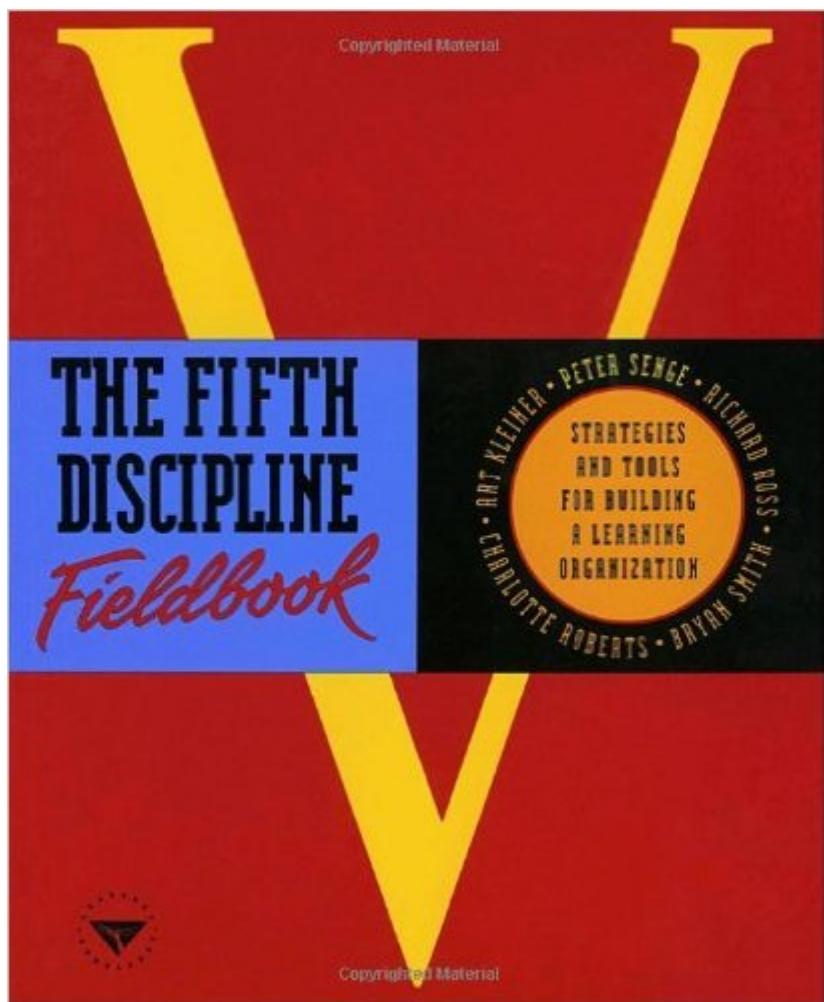


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The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies And Tools For Building A Learning Organization



Synopsis

Senge's best-selling *The Fifth Discipline* led *Business Week* to dub him the "new guru" of the corporate world; here he offers executives a step-by-step guide to building "learning organizations" of their own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a collection of theoretical summaries, reports, analyses, and strategies all quite useful to anyone interested in generating some thinking and action around change. The team of five writers (Peter Senge, Richard Ross, Bryan Smith, Charlotte Roberts, and Art Kleiner) provide some original work, but also serve as editors to a vast quantity of material drawn from practitioners, theorists, and writers in the field of organizational improvement. According to Senge, "great teams are learning organizations - groups of people who, over time, enhance their capacity to create what they truly desire to create." (p.18) This book is really about creating and building great teams. The learning organization develops its ability to reflect on, discuss, question, and change its current and past practices. To do this, people and groups in the organization need to meaningfully pursue the study and practice of the five disciplines - personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. The learning organization - Senge's vision for the productive, competitive, and efficient institutions of the future - is in a continuous state of change. Four fundamental questions continuously serve to check and guide a group's learning and improvement (see page 49): (1) Do you continuously test your experiences? ("Are you willing to examine and

challenge your sacred cows - not just during crises, but in good times?"") (2) Are you producing knowledge? ("Knowledge, in this case, means the capacity for effective action.") (3) Is knowledge shared? ("Is it accessible to all of the organization's members?") (4) Is the learning relevant? ("Is this learning aimed at the organization's core purpose?") If these questions represent the organization's compass, the five disciplines are its map.

Senge's second serving of the Learning Organization is filled with practical tips and real-life examples from companies and organizations that have embraced the teachings of the Learning Organization successfully. The Book is a collaboration of several writers who do a superb job of unraveling the web that is the learning organization. At times, it may seem to the reader that the book is a labyrinth of disjointed concepts and ideas. However, if you have read 'The Fifth Discipline' you will find no problems following the concepts introduced. In fact, you will even understand why the writers have chosen to introduce them in that fashion. If you have not read "The Fifth Discipline", do not despair, it will take a little longer to get 'the whole picture'. The Book is divided into 8 main sections: 1) Getting Started addresses the basic concepts and ideas of the Learning Organization. 2) Systems Thinking (the fifth discipline) - Many people have argued that Senge should have delegated the fifth discipline until the end, however, without Systems Thinking, your vision is disjointed and incomplete. 3) Personal Mastery covers the area of individual development and learning. The chapters here are among the most valuable in the area of self-growth and self-improvement. 4) Mental Models - These are the pictures that you have in your head which represent reality. 5) Shared Vision - You've seen the whole picture, you've developed and you understand how you see the world. Now you need to find a common cause with the rest of the people in your organization, something that you all work for. 6) Team Learning - As you work with other people in teams or groups, you need to pass the stuff that you have learnt and the wisdom you've acquired to others.

All too often, I find myself acting cynically about my field and ready to dismiss just about anything as mediocre, no matter how popular or praised. Well, this is one book that I think is really excellent - for content, for clarity, for sincerity, for the stories reported in it. When I plow through a business book, I try to see if I can remember the central ideas, the essence of what the author has to say from the mass of details and stories that make up every business book. Most often, they are appallingly banal and pathetically over-applied, touted as able to solve just about every problem, in particular if a fee is paid to the authors to come and talk about it in person. I was prepared to treat this book the

same way, and was simply delighted to find a truly excellent and useful book. And gee, I am glad that I can get inspired by a book in my chosen field, rather than bored! As I see it, this book has three principal ideas. First, we must think of organizations and their missions as complex systems rather than as conglomerations of isolated problems. It is pitch for the development of a holistic view - how everything interacts and what factors act upon what other factors. This is an analytical tool that can pinpoint what should be done, breaking mental habits of looking only at the bottom line of sales revenues, for example, rather than the need to provide better service or delivery times. Second, employees must be empowered to make their own decisions locally, requiring honesty and openness throughout the organization as standard practice. This enables them to question and learn, not just individually but as part of a unified team, hence the subtitle of a learning organization. Mistakes are part of this process and should be allowed as valid experiments.

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