

**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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**THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION:
CONCEPT AND APPLICATION**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION: CONCEPT AND APPLICATION

by

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ABSTRACT

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As we approach the 21st century, we are entering into a new era in the history of mankind. The Industrial Age is giving way to the Information Age. The only thing certain about that future is that it will change, and it will present organizations with an ever-increasing rate of change. We are on the leading edge of a new era of dramatic transformation and change that will deeply affect our organizational structures. Only the so-called "learning organizations," those that are able to continually transform themselves to better collect, manage, and use knowledge, will be able to thrive and prosper during these times of rapid change. This paper explores the five disciplines or skills that characterize a learning organization--systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning--and the leadership traits and competencies necessary to bring them into being. A highly successful governmental organization, the Seattle Engineer District, is then examined as a case-study of an organization that is on the path to becoming a learning organization.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE FUTURE IS CHANGE.....	2
THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION.....	4
Systems Thinking.....	7
Personal Mastery.....	7
Mental Models.....	8
Shared Vision.....	9
Team Learning.....	10
LEARNING LEADER SKILLS.....	11
Systems Thinking.....	13
Personal Mastery.....	14
Mental Models.....	15
Shared Vision.....	17
Team Learning.....	17
SEATTLE ENGINEER DISTRICT.....	19
Systems Thinking.....	20
Personal Mastery.....	21
Mental Models.....	22
Shared Vision.....	23
Team Learning.....	24
CONCLUSIONS.....	26
ENDNOTES.....	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	35

INTRODUCTION

The future environment has often been described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. The only thing certain about the future is that it will change, and it will present organizations with an ever-increasing rate of change. This unprecedented change will dramatically impact our organizational structures. It is my belief that only "learning organizations"-- organizations skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying their behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights¹ --will be able to thrive and prosper during these times of rapid change. These learning organizations must be lead by learning leaders with the traits and competencies to best guide their organizations through change. This paper will begin by examining the future that is rushing headlong towards us. It will then explain why becoming a learning organization is so essential, and examine the key characteristics of a learning organization. Next, the senior leadership skills essential to developing learning organizations will be explored. Finally, a highly-successful governmental organization, the Seattle Engineer District, will be examined as a case-study of an organization that is on the path to becoming a learning organization.

THE FUTURE IS CHANGE

As we approach the 21st century, we are entering into a new era in the history of mankind. The Industrial Age is giving way to the Information Age. The Information Age will be characterized by continuous, overlapping change.² This period of time will produce more change for humanity than any previous era in history.³ Ever-increasing change in this new age will be inevitable and will become the hallmark of our lives.⁴ Nothing will set today's moment in history apart from earlier periods more strikingly than the acceleration of change. People already have a definite sense that events in their lives are moving faster and the pace will only increase in the coming years.⁵

The magnitude and rate of future change will represent both a quantitative and qualitative shift from our present paradigms in terms of volume, speed, momentum, complexity, and ambiguity. Volume refers to the number of changes that we face. It is higher now than at any previous point in human history.⁶ The total amount of information in the world is said to be doubling every 16 months or less. The speed of change is also accelerating. The microprocessor has exponentially expanded our ability to collect, analyze, manipulate, and communicate

information and is making everything in the developed world move faster.⁷

The volume and speed of change combine to produce the effect of momentum. The momentum of change can be measured by analyzing how long people have to implement a change and the length of time before another change becomes necessary.⁸ Clearly, the days when one could learn a profession or trade with the expectation of a lifetime of practice and employment are gone. Today's solutions have a shorter shelf-life than ever before.⁹

The complexity of change today is far greater than in years past. Change is not a discrete event that occurs in a linear progression, rather it unfolds on many different levels and at varying speeds simultaneously.¹⁰ Increasing interdependence and competition for limited resources are just two of many factors making change today more complex.¹¹ The Information Age will be marked not only by increased detail complexity with many more variables, but also more dynamic complexity where cause and effect relationships are more subtle.¹² Finally, this future of change will be characterized by ambiguity resulting from the multitude of unknowns, vagueness,¹³ and chaos that we face.¹³

THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

We are on the leading edge of a new era of dramatic transformation and change that will deeply affect our organizational structures. Over the past 10 years significant economic, social, and technological changes of increasing intensity have dramatically altered our world. "Dinosaur"-like organizations with "pea-sized brains" that flourished in the Industrial Age will not survive in the faster, information-thick atmosphere of rapid change and intense competition of the Information Age. Only those "dinosaurs" that can transform themselves into more intelligent and proficient beings will survive. The new organization that evolves will display greater knowledge, flexibility, speed, power, and learning ability to better confront the rapid change in their new environment. The law of the "survival of the fittest" is quickly being transformed into the survival of the "fittest-to-learn".¹⁴ In today's dynamic, competitive environment, an organization's ability to learn is critical to its survival.¹⁵

It is becoming increasingly clear that the knowledge, strategies, leadership, and technology of yesterday will not lead to success in tomorrow's world. Most of the "excellent" companies highlighted in the popular book In Search of Excellence

have now dropped from their high ratings or disappeared altogether because they could not transform to maintain and sustain their excellence.¹⁶ The most successful organizations in the new era will be something called a "learning organization."¹⁷

A learning organization is an organization that is continually transforming itself to better collect, manage, and use knowledge for corporate success.¹⁸ Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire. Learning organizations are able to develop an organizational capacity for doing something new. They can intentionally build the capacity they need to transform and reinvent themselves to survive in a changing environment.¹⁹ A learning organization treats the unexpected as an opportunity to learn.²⁰ The hallmark of a learning organization is a sustained capacity to learn and to change.²¹

Learning organizations recognize that in the Information Age, knowledge will be the key raw material for wealth creation. Knowledge will become more important than financial resources, market position, technology, or any other single company asset. Knowledge is not just another resource alongside the traditional factors of production such as land, labor, and capital. It will

become the most important resource used in performing work in the new era. The knowledge that exists in an organization will be used to create a differential advantage and a competitive edge in the market place.²²

In a knowledge-based economy, the "knowledge worker" is the single greatest corporate asset. Highly educated and highly skilled employees at all levels in the organization, knowledge workers are the critical core of the company and the essence of the business from which all revenues flow. Unlike other assets of a company which lose value over time, the know-how of Information Age employees will actually increase in value when used and practiced.²³ In the knowledge era, learning will be the new form of labor and the heart of productive activity. Learning and being productive will be one and the same thing.²⁴

The core of a learning organization is based on the energy and synergy provided when five learning skills or disciplines converge. Each is critical to the other's success and each provides a vital dimension in building an organization that can truly learn to continually enhance its capacity to realize its highest aspirations. These five learning disciplines are systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning.²⁵

Systems Thinking. Systems thinking is the cornerstone of a learning organization.²⁶ The essence of systems thinking lies in a shift of the mind. Systems thinking is seeing the whole, a shift from seeing only parts.²⁷ Systems thinking enables one to see interrelationships rather than linear cause and effect chains. It enables us to see the processes of change rather than just snapshots.²⁸

From an early age we are taught to fragment and break apart problems. This appears to make complex tasks and problems more manageable, but we pay an enormous hidden price. We lose our intrinsic sense of connection to the larger whole.²⁹ In truth, however, the defining characteristic of a system is that it cannot be understood as a function of its isolated components.³⁰

Through systems thinking, learning organizations have a sense of their interconnectedness and interdependence with their surroundings. Systems thinking enables one to understand that changes, planned or unplanned, in one part of the organization can affect other parts of the organization with surprising, often negative consequences.³¹

Personal Mastery. Personal mastery refers to a special level of proficiency, like that of a master craftsman, committed to lifelong learning so as to continually improve and perfect his

skills. Personal mastery is an essential cornerstone of a learning organization since an organization's commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of each individual member.³²

Personal mastery entails a commitment to continuous learning at all levels of the organization. This includes pervasive support for any kind of developmental experience for members of the organization. Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning, but without it no organizational learning can occur.³³ The learning organization exudes a palpable sense that one is never finished learning and practicing, akin to the tradition of the Samurai, who never completes his quest for perfection.³⁴ People with high levels of personal mastery are continually expanding their ability to create the results they truly seek. Their quest for continual learning provides the spirit for the learning organization.³⁵

