

EBSCO Publishing Citation Format: APA (American Psychological Assoc.):

NOTE: Review the instructions at http://support.ebsco.com/help/?int=ehost&lang=&feature_id=APA and make any necessary corrections before using. **Pay special attention to personal names, capitalization, and dates.** Always consult your library resources for the exact formatting and punctuation guidelines.

References

Senge, P. (2007). *Fifth Discipline*. *Bloomsbury Business Library - Management Library*, 27.

<!--Additional Information:

Persistent link to this record (Permalink): <http://search.ebscohost.com.lib.kaplan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=26659570&site=ehost-live>

End of citation-->

Fifth Discipline**Peter Senge****Why Read It?**

This is the book that popularized the concept of the learning organization. More philosophical in tone than the majority of business-oriented books, it adopts a holistic approach. Learning is an individual and a group experience, something, Senge would claim, much deeper than just taking information in. "It is about changing individuals so that they produce results they care about, accomplish things that are important to them," he wrote.

Getting Started

Peter Senge is director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT. The *Fifth Discipline* emerged from extensive research by Senge and his team, but Senge said the "vision that became *The Fifth Discipline*" came to him one morning during his meditation, when he realized that "the 'learning organization' would likely become a new management fad."

The "fifth discipline" of the title is systems thinking. Of the five building blocks of a learning organization, systems thinking connects the other four and enables them to work together for the benefit of business.

Contribution 1. Learning is Vital

In the author's view, as the world becomes more interconnected and business becomes more complex and dynamic, work must become more "learningful." It is no longer sufficient to have one person learning for the whole organization, a Ford, say, or a Sloan or a Watson. It is no longer possible to figure it out from the top, and have everybody else follow the orders of the grand strategist.

The organizations that will excel in the future will be those that can tap the commitment and capacity to learn of people at all levels within them.

Managers should therefore encourage employees to:

- be open to new ideas;
- communicate frankly with each other;
- understand thoroughly how their companies operate;
- form a collective vision;
- work together to achieve their goals.

2. The Five Disciplines

There are five components to a learning organization:

- systems thinking
- personal mastery
- mental models
- shared vision
- team learning

3. Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is a conceptual framework to make patterns clearer, claims Senge. It requires a shift of mind to see interrelationships rather than linear cause and effect. It can help managers spot repetitive patterns, such as the way certain kinds of problems persist, or the way systems have their own in-built limits to growth.

4. Personal Mastery

This idea is based on the familiar competencies and skills associated with management. But it also includes spiritual growth — opening oneself up to a progressively deeper reality and living life from a creative rather than a reactive viewpoint.

As part of this discipline, one must continually learn to see current reality more clearly; the ensuing gap between vision and reality produces the creative tension from which learning arises.

5. Mental Models

These are the organization's driving and fundamental values and principles. Senge alerts managers to the power of patterns of thinking at the organizational level and the importance of nondefensive inquiry into the nature of these patterns.

6. Shared Vision

Senge stresses the importance of cocreation and argues that shared vision can only be built on personal vision. He claims that shared vision is present when the task that follows from the vision is no longer seen by the team members as separate from the self.

7. Team Learning

The discipline of team learning involves two practices: dialog and discussion. Dialog is characterized by its exploratory nature, discussion by the opposite process of narrowing

down the field to the best alternative for the decisions that need to be made. The two are mutually complementary, but the benefits of combining them only come from having previously separated them.

8. Creating Learning Organizations

The author argues that transforming companies into learning organizations has proved highly problematical, principally because it involves managers surrendering their traditional spheres of power and control to the people who are learning. If people are to learn, they must be allowed to experiment and fail. In a blame-oriented culture, this requires a major change in organizational attitude.

The learning organization demands trust and involvement. Again, this is usually notable by its absence. Real commitment is rare in today's organizations. Experience indicates that 90% of the time what passes for commitment is compliance. One man reported to Senge that by adopting the learning organization model, he made what he called "job-limiting choices." What he meant was that he could have climbed the corporate ladder faster by rejecting Senge's theories and toeing the company line.

Context

Although the learning organization sounds like a product, it is actually a process. Phil Hodgson of Ashridge Management College commented: "Processes are not suddenly unveiled for all to see. Academic definitions, no matter how precise, cannot be instantly applied in the real world. Managers need to promote learning so that it gradually emerges as a key part of an organization's culture."

The Fifth Discipline has proved highly influential. Though the learning organization has rarely been converted into reality, the idea has fueled the debate on self-managed development and employability, and has affected the rewards and remuneration strategies of many organizations.

Gary Hamel observed that: "While Professor [Chris] Argyris put organizational learning on the management agenda, Peter Senge married it with system thinking and created a language and approach that makes the whole set of ideas accessible to managers. Peter is no mere theorist, his organizational Learning Center at MIT has helped launch thousands of in-company learning experiments. The Fifth Discipline would certainly be on my shortlist of the half dozen best business books of the last 25 years."

For More Information

Senge, Peter. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday, 1990.

Footer

"The harder you push the system, the harder the system pushes you."

The Fifth Discipline

Copyright of Bloomsbury Business Library - Management Library is the property of A&C Black Publishers Ltd. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.