Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development

M.Sc. Global Change Managemen

Strategies for change and transformation
Summer semester 2025

Martin Welp & Julia Finkenzeller

Changes
NEXT EXIT

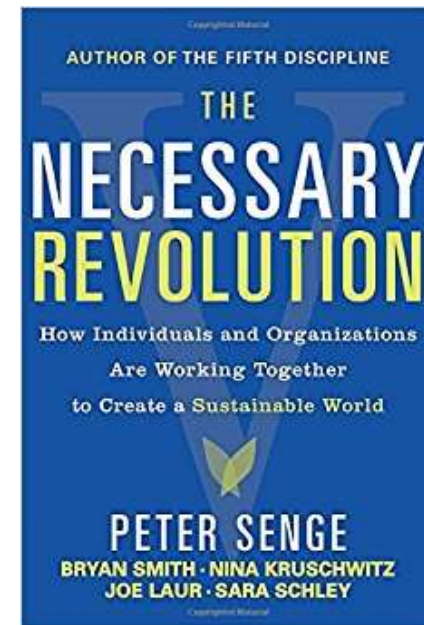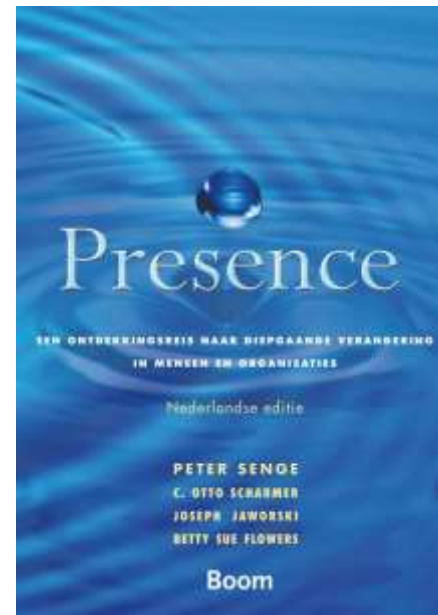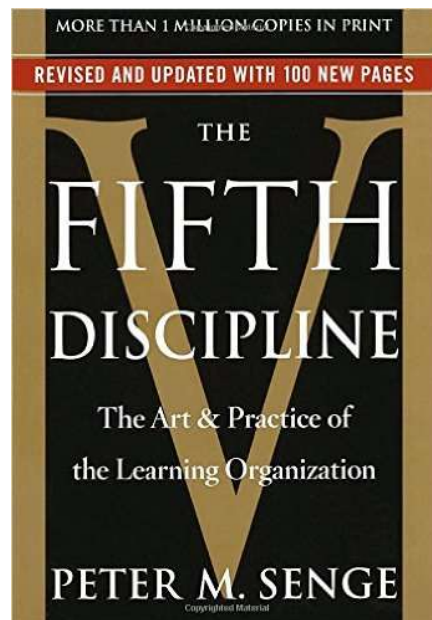# Building a learning organization

Learning goals for today

- Learning about the conzept of a „Learning Organization" by Peter Senge
  - What are the 5 disciplines?
  - How can they be applied in practice?
- Getting to know the conzept of

"Theory U"

- Getting to know the Case Study: What makes organizations "flourish"
- Seeing the connections to previous frameworks and concpets

Where we're at

Our prevailing system of management has destroyed our people. People are born with intrinsic motivation, self-respect, dignity, curiosity to learn, joy in learning. The forces of destruction begin with toddlers – a prize for the best Halloween costume, grades in school, gold stars – and on up through the university. On the job, people, teams, and divisions are ranked, reward for the top, punishment for the bottom. Management by Objectives, quotas, incentive pay, business plans, put together separately, division by division, cause further loss, unknown and unknowable.