Mental Models. Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Mental models can be as simple as the generalization that "all people are untrustworthy," or as complex as the latest theories on

organizational dynamics. They are important because they shape our behavior and our judgments.³⁶

Often we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the affects they have on our behavior.³⁷ Mental models of what can and cannot be done in different situations vary tremendously from person to person, and are often deeply entrenched and difficult to change. As a result, new insights often fail to get put into practice because they conflict with existing mental models.³⁸

The discipline of working with mental models starts with the individual and organization turning the mirror inward, and learning how to unearth internal pictures of the world, bring them to the surface, and hold them up to rigorous scrutiny. It also includes the ability to balance inquiry and advocacy, allowing people to expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others.³⁹ When advocacy and inquiry are combined, the goal is no longer to win the argument, but to find the best argument. When there is inquiry and advocacy, creative outcomes are much more likely.⁴⁰

Shared Vision. The practice of shared vision involves the skills of developing a shared picture of the desired future that can foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than mere

compliance. Genuine commitment is rare in today's organizations because most lack a shared vision. Most of what passes for commitment is really compliance. Committed workers have the energy to do whatever it takes to make their vision real. Compliant workers do only what is expected of them.⁴¹ In the past about 80% of most jobs involved compliance with clearly developed rules and procedures, and only about 20% involved judgment. In the Information Age these percentages will be reversed.⁴²

A shared vision provides the members of an organization with the stars to steer by.⁴³ It reflects the governing ideas behind an organization - the purpose, mission, core values, and desired future. In the 1960s, putting a man on the moon by the end of the decade, became a widely shared vision at NASA that led to countless acts of courage and sacrifice until the vision was made reality.⁴⁴

Shared vision is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning. Without a pull toward a shared goal which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of the status quo can be overwhelming.

Team Learning. The discipline or skill of team learning focuses on the process of aligning and developing the capacity of

a team to create the learning and the results that its members truly desire.⁴⁵ Collectively, we can be more intelligent than we are individually.⁴⁶ Successful teams learn how to best tap the potential of many minds in order to become more intelligent than one mind.

Alignment is a necessary condition before team learning can be effectively practiced. An aligned team has a commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and an understanding of how to complement one another's efforts. Thus an aligned team, like a great jazz ensemble or a championship basketball team, has little wasted energy or effort.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, however, such teamwork is not natural in our "Lone Ranger" culture, except in sports.⁴⁸

Talented individuals alone will not have the synergy necessary to excel in the Information Age where almost all important business decisions will be made by teams. Effective team learning will result in more profitable decisions and actions in the long run.⁴⁹

LEARNING LEADER SKILLS

I believe that in the Information Age, only the learning organization with the skills of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning will be capable of thriving in an era characterized by continuous,

overlapping, and an ever-increasing rate of change. I also firmly believe that senior leadership must play a key role in creating a learning organization.

Learning organizations demand a new view of leadership. This new view centers on leaders who are skillful facilitators of collaborative learning capable of developing learning teams whose responsibility is to create and sustain learning organizations.⁵⁰ The leader of the future will be less like a boss and more like a coach.⁵¹ The executive leader of a learning organization will create the conditions that allow his employees to move from a "change fragile" to a "change agile" state.⁵² Executive leadership behaviors, traits, and competencies that have proven successful in traditional, hierarchical organizations must give way to the new learning leader skills.

In addition to providing a framework for this learning organization itself, the five skills or disciplines outlined above also provide a framework for developing the capacity to lead learning organizations. Systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning might just as well be called the leadership disciplines as the learning disciplines. I believe that those who excel in these areas will be the natural leaders of learning organizations.

Systems Thinking. The learning leader must be a systems thinker and continually seek to understand the system as a whole. The traditional approach is to fragment a problem into its component pieces and seek to optimize each, then synthesize the pieces back into the whole. Three blind men examining different parts of the same elephant, each understand their piece clearly, but none understand how the pieces fit together. Some issues can only be understood by looking at the whole system.⁵³

Learning leaders seeks input from people at all levels of the hierarchy and considers the merits of every person's voice regardless of their status or level.⁵⁴ They are able to blur the boundaries between traditional stovepipes and integrate them in a way that the total is greater than the sum of the parts.⁵⁵ Systems thinkers are able to resist low-leverage solutions that address symptoms and find high-leverage changes that produce the best results.

