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**OL 602 – Self, Systems and
Leadership**

Leadership an Art or Science?

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Abstract

Leadership is both an art and a science. It is an art because its very nature is random and based upon each individual's own unique experience. It is beautiful to the beholder and understood only by some. Yet, it is also like science; performing functions, using tools based upon theories and formulas--yielding expected outcomes and desired results. True learning organizations are made out of leaders who understand the science of it and be artists; molding members of their organization into team members who get the picture of how the systems work and how to yield positive results. Peter Singe's *Fifth Discipline* gives leaders of the theories in the science of leadership and the tools, canvas awareness and inspiration of leading an effective learning organization.

As it is with many forms of art, order is created out of a randomness of disorderly events. Leaders deal with a similar randomness and create order. Artisans select and create qualitative perceptions, designing and arranging them in a manner that elicits a response from those involved or observing. I believe all leadership theories are based upon qualitative perception. Artists and leaders alike, look for who, what, where, when and why and to some extent become a helper, student, coach and a teacher, as they broaden perspectives, move, touch and inspire those directly and indirectly involved.

Leadership is a social science. It is social, because it deals with people, and a science because it involves quantitative perceptions used to discover laws and processes that are found to be universally true in nature.

As it is in science, adapting a theory to obtain an expected outcome must contain variables that meet or closely meet the needs of the subject, individual or group's perceptions, matching those of a theory (or theories) implemented. If the variables match a leadership model, applying a formula and theory (or theories) properly, should yield a desired result(s).

As it is with any social science, nothing will yield an exact- duplicated response, because people may be similar in make-up, but different in belief systems that in-turn, directly affect perception and the net response. But for the most part, scientist-leaders who study and practicing leadership principles and theories will yield a stronger and more fluent organization.

As Peter Singe indicates in his *Fifth Discipline*, there are systems and patterns in every organization that leaders need to be conscience of. So it is also that way with science. Developing an understanding of systems and seeing how they fit into the whole gives leaders in an organization tools to make it grow and prosper.

Leadership--itself is comprised of two main components: leaders and followers. Every person is a leader at some point in his or her lives--at varying degrees and in differing circumstances. Likewise, every person will also be a follower in varying degrees and circumstances. Leadership is never a constant and is a phenomenon that is forever changing.

However, by having an understanding of Singe's five disciplines: Systems Thinking, Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision and Team Learning organizations and leaders within them can have a competitive edge--accomplished through greater leadership abilities. Also, by avoiding falling into the trap the common learning disabilities of organizations, as discussed in Singe's *Fifth Discipline*, organizations can be strengthened and prosper through truly effective leadership.

Leaders need to learn how get "buy-in" from key members within their organization. This art of having shared vision will help the organization pursue their goals as a whole and yield excellence and constant learning. Shared vision takes the organization to the places it wishes to reach at a quicker and more efficient rate, than without it.

Effective leadership in an organization requires what Singe refers to as "personal mastery." Leaders develop the science of personal mastery or a high level of proficiency, when they continually focus and refocus on the vision. They must be committed to honesty and able to hold creative tension. Having these traits leads to deeper awareness and greater ability to lead in a changing environment, generating energy and ideas for change.

Mental models are extremely powerful components of an organization that leaders need to become aware of. Mental models are simply internal-cognitive images of how individuals or organizations see and understand a company or its systems. Mental models can limit organizations in ways of thinking and acting.

Mental models need to be discovered and tested for validity, in doing so; organizations can make the necessary changes to move forward and to grow.

All members in a true-learning organization must be instilled with the belief that they “are not their positions.” They must believe they are a valuable to their organization and see how they play a powerful and vital role in the organization, itself. They must be empowered and understand that their responsibilities truly do yield large results. Effective leaders will help the members of their organizations to see that they are not their position, but so much more.

Leaders in a learning organization have mastered the art of not being fixated on events and also understand that experience is a great way to learn, however, it truly takes years to see long-term effects of decisions. By not being fixated on events, leaders and members of the organization will not be distracted from seeing long-term patterns and understanding them in order to keep the organization moving forward. Learning from experience is only a delusion, which may keep leaders from making the best decisions to move forward with. Leaders must be consistently learning and cognizant of the processes and open-minded.

When learning organizations organize the processes of learning as a team, they can more effectively create the results its members want, yielding the talents of individuals of the team. The IQ of a team can be higher than that of its individual members. Teams must be the key-learning units in an effective organization.

Mastering the art of leadership in a learning organization can be a challenge. Having an understanding of Singe’s five disciplines helps leaders get a view of the systems in their organizations and empower members to avoid common disabilities that burden the organization with slower growth and less effectiveness. When leaders understand the science of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning they can take their organization from mediocre to one that learns, grows and prospers.

