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**Thoughts from Staff College.....the seventh in our series of Faculty blogs**

**Learning the lessons.... from learning the lessons**

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Is the recent past very present in your organisation at the moment? A flurry of 'reviewing'? Maybe some After Action Reviews or even (whisper it) an Inquiry?

As laudable an intention as 'learning the lessons' is, there may be a danger of just 'going through the motions'. You may well look back and wonder what happened with the results and actions from past reviews in your organisation.

However, it is important to learn lessons so you may wish to consider the following:

What are your organisation's values (culture?) when it comes to risk taking, failure, blame, initiative, levels of authority? Depending on these, the word 'learning' may have many different meanings for those whom you expect to create it and adopt it.

- There is only one past (the actual sequence of events as they unfolded) but many possible histories (depending on the experiences of those involved). And you can often find that historical narratives are bent to suit the will of current needs and desires. Remember the old adage: 'history is written by the winners' or, as an African proverb puts it - 'As long as lions will not have historians, hunting stories will glorify the hunters.'
- Where you make a difference as a leader, where you act in the world, is in the **present**. And the present **is the present no matter how it came about!**

A criticism of some types of psychotherapy is that you can spend months, maybe years analysing and coming to understand your past, but you will still be where you are! The time may be better spent looking to the...

- Future. And **the best way to predict the future is to create it!** (Alan Kay – Computer Scientist)

So maybe some work **right now** on reviewing your reviewing culture and practice could help this current round of learning to be really effective in shaping the future. A few questions to get you started:

1. Before Covid what were the last five substantial reviews carried out in your organisation?
2. What recommendations from those reviews actually 'stuck' (you can still see the changes in action now) vs. those that never quite got implemented or started but withered on the vine?

3. What were the differences between the successful reviews vs. the unsuccessful reviews?
4. Are you sure that your current reviews of the pandemic period have, themselves, learnt the lessons of the past?

Let us know how you get on if you decide to 'Review the Reviews' (Not to be confused with 'Begin the Bequine'!)

### **References**

Inquiries: learning from failure in the NHS? Kieran Walshe PhD [British Medical Journal \(BMJ 2002; 325:895-900\)](#)

Rethinking History [Keith Jenkins](#) Routledge 1991

[Begin the Bequine](#) Cole Porter (1935)