Winning organizations focus on a high quality of work life as well as on high quality goods and services because they recognize the interdependence between the organization and its internal and external environments.⁵⁶ Learning leaders realize that job satisfaction and productivity are positively correlated.

Leaders know that building a learning organization also includes family needs, spouses, and the surrounding community.⁵⁷

Personal Mastery. Learning leaders can work to foster an organizational climate in which the principles of personal mastery are practiced in daily life. They can do this by building an organization where it is safe for people to create visions, where dialog, inquiry, and commitment to the truth are the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected.⁵⁸ Nothing is more important to an individual who is committed to his or her own personal growth than a supportive environment.⁵⁹ Leaders should strive to create a culture that supports self-managed learning.⁶⁰

Leaders can create continuous learning opportunities by working with employees to create individual learning plans to develop new competencies. Employees should plan learning that will keep them marketable and useful to the organization.⁶¹ Self improvement should be part of each employee's regular evaluation.⁶² Learning is thereby integrated with performance management.

Learning leaders know that cross training for employees can be a valuable part of their learning plan. Cross training allows individuals to learn more about how the business is run than they

might be aware of through their normal compartmented work.⁶³

Personnel rotation programs are also very powerful methods of transferring knowledge.⁶⁴ Learning leaders practice deliberate bureaucracy busting by moving people around between functions.⁶⁵

The organization can make learning more attractive by providing incentives and appropriate support, such as time off the job and comfortable learning centers near the job site.⁶⁶ Learning organizations create more flexible working options such as flextime, work-at-home options, and child care assistance.⁶⁷

Mental Models. Executive leaders can also play a key role in the successes of their company by developing the discipline of mental models in their organization. Current mental models, if left unexamined, limit an organization's range of actions to what is familiar and comfortable. Executive leaders must institutionalize the reflection and surfacing of current mental models in order to challenge the status quo and the thinking behind it before external circumstances compel rethinking.⁶⁸

To develop the skills of mental models, the leader must create an organizational climate and culture of openness and merit. Employees must feel free and open to challenge the current organizational assumptions and mental models. They must be empowered and able to surface previously undiscussable

topics.⁶⁹ In a learning organization, such openness will lead to fresh perspectives, new insights on interrelationships, and increased knowledge.

Leaders must model risk taking and experimentation.⁷⁰ They must support and invest in the exploration of new ideas.⁷¹ They must be tolerant of mistakes and view them as opportunities for learning.⁷² Learning leaders understand that the knowledge gained from failure is often instrumental in achieving subsequent success.⁷³

It is a leadership responsibility to promote an environment where trust grows and flourishes.⁷⁴ Leaders must exhibit trust by working to dispel the "us" against "them" mentality in all areas of the operation. A zero-defect culture where mistakes are high risk will discourage learning.⁷⁵ A fear of failure climate encourages survival behavior, not learning behavior.⁷⁶

Learning can be enhanced by the opportunity to be creative, to break out of the mental models that typically govern our interpretation of a situation and see things from a new perspective.⁷⁷ Leaders need to encourage surveillance of the environment, looking for industry best practices, and benchmarking in order to foster strategic reorientations and embrace change in their mental models.⁷⁸

Shared Vision. Executive leaders also play a key role in the development of a shared vision in a learning organization. Leaders need to create a shared picture of the future they seek to create. In traditional, hierarchical organizations, the visions emanated from the top and were imposed on the organization. They commanded compliance but not commitment.⁷⁹

Leaders seeking to build a shared vision must continually share their personal visions with others. They communicate organizational values and vision through words and actions.⁸⁰ Effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, that embodies respect and acknowledges human dignity and value assists in establishing the necessary conditions for a shared vision.⁸¹ This is the art of visionary leadership and how shared visions are built from personal visions.⁸²

