



UNPACKING PETER SENGE'S DISCIPLINES

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ABSTRACT

The future is not ahead of us, it has already happened. Unfortunately, it is unequally distributed among nations, organisations and individuals (Kotler, 2005). The best lesson that a person can learn from a business school, is the realisation of what it cannot teach him or her. One of the important aspects that ever happened in our life, is when Peter Senge came up with the fifth disciplines that any organisation can apply in order to achieve a learning organisation. These disciplines are personal mastery, mental shared vision, team learning and systems thinking.

KEY WORDS: *learning organisation, learning, fifth disciplines, change, commitment, connection, compassion, empathy, courage*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are three kinds of organisations. The one that make things happen, the one that watches things happen and the one that wonders what has already happened (anonymous). Today one has to run very fast in order to stay in the same place as propounded by Kotler (2005). We are living in the DVUCADD environment. An environment characterised by dynamic, volatile, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity diverse and destructive. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1989) avers "today's corporate elephants need to learn to dance as nimbly and speedily as mice if they are to survive in our increasingly competitive and rapidly changing world". Peters and Waterman (1982) argue that "great companies are all driven by changing pressures in the market place". This environment requires the embracing of Peter Senge's fifth disciples. Learning organisation is the order of the day in order to copy up with this turbulent environment and doing away with the learning disabilities.

2. LEARNING ORGANISATION

As human beings organisations also learn. Organisations as human beings also have learning disabilities. A learning organisation is skilled at creating, acquiring, sharing, using, reusing and evaluating knowledge as well as modifying its

behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights. Peter Senge (2004) describes a learning organisation as an organisation where people expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together. Indeed, we can create the environment that we truly desire. We are actually environment creators. A learning organisation makes things happen.

3. PETER SENGE'S FIFTH DISCIPLINES

Peter Senge has found a means by which any organisation can use for creating a learning organisation. This was a response to get rid of the learning organisation disabilities which include, I am my position, the enemy is out there, the illusion of taking charge, the fixation of events, the parable of the boiled frog, the delusion of learning from experience and the myth of the management team. In the long run, the only sustainable source of competitive advantage is your organisation's ability to learn faster than its competition (Senge, 2004). Peter Senge is of the opinion that learning organisations are possible because deep down we are all learners.

The Fifth Disciplines

Figure 1 illustrates Peter Senge's fifth disciplines:

