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Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Broadway Business, 1997.

I was dreaming to read this book for several years and I found it excellent for clarity, content, and examples used by the author. I had moved through the book with lightning speed. I was able to remember main ideas due to the multiple details offered by the author which I found in the cases. Often, the authors of similar books draw banal examples. It was a nice surprise for me when I did not find any over-applied solutions in the book. I found the book very useful and inspiring. I never felt bored when reading it and I am very glad that I read it.

The first part of the book is divided into three sections and plays the role of introduction. It discusses the concept of lever meaning that small efforts can stimulate big differences in an organization. Another important idea introduced by the author is that there are five core disciplines of a learning organization, namely: personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Personal mastery is about deepening personal vision and focusing energy on achievement of a goal. This discipline is designed for clarification of significant details and seeing the objective reality. Mental models are developed to help people understand the internal side of the world and our stereotypes. Building shared vision is a discipline that stimulates development of enrollment and genuine commitment in a team in contrast with compliance that is typical for authoritarian leadership style. Team learning is based on the ability to think together as a team. Systems thinking is referred as the fifth discipline meaning that usually individuals fail to see the whole pattern paying much attention to minor details.

Senge stated that many organizations, including good ones, have learning deficiency. Most of the organizations can find solutions of the problems they faced, but only few of them are able to develop organizational culture fostering growth. Repetition of the mistakes made in the past lead to even bigger future collapses in comparison with previous years. Interestingly, an outer side of an organization can be quite presentable showing growth of sales and profits while it may contain the seeds of decay inside of it due to the lack of ability to accumulate new knowledge.

The main stress made by Senge was the importance of cultivation of a learning organization. To my mind, this book is more philosophic than other business-related books. I think that this book can be recommended to those who are interested to deepen his or her knowledge of leadership in business rather than a casual reader. The book may help one become more insightful leader of an organization because it challenges one's intellectual potential and perceived leadership qualities. The second part of the book relates a description of typical learning disabilities that are the common causes of organizational failure. Senge outlined seven learning disabilities as follows: “ I am my position”, “ the enemy is out there”, the illusion of taking charge, the fixation on events, parable of the boiled frog, the delusion of learning from experience, and the myth of the management team. When I read and analyzed the most typical mistakes made by leaders and employees, I realized that the majority of organizations may encounter the problems of irresponsibility inherent in “ I am my position” and “ the enemy is out there”.

Illusions connected with narrow thinking and inability of a leader to be

pragmatic can cause a lot of harm to organizations. When I read about the features of bad leadership I felt I was able make an example from real life for each learning disability. I was amazed by the disability called “ parable of the boiled frog” which described adaptation to changes. People, as well as frogs, can respond to immediate events, but ignore gradual changes.

The concepts outlined in the book can be applied not only to business. They could be also applied to any other sphere of human activity. “ The myth of the management team” which is another common mistake made by leaders made me thought about myself in a different way. I realized that often I tried to protect myself pretending smart and wise that was not correct. After reading this book I understood that lack of knowledge is not shameful. It was also interesting to get to know and analyze the concept of “ the delusion of learning from experience”. Interestingly, people can rare experience the consequences of their own important decisions. Meanwhile, the consequences of the most important decisions can stretch over years and even decades. For example, decisions related R&D, manufacture, and marketing spheres.

I was particularly amazed by the chapter 4 where there were 11 laws of the fifth discipline described. The laws represented a shift from traditional linear way of thinking. The laws described by Senge can be applied to any sphere of life, not only in business. To my opinion, among the most important laws are as follows: the causes of today’s problems are in decisions made yesterday, behavior can grow better before growing worse, faster is slower, big results may come from small changes, and the difference between the cause and effect in time and space. These laws made me think about

philosophical foundation of any process.

The third part of the book is devoted to the elaboration of the four disciplines. I was thrilled by the discussion of mental models and the role played by them in communication. The idea that one's mental models can effect one's actions in different ways was completely new for me. Also, this part of the book contains basic ideas helping individuals develop healthy and fruitful working relationships in an organization.

