



# **The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization**

*Peter M. Senge*

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# The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization

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## The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization Peter M. Senge Completely Updated and Revised

This revised edition of Peter Senge's bestselling classic, *The Fifth Discipline*, is based on fifteen years of experience in putting the book's ideas into practice. As Senge makes clear, in the long run the only sustainable competitive advantage is your organization's ability to learn faster than the competition. The leadership stories in the book demonstrate the many ways that the core ideas in *The Fifth Discipline*, many of which seemed radical when first published in 1990, have become deeply integrated into people's ways of seeing the world and their managerial practices.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge describes how companies can rid themselves of the learning "disabilities" that threaten their productivity and success by adopting the strategies of learning organizations—ones in which new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, collective aspiration is set free, and people are continually learning how to create results they truly desire.

The updated and revised Currency edition of this business classic contains over one hundred pages of new material based on interviews with dozens of practitioners at companies like BP, Unilever, Intel, Ford, HP, Saudi Aramco, and organizations like Roca, Oxfam, and The World Bank. It features a new Foreword about the success Peter Senge has achieved with learning organizations since the book's inception, as well as new chapters on Impetus (getting started), Strategies, Leaders' New Work, Systems Citizens, and Frontiers for the Future.

Mastering the disciplines Senge outlines in the book will:

- Reignite the spark of genuine learning driven by people focused on what truly matters to them
- Bridge teamwork into macro-creativity
- Free you of confining assumptions and mindsets
- Teach you to see the forest *and* the trees
- End the struggle between work and personal time

## The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization Details

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Organization Peter M. Senge**

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## TarasProkopyuk says

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## Hosein says

I was introduced with this book in a reading group in Tehran.

At first I had to read the first two chapters of the book in order to attend at that event.

After reading these two chapters, I honestly got interested and read the rest of it.

The whole idea around this book is how an organization can improve, not by itself but by helping all of the people working in.

## Helene says

Though this is NOT an easy read, it IS a must-read for everyone in a leadership position, and that really does include teacher-leaders. I think I started it four or five times before I was able to finish it. I would pick it up read a few chapters and then drop out. I'd pick it up again, start over, and then drop out again. It was Wyllis Terry who finally said, don't start it over, just keep reading from where you left off which allowed me to finally finish it. I'm glad I did. It is such a basic leadership book and really helps with looking at the whole system and not just the piece that you are working with.

I heard Senge a couple of times speak to systems thinking. The first time was at a National Staff

Development Conference in Boston. He had many of the 1,000 educators there in tears about their own influence on the environment before he was done, very moving. The second time was at the Upper Valley Educators Institute under the direction of Rob Fried. Senge used the earth as the ultimate example of a system. Very effective and influential. This book truly is worth getting through. Don't give up, keep reading!

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## **P. Lundburg says**

I'm not going to write a formal review on this one, but it's worthy of a couple of comments. I'm generally not a fan of business-success books, but Senge's observations about organizations and how they function--and can function better--is honest and spot on. The Learning Organizations are those that see the greatest success, and largely because their leaders cultivate an appropriately humble approach to mission fulfillment. Everybody, including top leaders, are part of the organization: they are not the organization, and the organization is not them. Building a culture of team players takes a lot of trust, and that starts at the top. When an organization applies the principles Senge lays out, it can be highly effective.

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## **Abraham says**

Rarely would I use this term to describe anything but the good book itself but here goes...*"this book is the bible for any leader/manager"*.

Or maybe a better description would be *"the canon"*, since it is a definitive work but one, as by the theme of the book suggests, that can and should be improved upon.

The book is both frustrating and refreshing for the same reason - it doesn't try and present its ideas in an "easily" replicable framework. Though an outlined framework or step-by-step process/venn diagram would make the reader feel more at ease, the author continually states that stuffing these ideas into an ubiquitous framework is next to impossible. There is no panacea diagram that can be turned into a power point slide when building a learning organization.

Thus with the above point in mind, this book quickly undermines most other strategy books/papers and points out missed themes in other books - like Good to Great Good to Great. The point being that the underlying long-term source of success in an organization is not its present strategy but its people and culture. Only the quality of its people and a culture of openness allow an organization to continually, adapt, learn and grow. James C. Collins James C. Collins touched on this idea in G2G when he discussed "getting the right people on the bus" but he made the fatal consulting mistake of seeing the overall results as static and linear, rather than dynamic and self-reinforcing.

However, there are five main points that can summarize Senge's Peter M. Senge requirements for a learning organization:

1. Systems thinking
2. Self-awareness/emotional intelligence
3. Vision
4. Clear Communication
5. Bottom-up solutions

These requirements are more requirements for the organizations leaders but should be encouraged throughout the organization as well.

Unfortunately for most organizations and people, Senge's ideas are easy in theory but hard in practice. I believe they are difficult to implement because once an organization hits a certain critical mass, the needs of the individual start to diverge from the needs of the organization and at certain organizational sizes a horizontal and efficient structure always seems to teeter on the brink of pure chaos.

