

The Learning Organization



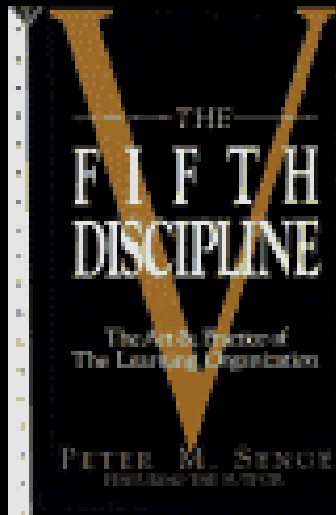
by

Dr. Robert Hurley

What You Will Learn

- The definition of learning organization
- The notion of learning how to learn
- Senge' five disciplines for becoming a learning organization
- Some examples of learning organizations
- Two sources of practical learning organization exercises and gaming activities

Learning Organization



The term “learning organization” was first used in the 1980s by Richard Pascal. However, it was the publication of Peter Senge’s best seller, *The Fifth Discipline*, in 1990 that popularized the phrase.

Learning Organizations



- Are committed to a cycle of continuous learning and improvement
- Promote a culture that enables and accelerates individual and group learning
- Are continually testing their assumptions and transforming new knowledge into actions

What Is Learning



- Not everyone agrees on what constitutes learning.
- Many workers consider learning simply “the act of acquiring new information.”
- For some, learning means “picking up new behaviors and skills.”
- Others look on learning as “gaining new insights through personal experiences.”

Learning How To Learn



- By engaging in meta learning, looking at learning from a variety of perspectives and practicing ways of learning, employees can increase their own learning capabilities.
- Individually, group-wise, and organization-wise, learning how learn better and faster is the essence of learning organizations.

Senge's 5 Disciplines

- **Systems Thinking**
- **Personal Mastery**
- **Team Learning**
- **Mental Models**
- **Shared Vision**





Peter Senge

Senge's "five disciplines," include systems thinking (comprehending the big picture), personal mastery (doing the job well), mental models (critically questioning old assumptions), shared vision (arriving at a collective purpose), and team learning (working together collaboratively).

Personal Mastery

- **Brief Definition:**
 - Learning to expand one's personal capacity to create the future and results one most desires.



Personal Mastery



- It is the basic human need to learn, grow, and achieve personal mastery that fuels and provides substance to all learning organizations.
- No organization can truly be a learning organization without its individual members being free to learn.

Personal Mastery



- Employees must be taught, encouraged, and granted permission to become creative architects of their own work lives.
- People must think of personal mastery as a process of continuous growth and development-not a human state to be achieved.

Mental Models

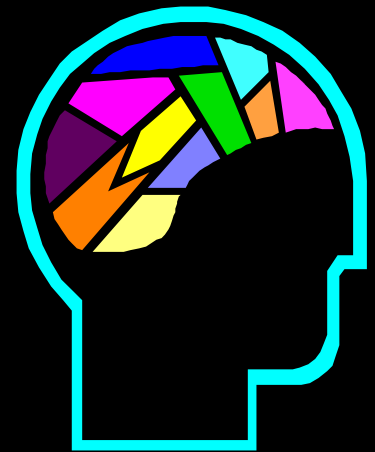
- **Brief Definition:**

- Surfacing, clarifying, testing, and improving one's internal representations of the world and understanding how these representations, along with their accompanying implicit assumptions, shape one's decisions and actions.



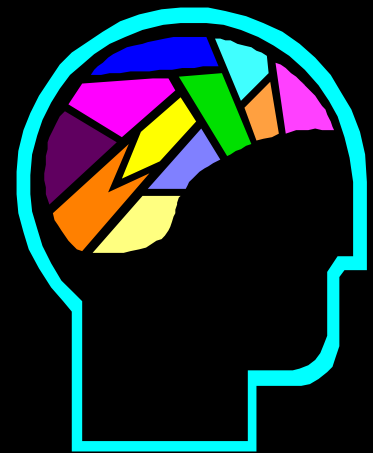
Mental Models

- Mental models are images, assumptions, and beliefs that everyone carries around in their heads.
- They include strongly held beliefs about self, family members, employing organizations, and the world at large which exist in the subconscious.



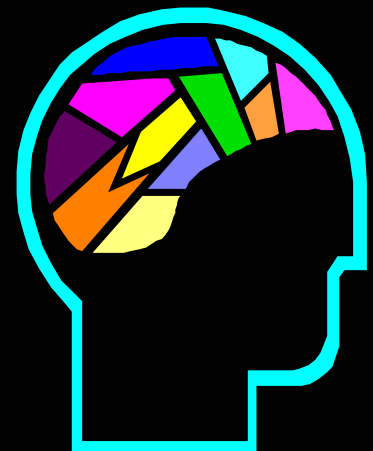
Mental Models

- These mental maps help people simplify, organize, and make sense of their complex world.
- A distinguishing characteristic of learning organizations is that they operate from a strong factual base.