- Dr. W. Edwards Deming, quality management pioneer (Senge 2008)

Selected literature on organisational learning

Junghans, Kreft & Welp 2018
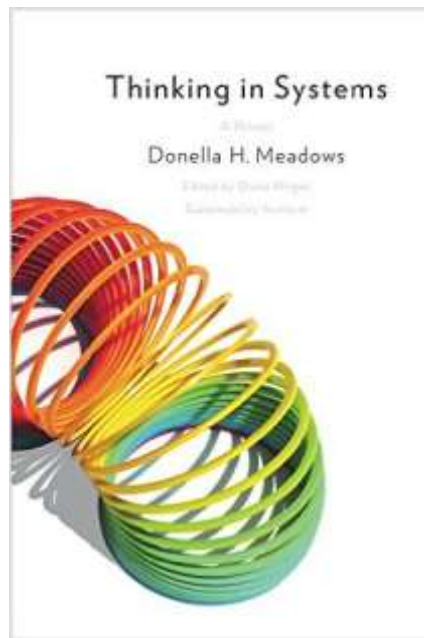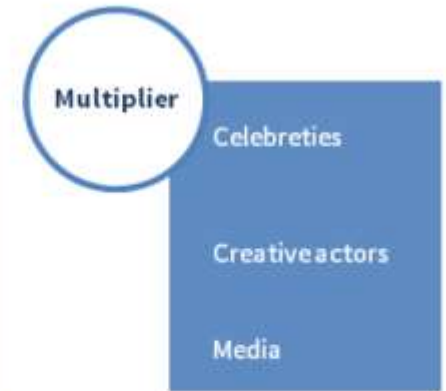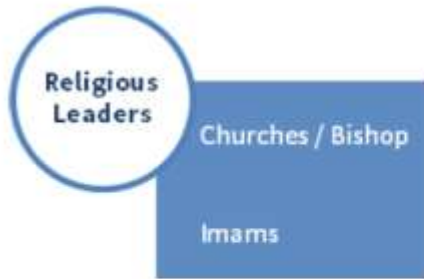
The Fifth Discipline - The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.

"Give me a lever long enough ... and single-handed I can move the world"
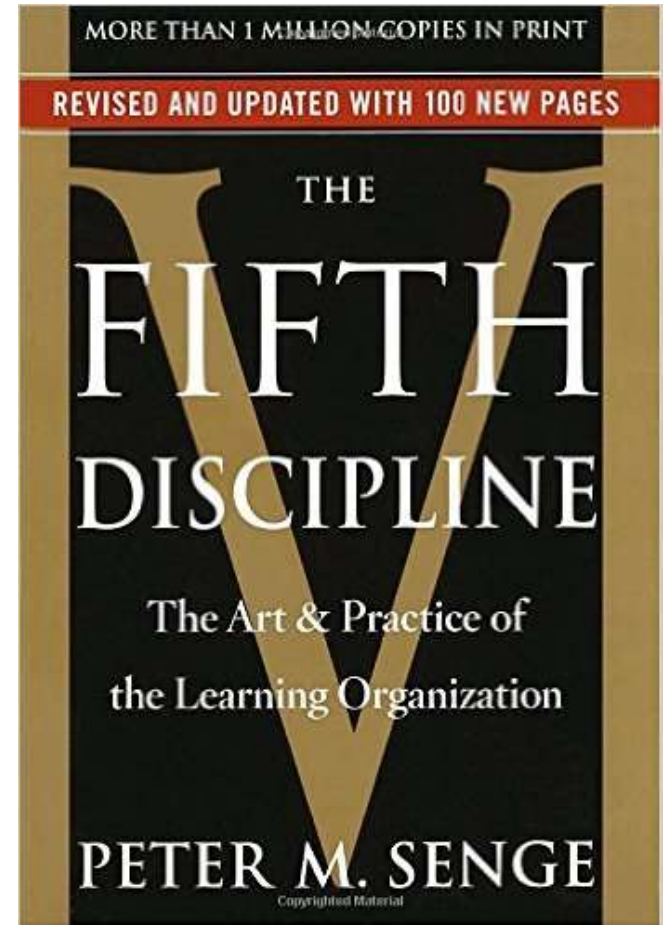
Core insights

- there are ways of working together that are vastly more satisfying and more productive than the prevailing system of management

- organizations work the way they do because of how we work, how we think and interact;

- the changes required ahead are not only in our organizations but in ourselves as well.

- In building learning organizations there is no ultimate destination or end state — there is only a lifelong journey.