Team Learning. Learning leaders support the operation of teams in their organization and create the conditions for team learning to flourish. Learning organizations are willing to make a considerable investment in teaching employees how to function effectively in teams.⁸³

They foster team learning by increasing the "localness" of his organization - extending the maximum degree of authority and power as far from the corporate center as possible. Localness

unleashes peoples commitment by giving them freedom to act, try out new ideas, and be responsible for producing results. Teams learn most rapidly when they have a genuine sense of responsibility for their actions.⁸⁴

The leader must be willing to suspend his privilege of rank in order to get the benefits of dialogue. Every member of the team must be able to participate without fear of judgment.⁸⁵ The leader must provide an organizational climate that supports frank dialogue and discussion.⁸⁶ A more participatory workplace affords more space for learning.⁸⁷

Learning leaders support the working of employees across functional, divisional, and hierarchical lines in interdisciplinary teams.⁸⁸ They establish incentive systems that reward teamwork.⁸⁹

Learning organizations find ways to preserve and share what is learned.⁹⁰ Learning leaders insure mechanisms are in place to quickly and efficiently spread knowledge throughout the organization. The establishment of a mechanism to exchange and share what teams learn is a key element in creating the learning organization.⁹¹

SEATTLE ENGINEER DISTRICT

Now we will examine a highly successful engineer district to see if there is evidence that it is on the path to becoming a learning organization. An engineer district represents a complex governmental unit in a period of change. An engineer district provides a wide variety of products and services such as engineering, contracting, construction, real estate, environmental, restoration, navigation, flood control, and waterway regulation. Principal customers for a district are the Army and Air Force, as well as federal, state, and local civil authorities. The engineer districts face a changing business environment that has become increasingly competitive as both military and civil construction budgets have declined. The district must operate like a business, on a project-funded basis, in a highly competitive environment with an ever increasing focus on productivity, efficiency, and resource utilization. Success in this intensely competitive atmosphere depends heavily on customer satisfaction, cost, timeliness, and the quality of goods and services.⁹²

The Seattle District with its 860 employees is a district that is thriving in this changing environment. Among its numerous quality awards in 1996, it was selected for the

prestigious Department of the Army Communities of Excellence (ACOE) Award. The ACOE Award program is closely patterned after the Malcom Baldrige National Quality Award Program which has become a widely accepted standard of organizational quality. The core values of the Baldrige Award criteria are customer-driven quality, leadership, continuous improvement and learning, employee participation and development, fast response, design quality and prevention, long range view of the future, management by fact, partnership development, corporate responsibility and citizenship, and a results orientation. These values drive a culture with a strategic emphasis on learning and describe a cultural shift that supports a learning organization.⁹³ An analysis of the 1996 ACOE Award submission from the Seattle District and other management documents should provide evidence of the five learning disciplines as well as the leadership skills and competencies necessary to develop learning organizations.

Systems Thinking. The discipline of systems thinking is clearly evident in the Seattle District. The number one business goal of the District is to shift from a culture focused on satisfying internal stovepipes to a culture of customer focus.⁹⁴ All processes in the District are evaluated in terms of their contribution toward customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction surveys show that the District is generally rated as above average in comparison to other Districts. However, these surveys have also highlighted customer dissatisfaction centered on timeliness, budget frustrations, and bureaucratic decision making processes that delay progress, increase costs, and stifle creativity.⁹⁵ The District treats customer input very seriously. Numerous quality improvement teams have been chartered and empowered to systematically review each business process and develop improvement objectives.

Personal Mastery. The discipline of personal mastery is also clearly evident in the Seattle District. A second major goal in the District's business plan is to recognize and foster the strengths of individual and the value of diversity.⁹⁶ Employees and supervisors jointly develop individual development plans for each employee to insure that the job competencies required for current and future work assignments, professional development, and career progression are nurtured.⁹⁷ Performance criteria that reflect the tenets of the District business plan are included in individual performance plans.

