

Fact-File 24: Looking at Change... through the lens of the 5 Disciplines



Extract from *The Learning-Centred Leadership Series: Module 3*

Learning to Lead Change...

When you boil it down, leadership is largely about leading people through change. Leaders play a critical role in preparing people for it, then guiding them through it. No matter what your specific job,



all managers now need to be more change-adept. In a word, we all need to be change leaders.

Whatever kind of change challenges you face, whether they're inside your own team or across the whole organisation, leaders need tools, models and frameworks to help them do their change-work.

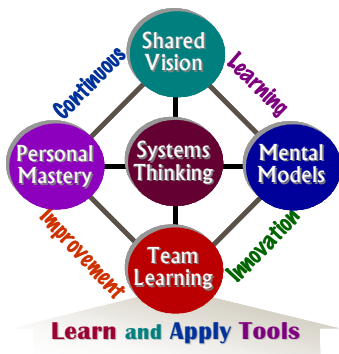
This fact-file looks at leading change through the lens of the 5 Disciplines – *Shared Vision, Mental Models, Personal Mastery, Team Learning and Systems Thinking* – first codified by Peter Senge, the populariser of *The Learning Organisation*.

The Lens of the 5 Disciplines

The 5 Disciplines give leaders a useful framework to build change capability, as well as understand both the dynamics of – and the practices behind – planning and running effective change processes. Each Discipline consists of:

- A set of principles and practices to build your change leadership capability...
- *Guiding ideas*, concepts and tools to assist in bringing the disciplines to life when you apply them to real change challenges...

Five Learning Disciplines



The 5 Disciplines also offer a useful way to see where and why change efforts fail or succeed.

While they don't lead to anything like a simple, 5-step model for 'doing' trouble-free change, they do provide crucial

perspectives and common leverage points for avoiding many of the common pitfalls.

In our Leading Change Forums, we describe the 5 disciplines as lenses through which to view *what's going on, what needs to go on* and *what can go wrong*, with your change process. As you change lenses, you can view your change from a different angle and see new possibilities – things you can do – as well as and things you didn't do...

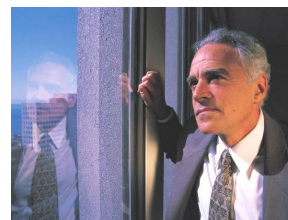
The 1st Discipline: Shared Vision

Shared Vision is probably the most useful tool change leaders have at their disposal.

Anytime you change something, you propose something new. Even if the change is better, the natural tendency is to resist or ignore it until someone helps us see the destination more clearly and we warm up to the significance of being there. *This is the work a good vision does.*

The key vision question, says Senge, is '*What do we want to create together?*'. When a team or an entire organisation collectively creates a shared vision (along with guiding principles and practices to get them there), it provides:

- A common focus, a sense of mutual purpose and acts as a catalyst for committed action.
- A way to build-up common understanding, to unleash ideals and aspirations and to unearth reservations and resistances



Many people nod knowingly when shared vision gets mentioned. But this concept isn't just a rehash of tired, old vision and mission statements.

Most change efforts pay lip service to the idea of having a vision of change, but gloss over or rush through the 'shared' bit, which usually results in an imposed vision many can't relate to.

If you want a truly shared vision there's few other ways than to get lots of people sharing their ideas of what the vision should be and their aspirations for the future are.

Taking the time to involve everyone in having the conversations needed to shape a truly shared vision may sound a bit cumbersome but the pay-back in terms of increasing buy-in, participation and reducing resistance is well worth the effort.

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The 2nd Discipline: Mental Models

Mental Models - beliefs, values, mind-sets and assumptions that dictate the way we think and act - are the biggest barrier to successful change and one of the keys to unlocking its secrets.

Because thinking controls our actions and behaviour to such a large extent, mental models offer the biggest leverage point for leaders looking to create deep and self-sustaining change. That's why '*mental model management*', as Senge says, "*discovering them, testing their validity, and improving them - can be a breakthrough concept.*"



Why do so many good change ideas never get put into practice? Because they tend to bump up against deep-seated beliefs that limit us to the old,

familiar ways of thinking and acting. This comes across as creeping complacency, which can kill off a change effort off before it even starts.

Often we still think the same old way because no-one has shown us a different way. Until we find new guiding ideas and principles to replace the old mental models, very little is likely to change.

Getting in touch with the thinking going on about change, challenging assumptions, questioning the "prevailing wisdom", values, culture and mental models and encouraging people to rethink or reframe are all essential to success. It's also essential for understanding and lessening deeply held but unexpressed reasons for resistance.

The limits that block change initiatives have a lot more to do with the mental models embedded in the culture than you think. Mental modelling involves change leaders in making their own mental models of change clearer, as well as understanding how others around them think.