For now, organizational design is an art and a science and needs constant innovation and more books like this one to help keep driving it forward until we can unlock the true secrets.

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## Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization, Peter M. Senge

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (Peter M. Senge 1990) is a book by Peter Senge, focusing on group problem solving using the systems thinking method in order to convert companies into learning organizations. The five disciplines represent approaches (theories and methods) for developing three core learning capabilities: fostering aspiration, developing reflective conversation, and understanding complexity.

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## Replicant33 says

Reading yet again in preparation for teaching using this book, among others, to assist in approaches to solving complex problems. I still have major issues with some of Senge's assertions - he is commonly viewed as a brilliant thinker who applied complexity theory to organizational management. However, his reduction to the day-to-day processes of organizations as "archetypes" and the "god's eye" view of the manager as separate from and controlling the organization by optimizing the action of these archetypes badly misrepresents the true nature of human organizations. Managers are part of the organization; the complex interactions that take place cannot be reduced to simple archetypes any more than the manager can be viewed as separate from yet somehow able to manipulate the functioning of the organization. Similarly, the whole discussion of explicit versus implicit knowledge displays his lack of understanding of the emergence of knowledge continuously through various and changing human interactions, whether involving the manager or not.

Finally, (and I could go on), Senge does not seem to grasp the complex nature of power relationships, ever-

changing and based far more on the ability to participate in discourse and solve problems than one's (or a group's) position on a hierarchy.

Nevertheless, the "Learning Organization" with its list of characteristics that any manager can put in his or her notebook and check off leaves most readers feeling like Senge has made the complex simple, and has provided an idiot's guide to managing complex organizations that will give them a leg up. It's bad science, bad organizational theory, and certainly not complexity theory - but it sure has sold a lot of books (and I still teach a class that uses much of this book as assigned reading for those very reasons).

Hopefully I'll be done plowing through those chapters again soon...or maybe I'll just find my reading notes from last time...

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## **Jack Vinson says**

This book isn't so much a knowledge management book as a tome on management philosophy. Senge has a lot of great ideas and thoughts throughout the book. There is the concept of leaders advocating vs. inquiring. The "what I say vs. what I do" idea of Espoused vs. In-use theories. The heart of the book is centered on five characteristics (disciplines) that organizations need in order to move into the next level of quality and competition.

I. Systems Thinking. This is the ability to see the patterns behind any behavior, whether it is in the company or on a much more personal level. Senge spends a lot of time describing the idea and giving examples of how systems thinking provides leverage to make significant changes. "Give me a lever long enough and I can move the world" is one of the many quotes here. Senge also defines several archetypes of systems that he encounters over and over again. The basic cycles are balancing processes and reinforcing processes.

A. Balancing process with delay. This is a simple cycle where an action in one direction eventually causes a reverse effect on the same variable. This is a fairly standard feedback loop with delay in the control world. It is interesting because the delay frequently makes people overreact when their first action appears to be ineffective.

B. Limits to growth. This is a pair of cycles. One reinforcing cycle represents growth, but is connected to a balancing cycle that reduces the effectiveness of the growth cycle.

C. Shifting the burden. This is archetype has paired balancing processes that affect a variable / problem. One process makes the problem go away temporarily. The other process digs at the heart of the problem but frequently has a delay, so that it is "easier" to use the temporary fix. This has a side reinforcing process that adversely affects the ability to employ the long-term solution. Best example is alcoholism where the alcoholic uses alcohol as a fix, but the longer she drinks the harder it is to stop.

D. Shifting the burden to the intervener. A special case where an external entity is the quick fix, slowly eroding the internal ability to solve the problem. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life."

E. Eroding goals. Another special case where the fix is to let a goal slip. This eases tension and sets up a downward spiral where the tension can only be relaxed by letting the fundamental goals slip.

F. Escalation. Two reinforcing processes linked by a common problem. This is the model used to describe arms races or price wars.

G. Success to the successful. A limited resource is doled out in greater proportion to the most "successful" user of the resource, leaving the other users short. This can quickly spiral out of control, leaving only one user.

H. Tragedy of the commons. A common, limited resource is used by many groups. While the overall usage is low, there is no problem. As all the users are successful, they demand more and more of the resource. As the

resource becomes the constraint, the tragedy is that the users do not see what is happening until too late. This is frequently found in land-use problems and was a likely cause of the dust bowl and over-grazing of African savannas.

I. Fixes that fail. This is basically a shifting the burden without a second, fundamental balancing loop. There are the easy fixes that also cause long-term problems. Examples include cutting the maintenance budget to meet some financial goal, which eventually leads to quality or other problems.

J. Growth and under-investment. This archetype has three cycles. A pair of balancing cycles limits a growth cycle. This is a type of Limits to growth where the balancing process is sort of a Shifting the burden.