The goals of the business plan are also being fully integrated into the performance award process.⁹⁸ Developmental, rotational, and cross training assignments are used frequently

and routinely.⁹⁹ Alternative work schedules and locations, as well as a host of employee support services and facilities provide a work place environment that is oriented on employee well being and satisfaction.¹⁰⁰ The District offers a wide range of programs on personal wellness for employees. To further enhance the quality of the work environment, the District provides a fitness center, daycare center, cafeteria, credit union, cash machines, photo development and postage machines on site.¹⁰¹ The District has a commitment to family values reflected in the use of sick leave for family illnesses and support of an employee leave donation program.

The District leadership has developed a year-long leadership training program in conjunction with Antioch University in Seattle to strengthen the skills of selected District employees on an individual and group level so they may effectively lead, make more efficient decisions, encourage needed changes in the organization, and plan for the future.¹⁰²

Mental Models. The District leadership promotes the discipline of mental models through a variety of internal and external sources. "Out of the box" thinking is encouraged and expected. A culture of openness is sought by the leadership. Frequent use of town hall meetings and brown bag lunches foster

an internal dialog in the District.¹⁰³ Multiple forums exist in the District to involve employees and effect change in mental models such as quality improvement teams, process action teams, and the suggestion program. Externally, the District places the highest priority on customer satisfaction and has developed avenues at all levels to insure a constant customer dialogue is maintained.¹⁰⁴

The District has changed from a mental model with contractors and suppliers in an adversarial relationship to a relationship of mutual motivation and understanding to improve success. Partnering with contractors is an established way of doing business in the District.¹⁰⁵ The District has partnered well over \$300 million in contracts since 1992 with no substantiated claims or litigation on any partnered project. Based on the success of external partnering, the same process is being adapted for in-house use.¹⁰⁶ The District has also initiated a program to benchmark with private, non-governmental business to ascertain industry best practices.¹⁰⁷

Shared Vision. It is clearly evident that the Seattle District has made an effort to develop a shared vision for all its stakeholders. The vision of the District is "to be our customer's choice, competitively priced and more responsive than

any other alternative."¹⁰⁸ Key business drivers behind this corporate vision are: meeting or exceeding customer expectations through continuous improvement, keeping cost at a minimum, finishing on or ahead of time, and providing a quality product or service.¹⁰⁹ From this vision statement flow the District's published mission statement, values, and business plan goals. The leadership made a concerted effort to get input from all levels of the District work force, the customers, and the community in developing these products. A variety of forums were used to solicit input including town hall meetings with employees, brown bag lunches, surveys, and off-site workshops. More than 100 employees provided input into the process of developing a shared vision.¹¹⁰ The ability of the District to develop a shared vision is a key contributor to its success.

Team Learning. There is also clear evidence that the District promotes the discipline of team learning. A major goal of the District business plan is to "recognize and foster the strengths of individuals and the value of diversity and teamwork."¹¹¹ The District has undertaken a conscious effort to shift organizational emphasis away from a hierarchical structure to a team-driven work environment that encourages teamwork by using multi-disciplinary or cross-functional teams and enabling

and empowering employees closest to the customer with the authority they need to satisfy customer needs.¹¹² The leadership is moving towards a flatter organization with a reduced number of supervisors and broader personnel responsibilities for work teams that are larger and more diverse in technical expertise.¹¹³ The District has identified eleven changes in the role of managers in the organization as they become more team oriented. The leadership is also making changes in the District's awards and recognition programs to emphasize the importance of multi-disciplinary team awards.¹¹⁴ Internal and external partnering and team building initiatives in the District are designed to encourage and promote effective team learning. Internal turf-related strife has been significantly reduced while teamwork has significantly improved in the District.¹¹⁵

Efforts have been made in the District to efficiently and effectively share knowledge. Data and information systems are designed for single source data entry and access available to not only all District employees, but also customers in the region.¹¹⁶ The District is also developing customer notebooks as a tool to track and provide information about customers throughout the organization as a tool for continuous learning.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSIONS

It is clearly evident that elements of the five disciplines of a learning organization are present in the Seattle District. But this does not mean that the District is now a learning organization. In fact, no organization is or is likely to be a learning organization because learning must be a continuous process. Learning organizations must always keep learning. It is about becoming, not being. It is a journey, not a destination.