Illusion of a seperate world

- intention is to get rid of the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces

- when we give up this illusion we can build "**learning organizations**", organizations where people **continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire….**
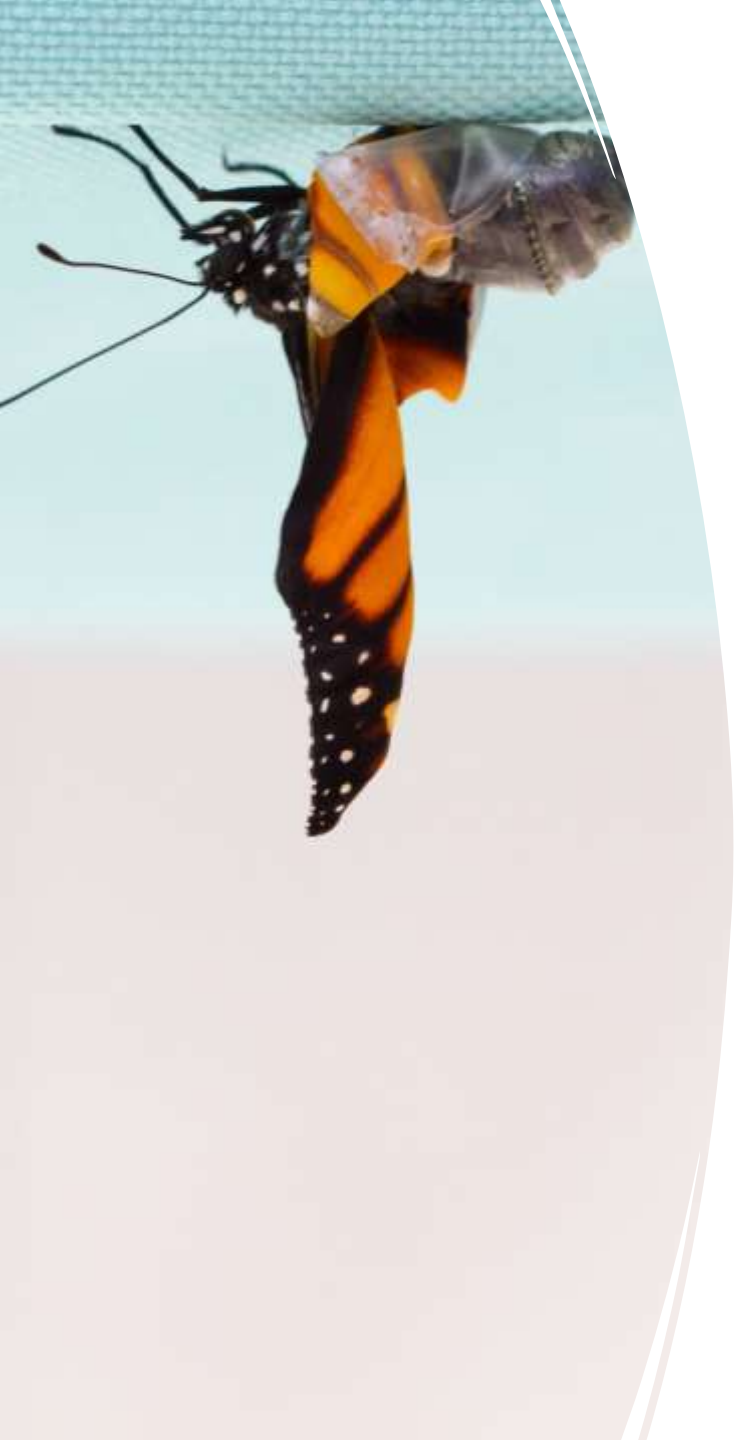
Living systems

- unlike machines, **living systems**, such as your body or a tree, **create themselves;**

- they are not mere assemblages of their parts but are **continually growing and changing** along with their elements;

- this awareness is **stolen from us when we accept the machine worldview** of wholes assembled from replaceable parts.

