- feels threatened by a learning congregation (the church may have a vested interest in people not growing beyond a certain point).
- sees learning as controlled by, rather than enabled by, the teacher.
- goes for uniformity and tries to turn everyone into the same type of Christian.

### **What are the marks of non-learning churches?**

1. There is only one way to do something and one 'right answer' to any question
2. People worship the way we do things rather than the reason for our faith
3. Hostility to new / different people and procedures
4. 'Command and control' leadership, lack of trust of others' skills and gifts
5. Culture of inadequacy "I couldn't do it as well as she did."
6. Last words of a dying church "We've always done it that way!"