Mental Models

- Learning organizations are willing to continuously discard or revise obsolete and sometimes treasured beliefs and embrace new and unfamiliar mental models.



Shared Vision

- **Brief Definition:**
 - Building a common sense of purpose and commitment by developing shared images of the future that we seek to create.



Shared Vision



- In a learning organization all workers, regardless of their position, are invited and provided with opportunities to create, test, communicate, and promote the company's mission.
- Employees are asked to play a strategic part in setting the goals and quality standards that will turn their company's shared vision into reality.

Shared Vision



- Workers are also encouraged and given assistance in setting and aligning their own personal visions and goals with those of the organization.
- In this way learning organizations have a definite advantage over their competitors:
- They are able to benefit from the collective intelligence, creative know-how, and commitment of all employees.

Team Learning

- **Brief Definition:**
 - Reflecting on action as a team and transforming collective thinking skills so that the team can develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual members' talents.



Team Learning



- People can learn and think of more things collectively than they can individually.
- This is due to the fact that people learn from one another.
- Furthermore, the ideas expressed by one person can set in motion a sweeping avalanche of ideas.

Team Learning

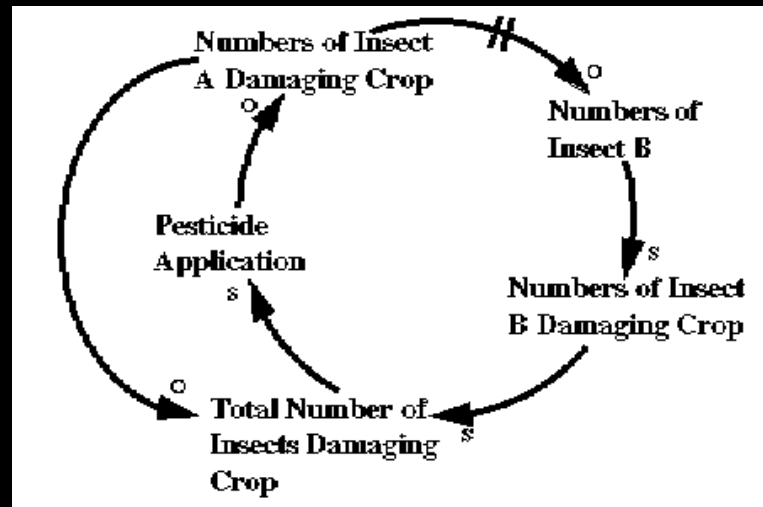


- In a matter of seconds a work group can become a thinking machine, producing a set of answers to heretofore unsolvable company problems or coming up with revolutionary new product ideas.

Systems Thinking

- **Brief Definition:**

- Understanding the interconnections and interrelationships that shape the behavior of the systems in which we exist.



Systems Thinking



- An engine has many parts and for any engine to function at its full potential all parts must be operational.
- The same principle holds for organizations.
- Organizations are made up of interrelated elements that function as a whole (i.e., a system).

Systems Thinking



- Changes in one element or part of the system can cause changes in other elements.
- In fact, a change in one critical part (e.g., customer service) can set off a chain reaction of continuous cause-and-effect events that ripple and loop throughout an entire company.

Systems Thinking



- Depending upon the effect of the change, overall company performance can be either greatly enhanced or diminished.

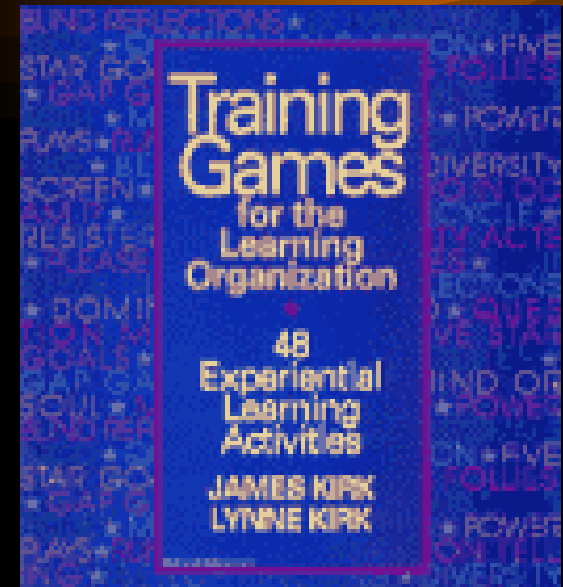
Additional Resources



The concepts of the learning organization can be somewhat abstract. The Fieldbook explains the concepts in more detail and suggests various learning exercises.

Additional Resources

This resource contains 48 gaming activities designed to make concepts relating the learning organization more concrete, understandable, and fun for workers to learn.



What You Have Learned



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