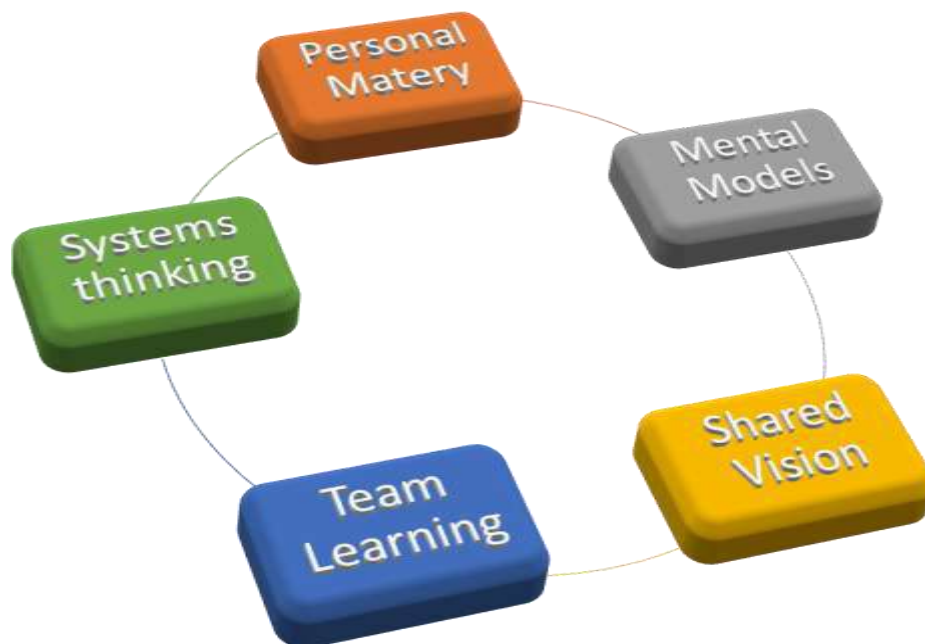


Figure 1: Senge's disciplines

3.1 Personal Mastery

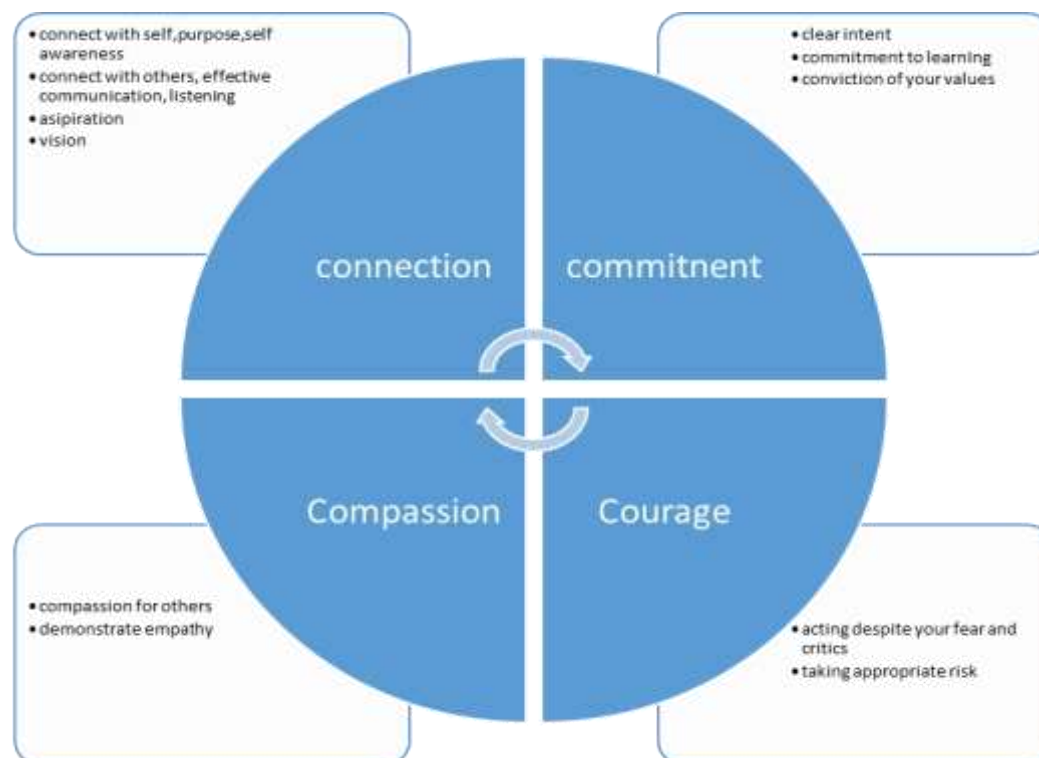
Organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs (Senge, 2004). Personal mastery is the discipline for personal growth and learning. People with high level of personal mastery are continually expanding their ability to create the results in life they truly seek. From their quest for personal learning come the spirit of learning organisation (Senge, 2004: 412). Senge (2004) proffers that personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills, though grounded in competence and skill. It means approaching life as a creative work. One will be living life as a creative rather than reactive viewpoint. It calls for proficiency. Senge (2014) explains personal mastery in the following ways:

- continually clarifying what is important to us
- continually learning how to see current reality more clearly
- In moving towards a desired destination, it is vital to know where you are now
- lifelong generative learning
- learn how to perceive and work with forces of change rather than resist those forces
- People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never arrive.
- It is a lifelong discipline and so is a process

- There is personal vision. Real vision cannot be understood in isolation from the idea of purpose. We need understand why are we here on earth. We were put here on earth for a certain purpose. The question is what is that purpose? Happiness may be most directly a result of living consistently with your purpose. Vision however, is different from purpose. Purpose is similar to a direction while vision is the destination. It is a picture of the desired future.

Nickols (2008) avers that toss out the rule book change by definition calls for configured responses not adhered to prefigured routines. It therefore, follows that we create the environment that we want. How can then this environment be created? We can make use of the 4 Cs of personal masters by Ralph (2008). The 4Cs of Personal Mastery are not meant to be a panacea, but rather seeks to highlight four key areas that can help create meaningful, deep change. It helps create the type of change that brings people along rather than alienates them. It aims to balance the logical with the emotional. It can also help create the type of change that is enduring rather than wallpapering a technical solution over a much deeper problem. It requires a 'go slow to go fast' approach, where there are no simple answers. For most challenges, if they were simple to fix someone would have done it a long time ago.