The 3rd Discipline: Personal Mastery

To change things on the outside, leaders need to first make personal changes on the inside. These often need to come before any organisation changes they may want to make.

This is the territory of *Personal Mastery* - perhaps the most elusive of Senge's Learning Disciplines

because it is centrally to do with personal work on our inner-selves. As Peter Senge says of senior managers (but it applies equally well to all of us): "*We're pretty good at directing others to change, but not so great at changing ourselves*" (*The Dance of Change* p. 8)

Many managers fixate on planning details of the new procedures, the new technology or the tasks needed to implement the change process itself - and neglect the most important element - people.

In most workplaces, we still focus on 'functional competencies' people need to manage change - things like planning, organising, analysing and co-ordinating. But change leadership more often relies on other competencies like: visioning, concept-shifting, critical reflection, facilitation, collaboration, trust-building and teamwork

Personal Mastery is about 'self-awareness' - how much we know about the impact our behaviour has on others, as well as the change process itself. It's the human face of change. It means:

- Mastering the skills to manage change relationships sensitively
- Being willing to have our own beliefs and values challenged
- Ensuring our change actions and behaviours are authentic, congruent and principled
- Connecting to the emotional side of change.

The 4th Discipline: Team Learning

Change generally happens when teams start to '*think together*' - developing the critical reflection, inquiry and discussion skills to conduct more skillful conversations that lead to better decisions and common commitments to action.

The conversations connected with the discipline of Team Learning enable people to have open dialogues about their change fears and feelings, discuss complex and conflictive issues and share mental models, perspectives, guiding ideas and concepts.

Working well with change teams is a major part of the job change leaders do. Leaders need to help change teams find ways of:

- Working and learning together across current workgroup boundaries

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- ❑ Helping people work together on joint change activities and expanding the team's learning-for-change capabilities
- ❑ Improving how team members interact with each other and talk together about the changes they're working on
- ❑ Cultivating experimental mind-sets – sparked by curiosity and risk-taking and determination to learn (or un-learn) from each change
- ❑ Creating environments that encourage them to think creatively and innovate



- ❑ You can't improve one system and not consider the blockages presented by current behaviours and other adjoining systems
- ❑ You can't change decision-making patterns or management structures without changing roles, relationships and job designs

Systems Thinking helps teams unravel the often hidden subtleties, flow-ons, influences and intended/unintended consequences of change. Leaders use Systems Thinking Maps to:

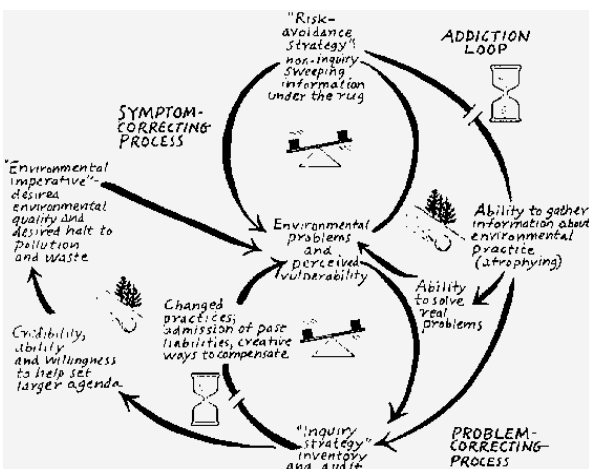
- ❑ Analyse situations, problems, causes and courses of action to find better (and often not obvious) leverage points in a system
- ❑ See new ways to see what's going on with complex change, discover more complete interconnections and get new insights into the web of contributing factors calling for change
- ❑ Choose better change options and test out the consequences of different options

The 5th Discipline: Systems Thinking

Many change challenges and problems plaguing us today are complex. They involve multiple factors and are partly the result of actions taken in the past to 'quick-fix' them.

Systems Thinking is the discipline to understand, manage and sustain change. It enables us to better see the interrelationships that underlie complex change situations rather than simplistic (and inaccurate) linear cause-effect chains.

When you think systemically about any change you're contemplating, you begin to see you can't change one thing in a system without it affecting everything else. For example:



Senge sees *Systems Thinking* as the 5th Discipline, because it's the one that fuses the others all together.

"The cornerstone of any learning organisation is the fifth Discipline - systems thinking. Without systems thinking each of the disciplines would be isolated ...The fifth discipline integrates them to form the whole system... However, the converse is also true - systems thinking cannot be achieved without the other core disciplines: personal mastery, team learning, mental models and shared vision. All of these disciplines are needed to successfully implement systems thinking." *Peter Senge*

According to Senge, leaders in learning organisations learn to thrive on change and constantly innovate by methodically cultivating these 5 Disciplines. They may never be fully mastered, but learning-centred leaders, teams and organisations practise them continuously.



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- ❑ You can't change one procedure without that affecting other systems and procedures