

Experiential Learning at Warwick



The Warwick, Rhode Island, fire department recruits shown are recapping the burning building exercise in which their task was to control the fire and save victims (including the two dummies lying on the ground). Warwick and many other communities have special learning centers in which they can “burn” buildings. Fire and police units nearby in Woonsocket also recently participated in a mock disaster in which they rescued students during school from a mock chemical accident in the area. “Woonsocket is certainly one of the better prepared communities in the state when it comes to responding to this type of situation,” says an executive at the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency, who watched the “disaster” unfold.

Companies can learn from this example, learning through experience works best where there is a strong *learning orientation*. Organizations achieve a learning orientation culture by rewarding experimentation and recognizing mistakes as a natural part of the learning process. They encourage employees to take reasonable risks to ultimately discover new and better ways of doing things. Without a learning orientation, mistakes are hidden and problems are more likely to escalate or reemerge later.

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