Cs of Personal Mastery



Connection

It is important to be able to connect with ourselves and other people. People with high personal mastery feel connected to themselves, to others and to life itself (Senge, 2014). We need to know what is important both personally and professionally. This can help to clarify your thinking. Self-awareness is the ability to have a deeper understanding of yourself. You need to read, peruse, evaluate and scrutinise that book called you (Mutongi and Mwerahare, 2018). In moving towards a desired destination, it is important to know where you are now. There is need to carry out a SWOT analysis of yourself in line with your personal vision. Personal mastery suggests a special level of proficiency in every aspect of personal life and professional. People with high personal mastery have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their vision and goals. They are deeply inquisitive, committed to continually seeing reality more and more accurately. They feel connected to others and to life itself.

Commitment

Learning in this context does not mean acquiring more information but expanding the ability to produce the results we truly want in life. It is lifelong generative learning (Senge, 2004). We are committed to create the environment that we want. We are creators not just reactors. To those who are committed the enemy is not out there. We may be familiar with the old fable about the hen and a pig, in which they are discussing how they each play a part in the well-being of mankind through the decidedly crucial element of providing breakfast. Both animals

obviously play a significant part making this meal such an enjoyable one—the hen provides the eggs and the pigs provides the bacon. On the plate the bacon and eggs are both delicious, appetising, appealing and strengthening. While they were discussing, the hen pointed out how it takes in the provision of the delicious meal. The pig quickly noticed that the hen was just involved and has just contributed. The pig avers that “one of us had to die in order to come out with this bacon whilst you were just involved in the production of the eggs”. This shows that the pig is committed and thus sacrifice. Senge (2004) avers that when people genuinely care, they are naturally committed. They are doing what they truly want to do. They are full of energy and enthusiasm. They persevere, even in the face of frustration and setbacks, because what they are doing is what they must do.

Courage

Courageous people see current reality as an ally, not an enemy. They have learnt how to work with forces of change rather than resist these forces (Senge, 2004). Courage is not the absence of fear but doing it despite the fear. So courage is the ability to do something that you are afraid of. Maxwell (2000:41) alludes that courage in a leader inspire commitment.

Compassion

When one is connected to others, he/she develops compassion. Avoid stereotyping, prejudice and judging others too quickly (Mutongi and Mwerahare, 2018). There is need to put yourself in someone's shoes. Imagine living the same life that person would have lived, probably you were going

to do the worst things. Empathy makes us understand each other better.

3.2 Mental Models

Model models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generations, beliefs, pictures, images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Strong mental models create rigidity. An example of a mental model is that women are not good leaders. This is not a functional mental model. We need to unfreeze pattern of behaviour that are not favourable to us and dismantle mental models that are not functional and shape new once. If human beings are perceived as potentials rather than problems, as possessing strengths instead of weaknesses as unlimited rather than dull and unresponsive then they thrive and grow to their capabilities (Bush, 2019). Thus, mental models should be positive. Positive model models result in the achievement of our vision. Senge (2014) opines that the healthy corporations will be ones which can systematize ways to bring people together to develop the best possible mental models for facing any situation at hand.

3.3 Shared Vision

A leader who impose a vision is bound to fail. A shared vision is not an idea. It is not even an important idea such as freedom. It is, rather, a force in people's hearts, a force off impressive power (Senge, 2004). When people truly share a vision they become connected, they are bound together by a common purpose and aspiration. Shared vision motivates employees to learn to achieve that vision. It gives employees energy and focus. Shared visions emerge from personal visions. Working on something exciting that you really care about, you do not have to be pushed. The vision pulls you (Jobs, 2019).

At its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question, "What do we want to create?" (Senge, 2004). It fosters risk taking and experimentation. Senge adds that a vision is truly shared when you and I have a similar picture and are committed to one another having it. Personal visions derive their power from an individual's deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring. Shared vision promotes generative learning. The discipline of building shared vision lacks a critical underpinning if practiced without systems thinking. Vision paints the picture of what we want to create. Systems thinking reveals how we have created what we currently have. Vision becomes a living force only when people truly believe they can shape their future. Shared visions emerge from personal visions. Senge (2004) is of the opinion that the first step in mastering the discipline of building shared visions is to give up traditional notions that visions are always announced from "on high" or come from an organization's institutionalized planning processes. The problem with top management going off to write their vision statement is that the resulting