I believe that in a future of continuous change, only learning organizations will be best postured to thrive and prosper. In a world where each day brings new challenges and opportunities, the learning organization ensures its own future success because rather than waiting for external factors to drive its own choices, it creates its own future--one that its members truly desire. I believe that the role of the learning leader today is to recognize his future environment is changing and to seek to inculcate the five learning disciplines--systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning--into his organization. These five disciplines will enable his organization to master rather than serve change.

I believe, wholeheartedly, that the leader must embark his organization on the journey to becoming a learning organization.

The transition from a reasonably competent, nonlearning organization to a powerful learning organization can be likened to the transformation of the slow, plodding caterpillar into the graceful, powerful, and beautiful butterfly. The learning organization empowers its people, integrates quality initiatives with quality of work life, creates free space for learning, encourages collaboration and sharing, promotes inquiry, and creates continuous learning opportunities.¹¹⁸ I believe that the transformation to a learning organization can result in a dynamic, energized work environment where employees at all levels look forward to each day's challenges, where learning and continuous improvement go hand-in-hand, and where extraordinary achievements are possible.

The words of social philosopher Eric Hoffer should be our guide:

It is indeed remarkable how many of our present difficulties would be mitigated or even removed in a learning society...a learning society would have a decided advantage in a time of rapid change: while the learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no

longer exists, the learner adjust himself
readily to all sorts of conditions.¹¹⁹

It is a journey that should beckon to every organization.

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- ⁴⁵ Marquardt, 44.
- ⁴⁶ Brian Dumaine, "Mr. Learning Organization," Fortune (17 October 1994): 154.
- ⁴⁷ Senge, 234-236.
- ⁴⁸ Watkins and Marsick, 111.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 112.
- ⁵⁰ Robinson, 17.
- ⁵¹ Kiechel, 136.
- ⁵² Chawla and Renesch, 103.
- ⁵³ Senge, 66.
- ⁵⁴ Watkins and Marsick, 166.
- ⁵⁵ Chawla and Renesch, 104-106.
- ⁵⁶ Watkins and Marsick, 18.
- ⁵⁷ Victoria J. Marsick and Karen E. Watkins, "Adult Educators and the Challenge of the Learning Organization," Adult Learning 7, no. 4 (March 1996): 20.
- ⁵⁸ Senge, 172.

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- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 172-173.
- ⁶⁰ Watkins and Marsick, 21.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 19.
- ⁶² Ibid., 20.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 250.
- ⁶⁴ Garvin, 87.
- ⁶⁵ Kiechel, 134.
- ⁶⁶ Watkins and Marsick, 68.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 227.
- ⁶⁸ Senge, 186-187.
- ⁶⁹ Watkins and Marsick, 166.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 8.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 155.
- ⁷² Ibid., 166.
- ⁷³ Garvin, 85-86.
- ⁷⁴ Dawna M. Bivens-Smith, "A Path to the Learning Organization," Adult Learning 7, no. 4 (March 1996): 22.
- ⁷⁵ Watkins and Marsick, 14.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 34.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 158.
- ⁷⁹ Senge, 206,213.

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- ⁸⁰ Bivens-Smith, 21.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 22.
- ⁸² Senge, 212,215.
- ⁸³ Watkins, and Marsick, 7.
- ⁸⁴ Senge, 287-288.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 245.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 237.
- ⁸⁷ Watkins and Marsick, 17.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 111.
- ⁸⁹ Garvin, 83.
- ⁹⁰ Watkins and Marsick, 15.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 116.
- ⁹² Seattle District, US Army Corps of Engineers, Army Community of Excellence, (1996), iv.
- ⁹³ Watkins and Marsick, 174.
- ⁹⁴ Seattle District, 25.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 66.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 16.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 25.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 21.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 26.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 27-28.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., 28.

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- ¹⁰² Ibid., 3.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 28.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 61-62.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 17.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 33-34.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 64.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., i.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., i.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid., 16.
- ¹¹² Ibid., 21.
- ¹¹³ Ibid., 21.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid., 23.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 49.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11-12.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., 62.
- ¹¹⁸ Marquardt, 219-220.
- ¹¹⁹ Eric Hoffer, In Our Time (New York: Harper and Row), 29-30.

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