All the archetypes are simple descriptions of problems that frequently occur in business, society, family, the environment, anywhere problems arise. Clearly, real systems are complex beyond description. The idea behind the archetypes is to

II. Personal Mastery. The ability to know oneself; how one reacts to situations and people. The ability to see how one's beliefs affect their environment. Being open to change and new ideas. Having a personal vision that causes internal tension and a desire to change and move in new directions.

III. Mental Models. Love of truth and openness are the goals to shoot for in this discipline. Understanding that we all have mental models and willingness to examine one's own along with those of the organization.

IV. Building Shared Vision. Connecting people by generating visions that integrate personal vision for life and for the organization into an organic, living whole.

V. Team Learning. The practiced discipline of learning together, developing the best plan for the group.

Having true dialog amongst colleagues. Increasing the collective intelligence above that of any one person in the room. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

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## **Adam says**

Stumbled upon a copy this week and decided to re-read. I found it more enjoyable now than I did when I read it the first time, perhaps because systems thinking has become such a core part of what we discuss in our company and with our clients.

Most of the texts that I read on systems thinking when I was in school and even today are written in a very 'smarter than you' tone; I think that one of the greatest features of this book is that its choice of language is very accessible.

I think that there are times when the writing became slightly redundant, but I did not mind as the examples that Senge gives are excellent. My favorite sections had to do with the presentation of the concept of 'creative tension' and how we often confuse the resulting 'emotional tension' with it, thus reacting to the wrong forces; this is very applicable to product development companies.

All in all, a tremendous work that holds up after all these years. Highly recommended.

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## **Neelesh Marik says**

This book is of biblical importance to any 'systems thinker' and/ or a life long learner, specifically in a organizational context as opposed to a lone ranger situation.



The book traces the endemic learning disabilities that plague most organizations, expounds on the fundamental laws of the fifth discipline, and describes typical ‘system archetypes’ that constitute dysfunctional patterns which impede performance.

Upon that foundation, it goes to describe each of the five disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Beyond just the core concepts of each discipline, there is an emergent synergism that weaves all five disciplines into an inter-connected whole.

This edition goes on to provide a practitioner's handbook for implementation: the impetus for change, strategies for learning organizations, the new role of leadership and the recipe for systems citizenship.

The appendices are very useful as they contain a full list of variants of the system archetypes, and a short snapshot of the ‘U process’ which is dealt with in greater detail in his next book ‘Presence’.

## Foad Ansari says

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## SeyedMahdi Hosseini says

1990-1999 թվականներին ՀՀ-ում ընդհանուր առմամբ 100 հազար անգամ ավելացել է օտարերկրացիների թիվը։ 1990 թվականին ՀՀ-ում ապրում էին 100 հազար օտարերկրացի, իսկ 1999 թվականին՝ 1 միլիոն 200 հազար օտարերկրացի։ 1990-1999 թվականներին ՀՀ-ում ապրել են 100 հազար օտարերկրացի, որոնցից 100 հազարը՝ օտարերկրացիներ են, որոնք ՀՀ-ում ապրում են 100 հազար օտարերկրացիների թվում։

## Jurgen Appelo says

Good ideas, but far too much stories and quasi-philosophical fluff. Could have been edited to one third of its size.

## Amanda Brinkmann says

Senge, along with Ackoff and Flood, are some of the great minds in the field of systems thinking and complexity. This book and the full integration and understanding of its content into Leadership and Organisational practice, should, in my opinion, be compulsory. The Learning Organisation is not some pie-in-the-sky, futuristic concept - it is a necessity in respect of Transformation so as to still exist as an organisation, given the rapid change, uncertainty and increased complexity that we live and manage within.

Within the active practice of being a Learning Organisation, Sustainability - from an authentic and systemic perspective - finds its place rather comfortably within the DNA of the organisation. Handle this change process correctly, involve everyone in your organisation, enroll them and make true sustainability - people, profit, planet - REAL and rewarded - and sit back and watch how productivity and morale improve, how innovations leads to improvement of the bottom line.

We have reached the Limits to Growth - and so conventional management/leadership practice, where the CEO or Board decide on some ridiculous and unachievable financial growth target, so as to satisfy their shareholders and to deliver on the HUGE incentive packages of the CEO's, is simply very last century. Such leadership leads to unwell, unhappy and demotivated employees, collective stress and creates a toxic business environment, typically exemplified by static thinking, rigid planning and processes, top-down structures, silos, destructive internal competition and the CMA [ cover my arse] syndrome being prevalent.

The Fifth Discipline - Systems thinking and design - brings everything together. I have mastered Systems Thinking and Design, am in flow at the highest levels of complexity and have a deep interest in learning as much as possible from the range of thinkers as well as about the related fields of study, such as behaviorism, socio-psychology, various economic principles.

I say again - Senge's revised edition of The Fifth Discipline is a core book that will open up a whole new world of possibilities for those who have not been exposed to systems thinking and the learning organisation; or if they have, and are not practicing the principles, then the book should be read, slowly and systematically, notes made and the principles understood, internalised and practiced.

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## Obeida Takriti says

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