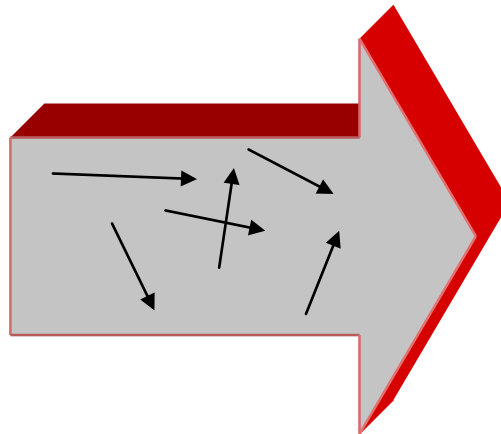
vision does not build on people's personal visions. This is not to say that visions cannot emanate from the top. Often, they do. But sometimes they emanate from personal visions of individuals who are not in positions of authority. Senge (2004) argues that sometimes they just "bubble up" from people interacting at many levels. The origin of the vision is much less important than the process whereby it comes to be shared. It is not truly a "shared vision" until it connects with the personal visions of people throughout the organization. For those in leadership positions, what is most important is to remember that their visions are still personal visions. Just because they occupy a position of leadership does not mean that their personal visions are automatically "the organisation's vision." Visions that are genuinely shared require ongoing conversation where individuals not only feel free to express their dreams, but learn how to listen to each other's' dreams. Out of this listening, new insights into what is possible gradually emerge.

Senge believes that we must allow multiple visions to coexist listening for the right course of action that transcends and unifies all our individual visions. For example, Martin Luther King Jr's vision of the emancipation of the black American unifies other black American's vision. He calls for equality. Other vision that touches the heart of many include Mother Theresa's vision of finding the solution to poverty and through that preached love. Jairos Jiri had a vision of seeing the disabled people living a better life and started Jairos Jiri Centres for the disabled. Mahatma Gandhi had a vision for human rights, Winston Churchill for freedom, Bill Gates for technology. Maxwell (1999) alludes that Princes Diana started rallying people to causes such as AIDS research, care for people with leprosy sand ban of land mines. In creating a shared vision, there is need to avoid negative visions. Senge argues that what do we want? is different from what do we want to avoid?

3.4 Team Learning

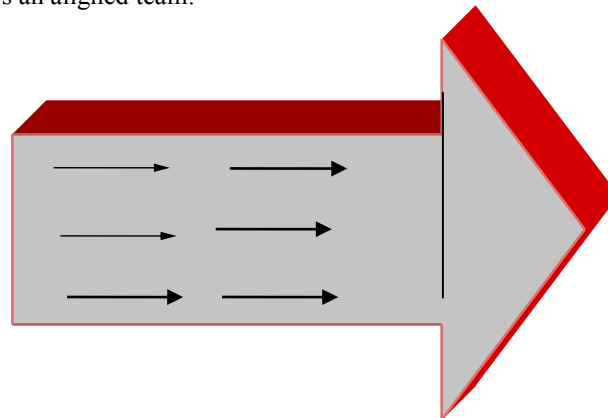
Teams also learn. We must have a star team not a team of stars. The discipline of team learning starts with a dialogue. People suspend assumptions and enter into genuine thinking together. Unless teams learn, the organisation cannot learn. Team learning creates synergies. We complement each other's strength and compensate each other's weaknesses. This results in team building. We are bound to achieve more ad become more successful when working as a team than as individuals. It is therefore important to avoid internal competition, blame game, sabotage, pull her/him down syndrome (PHD syndrome), the enemy is out there syndrome, I can do better than him, back biting in order for effective team learning to occur. We therefore need to do away with fame suppression (Mutongi and Mazhawidza, 2019). Team learning calls for team alignment in order to point to the same direction. This can be shown in the following diagrams:

The following team shows the unaligned team:



The above diagram shows that there is lack of team learning. Teams members have no common purpose. Thus there is lack of team learning.

The following diagram shows an aligned team:



The above diagram shows that there is team learning. Teams members have a common purpose as they are going to the same direction. In this case team learning is achieved.

3.5 Systems Thinking

The whole is better than the sum of its parts. Senge (2004) alludes that from a very early age, we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the world". We then end up losing connection to the bigger picture. This is similar to try to reassemble the fragments of a broken mirror to see a true reflection. Truly you will not get a true reflection of yourself. Peter Senge tries to destroy the illusion that the world is created of separate unrelated forces. We can take a human body as a model of systems thinking. Each part of the body is important and connected to each other for the achievement of the human objectives in life. An organisation is a system. Systems thinking makes the full patterns clear. We must do away with silo mentality and territory mentality. The success of one department affects positively the other department. The failure of one department results in the failure of other

department and affects the whole system. An individual's success and failure also affects the whole organisation.

4. CONCLUSION

It is of paramount importance that organisations should get rid of learning disabilities through practising Peter Senge's learning disciplines. These are personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Organisations should make sure that these disciplines are effectively implemented for learning organisation to occur. The enemy is not out there we are enemies to our progress.

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Bio-data

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