

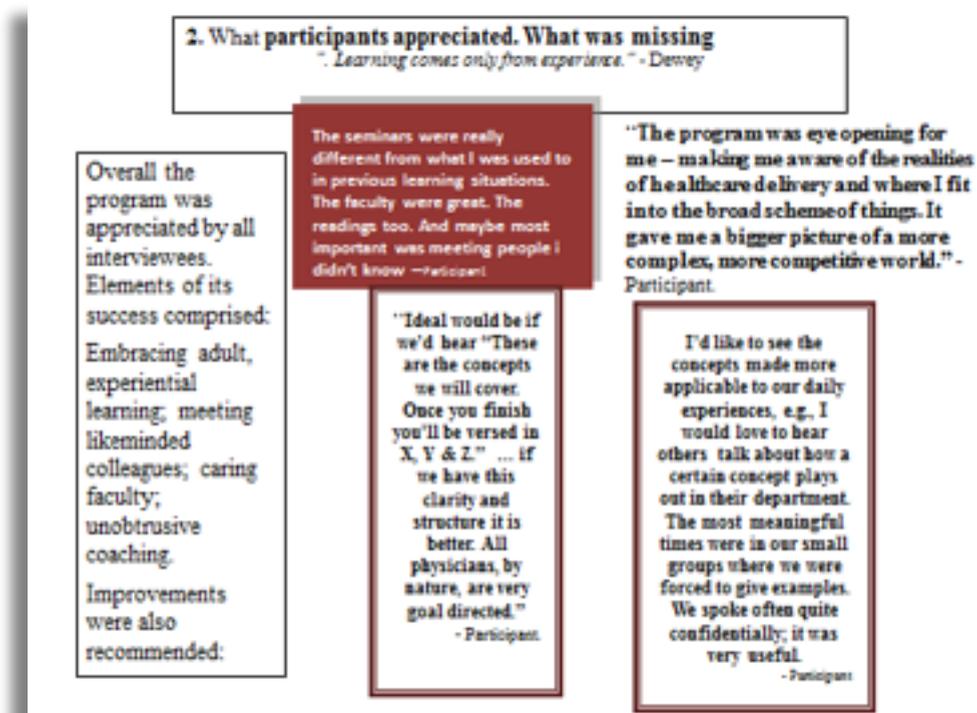
## Q: What does a learning history look like?

A: There is no simple response to the question of what a learning history looks like because there is no one way it should look. The eventual format, however, must work for the intended audience and the cultural constraints of that audience. Artistry is invited. A team of engineers needs something different than a team of kindergarten teachers. Here we show a couple of pages from the a local (organizationally bounded) learning history to illustrate various components. Below that we offer a table that compares this with an open system (organizationally unbound) learning history. We include a brief overview that serves as an introduction. Note that the concluding paragraph speaks also to designing the **validation & dissemination meeting**, which, like the learning history format itself, intentionally cultivates dialogue and introduces tastes of other action research practices, in this case World Café.

**Introduction:** After many months of preparation the Division of Management launched a new faculty leadership development program, *Leadership Pathways*, for School of Medicine faculty. The goals of the program were to help the participating faculty develop new ways of thinking about leadership, management, and organizations and to contribute value to the institution through involvement in a ‘learn-by-doing’ project. Selected ‘star’ faculty participated fully during a five-month pilot round. All were clinical faculty, referred either by their department chairs or an associate Dean. The following excerpt is taken from a learning history prepared to reflect on, learn from and grow their leadership program.

**The learning history is organized into a series of ‘themed short stories’, each recounting a particular key issue. Segments focus on particular dilemmas, questions, or anecdotes. This segment serves as an introduction.**

**The left-hand column provides commentary, insights, questions, reflections, and perspectives brought forward by the learning historians. These comments can be clarifications, provocations, and anything in between to support further talk about the**



**To tell a story from multiple perspectives requires bringing in quotes from a variety of people who build and elaborate the story in counterpoint to each other.**

*I see AMC as full of individual machines all doing something really well but with no real connections"*  
- Participant



Participants also invariably offered positive images of a future: something small and living. Are images incompatible?

All interviewees agreed that in so complex and demanding an environment more organic leadership is needed. Pilot program participants were asked to share the image that informs how they really think about their hospital. All conjured a mechanistic organization. Think Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times. This has led to silo'ed departments, bureaucracy, etc



*For me our program is a small tree. In time this tree can grow to give shade and softening around the edges.*  
Participant.

A full-column text interlude is used when a transition is needed, like an mcee announcing a shift between stage acts. This text sets the context for key quotes as people continue to reflect – in this case, upon the implications of how a mechanistic and organic

**This comment draws the reader's attention to the implicit meaning. Disagreements are typical. Results and performance do not 'prove' one side or the other correct, because each side interprets differently. In talking through a document like this, however, each side can see how the other reached their interpretation.**

Most learning histories have multiple audiences and each may require a different format. This version was prepared for program participants and sponsors who met to discuss the findings from interviews and data collection about their program's success. Additionally future participants and sponsors listened to the dissemination meeting to consider the implications of learning initiatives for themselves and their teams.

### Validation & dissemination:

During the validation & dissemination: meeting, the walls of the meeting room were covered in colorful poster sized versions of these learning history pages. Markers were made available for all meeting participants to write comments on the posters. Food and beverages were shared as people perused the posters and talked together. No meeting at the Academic Medical Center had ever combined such informality, conviviality and productive outcomes. The chapter in the Handbook of Action Research 3e offers more detail.

### Comparison of local/bounded and open systems/unbounded learning histories

	The local/bounded learning history	The open systems/ boundaryless learning history
Storyline charted	Program on leadership development	Pro-environmental behavior
Sponsor	Program designer	UK government department

'Insiders'		All faculty participants, their department Chairs and Dean of School of Medicine	Five different community groups in the UK
'Outsiders'		Lead action researcher with regular input from program design team	A team of 5 action researchers and digital story experts
Reflective conversations		Taped interviews one on one with all key stakeholders	Participative focus groups, home visits, 1:1 work. Emphasis on co-creation
Form of learning history artefact(s)		Two-column document with color pictures, also made available on poster board at diffusion meeting	Eight 3-minute orally voiced digital stories
Validation		Focus group/workshop with participants to check first themes	Workshop with original 'storytellers'
Diffusion process		Participative workshop with original insiders plus new participants	Five external audiences attended 2 participative workshops, 3 months apart
Supporting infrastructure for knowledge travel and enduring change		Facilitated conversation with decision-makers about how to further support and improve the program  Document was made available on an ongoing basis	+ The stories were on film and uploaded on a website  + Community partnership organizations helped mobilize volunteers and audiences to participate  + Storytellers felt motivated to continue telling their story after the project ended

**Based on the chapter by Hilary Bradbury, George Roth and Margaret Gearty that appears in Bradbury, Ed, 2015. Handbook of Action Research, 3e Sage Publications.**