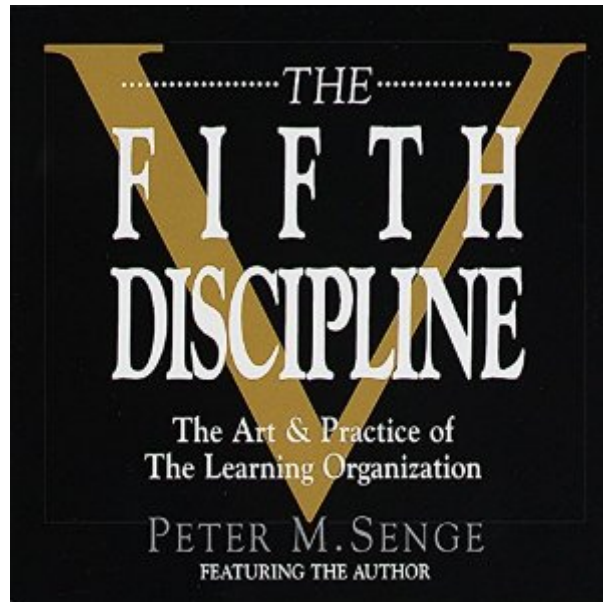


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The Fifth Discipline: The Art And Practice Of The Learning Organization



Synopsis

An MIT Professor's pathbreaking book on building "learning organizations" -- corporations that overcome inherent obstacles to learning and develop dynamic ways to pinpoint the threats that face them and to recognize new opportunities. Not only is the learning organization a new source of competitive advantage, it also offers a marvelously empowering approach to work, one which promises that, as Archimedes put it, "with a lever long enough... single-handed I can move the world." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a collection of theoretical summaries, reports, analyses, and strategies all quite useful to anyone interested in generating some thinking and action around change. The team of five writers (Peter Senge, Richard Ross, Bryan Smith, Charlotte Roberts, and Art Kleiner) provide some original work, but also serve as editors to a vast quantity of material drawn from practitioners, theorists, and writers in the field of organizational improvement. According to Senge, "great teams are learning organizations - groups of people who, over time, enhance their capacity to create what they truly desire to create." (p.18) This book is really about creating and building great teams. The learning organization develops its ability to reflect on, discuss, question, and change its current and past practices. To do this, people and groups in the organization need to meaningfully pursue the study and practice of the five disciplines - personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. The learning organization - Senge's vision for the productive,

competitive, and efficient institutions of the future - is in a continuous state of change. Four fundamental questions continuously serve to check and guide a group's learning and improvement (see page 49): (1) Do you continuously test your experiences? ("Are you willing to examine and challenge your sacred cows - not just during crises, but in good times?") (2) Are you producing knowledge? ("Knowledge, in this case, means the capacity for effective action.") (3) Is knowledge shared? ("Is it accessible to all of the organization's members?") (4) Is the learning relevant? ("Is this learning aimed at the organization's core purpose?") If these questions represent the organization's compass, the five disciplines are its map. Each of the five disciplines is explained, and elaborated in its own lengthy section of the book. In the section on "Systems Thinking" (a set of practices and perspectives, which views all aspects of life as inter-related and playing a role in some larger system), the authors build on the idea of feedback loops (reinforcing and balancing) and introduce five systems archetypes. They are: "fixes that backfire", "limits to growth", "shifting the burden", "tragedy of the commons", and "accidental adversaries". In the section on "Personal Mastery", the authors argue that learning starts with each person. For organizations to learn and improve, people within the organization (perhaps starting with its core leadership) must learn to reflect on and become aware of their own core beliefs and visions. In "Mental Models", the authors argue that learning organizations need to explore the assumptions and attitudes, which guide their institutional directions, practices, and strategies. Articles on scenario planning, the ladder of inference, the left-hand column, and balancing inquiry and advocacy offer practical strategies to investigate our personal mental models as well as those of others in the organization. In "Shared Vision", the authors make the case for the stakeholders of an organization to continually adapt their vision ("an image of a desired future"), values ("how we get to travel to where we want to go"), purpose ("what the organization is here to do"), and goals ("milestones we expect to reach before too long"). The section offers many strategies and perspectives on how to move an organization toward continuous reflection. In "Team Learning", the authors rely mostly on the work of William Isaacs and others, and make a case for educating organization members in the processes and skills of dialogue and skillful discussion. This book is enlightening and informative. It has already found a place on my shelf for essential reference books.

Senge's second serving of the Learning Organization is filled with practical tips and real-life examples from companies and organizations that have embraced the teachings of the Learning Organization successfully. The Book is a collaboration of several writers who do a superb job of unraveling the web that is the learning organization. At times, it may seem to the reader that the

book is a labyrinth of disjointed concepts and ideas. However, if you have read 'The Fifth Discipline' you will find no problems following the concepts introduced. In fact, you will even understand why the writers have chosen to introduce them in that fashion. If you have not read "The Fifth Discipline', do not despair, it will take a little longer to get 'the whole picture'. The Book is divided into 8 main sections: 1) Getting Started addresses the basic concepts and ideas of the Learning Organization. 2) Systems Thinking (the fifth discipline) - Many people have argued that Senge should have delegated the fifth discipline until the end, however, without Systems Thinking, your vision is disjointed and incomplete. 3) Personal Mastery covers the area of individual development and learning. The chapters here are among the most valuable in the area of self-growth and self-improvement. 4) Mental Models - These are the pictures that you have in your head which represent reality. 5) Shared Vision - You've seen the whole picture, you've developed and you understand how you see the world. Now you need to find a common cause with the rest of the people in your organization, something that you all work for. 6) Team Learning - As you work with other people in teams or groups, you need to pass the stuff that you have learnt and the wisdom you've acquired to others. At this stage, the learning is no longer that of the individual, but the group. 7) Arenas of Practice - (Self explanatory) 8) Frontiers - Where do we go from here. If you are interested in development, learning, growth, leadership, gaining a competitive edge whether at an organizational or personal level, then this book is for you. In fact, I'd venture to say that this book is for everyone.

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