The author also explained the concept of “beer game”. Senge revealed several lessons resulting from the way of thinking, namely: structure influence behavior, structure is subtle in human system, and leverage can be derived from new way of thinking. I understood that the majority of organizations fail because of internal obstacles more often rather than resulting from external attacks. The first lesson of beer game was that different people tend to produce similar results if placed in the same system. Success of the participants of beer game depends on each of them and is impossible without success of others. Structure is subtle meaning that people tend to translate their goals, perceptions, norms, and rules into actions reflecting the process of decision making. It was interesting for me to get to know that human systems usually contain potential leverage derived from new way of thinking. It means that people possess potential for resolving problems that occur, but they usually fail to do so because they do not realize the way the instability was created.

Thus, people do not realize that their actions may cause problems in an organization. When problems arise they tend to blame other people declining responsibility and seeking out “enemy”. Being “proactive” in this case

can make things worse. It is impossible to learn from experience in this situation because the consequences of their actions can be found elsewhere. Usually, members of different teams tend to blame each other in this situation that hampers the opportunity to learn from a situation.

In the fourth part of the book chapter eighteen made a profound impression on me. In this chapter Senge focused on moral price one should pay to become a leader. He emphasized that a leader is one who is subject to continuous improvement. The work of a leader is to redesign the organization on a continuous basis. The author differentiates between good and bad leaders. The quality of a leader also depends on the relationships with other people. For example, a bad leader is despised by people while a good leader is praised. The work of a good leader is invisible because a good leader emphasizes and appreciates the results of team work.

This part of the book turned my perception of learning organization over because I reconsidered my principles cardinally. Senge stated that real learning organization appreciate openness meaning that the ideas of all system participants can be taken into account rather than considering the point of view of a leader only. I worked for several organizations where this tendency could be observed. It seems that such approach is outdated. Good ideas can be generated by ordinary workers rather than top managers only. Another important outcome was that people should be encouraged to risk-taking behavior. One can never know whether he or she was right or wrong until he or she take actions. However, taking actions is connected with the risk of making mistakes. Thus, a good leader should accept the idea that it is natural to make mistakes.

Another idea of this part of the book is that contemporary organizations tend to find balance between work and family life. To my mind this is an evolutionary approach used in resolving a dilemma between work and family. The author suggested the opportunity of learning every time either one is in his or her working place or in a family circle. Creating teams at work and in a family will allow not separation of work and family helping make strong teams anywhere.

Also, the author described microworlds which help test assumptions and reveal inconsistencies. Senge concluded that people in organizations can learn best through their own experience only. He outlined a conception of “learning through doing” which is one of the most important concepts in resolving systemic issues. This concept can be applied through using microworlds which help make experiments and forecast the consequences of the decisions made. Microworlds also help discover conflicting moments of complex issues related team work. Sometimes experiments connected with using microworlds systems help see the whole picture and linearity of human thinking. I even caught myself pondering over how linear my own way of thinking was in some moments of my life.

The main ideas of the author were that people are capable of creating their reality, any problems can be solved, and people have the power to control their lives and destinies. The main outcome of the book is that organizations striving for continuous growth have to adopt a culture of continuous learning in order to develop a sustainable advantage. The main task of good leaders in the organizations is to create an environment inspiring for continuous individual and collective learning. Learning organizations were represented

as alternative to authoritarian organizations requiring a shift in mind among their members.

Another important outcome was that people nature is to feel a part of some community that can be used in building a successful organization. It is important to make people feel that they are useful; help shift from “ I am my own position” to awareness of the fact that they are the active participants of organizational process; encourage risk-taking and creative behavior. Peter Senge suggested the way of how to put the systems theory to work. Systems thinking is the core approach used by the author offering the way of how separated parts of any system can be integrated with maximum advantage for an organization. Systems theory offered a way to see the whole picture while also addressing the interrelationships between the parts of the system.

The book made me ponder over many things. First, people are learners by nature and a true leader must support this craving for knowledge. The second important outcome is that a good leader should try to connect personal growth with professional growth of people in an organization for attainment of better results. The third main idea is that one can build learning organization through organizing continuous learning process in an organization. Also, I understood that it is easy to do because people re-create themselves through learning and get the power to do something they were unable to do before they know they can.

Works Cited

Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Broadway Business, 1997. Print.