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Core Competencies of Organizational Learning

URL: https://www.solonline.org/organizational-learning/
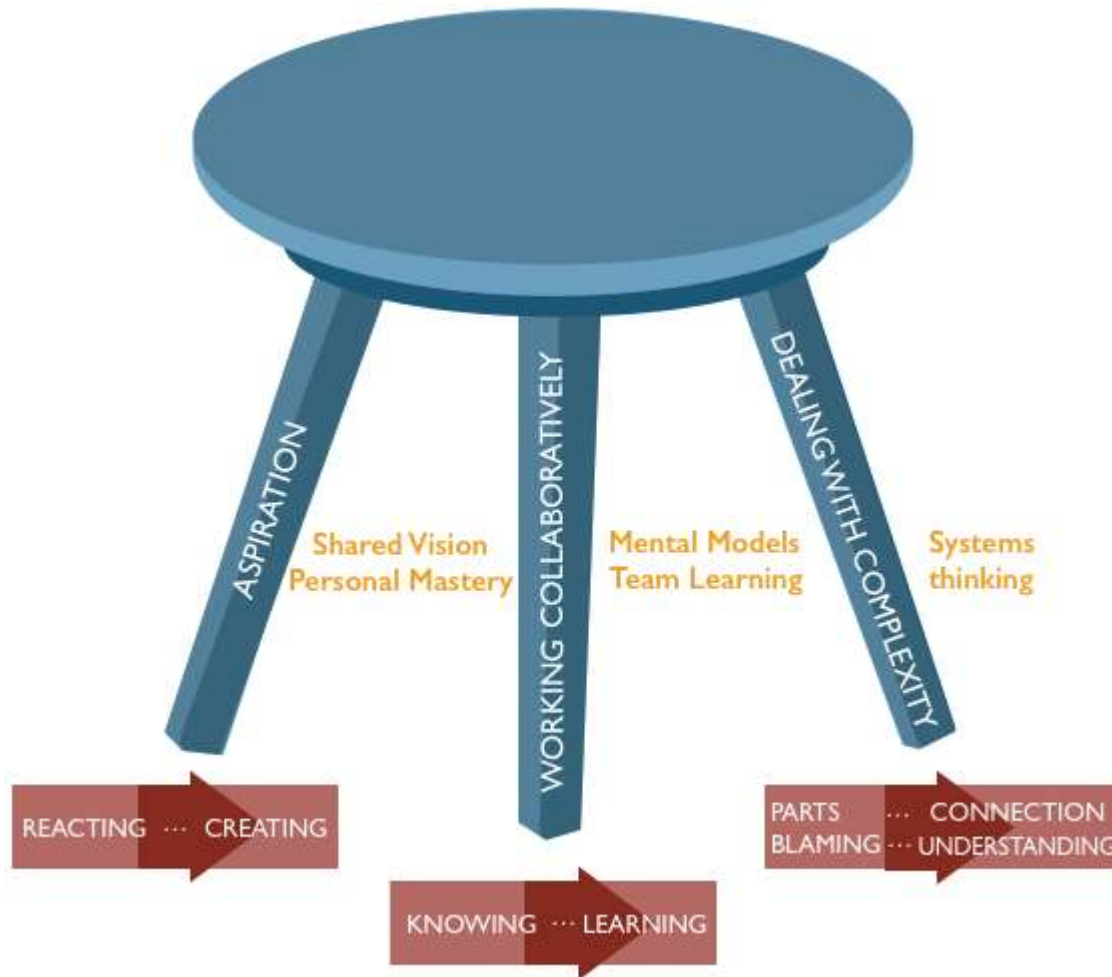
Learning organizations practices

1) Personal mastery (the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively)

- entails **"clarifying personal vision"** and **"holding creative tension"** (by focusing simultaneously on the vision and current reality), which generates energy towards **achieving the vision**

Learning organizations practices

2) Mental models (working with them means turning the mirror inwards, learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny)

– entails **distinguishing** the **direct "data"** of experience **from the generalizations and abstractions** that we form based on the data

Learning organizations practices

3) Building shared vision (this practice involves the skills of developing shared images **of the future** that foster genuine commitment and enrolment)

Learning organizations practices

4) Team learning (starts with **dialogue**; involves learning how to **recognise the patterns** of interaction in team that undermine learning)

The integrating discipline

5) Systems thinking (conceptual framework, body of knowledge and tools to make system patterns clearer and help us to change them effectively)

– entails using the **"systems archetypes"** to **perceive underlying structures** in complex situations

Ensemble

- it is vital that the five disciplines develop as an ensemble

- this is why systems thinking is the fifth discipline – integrates the disciplines.

Three distinct levels

- Each of the five learning disciplines can be thought of on three distinct levels:
    - **practices:** what you **do**
    - **principles:** **guiding ideas** and insights (ex.: "structure influences behaviour")
    - **essences:** **the state of being** of those with high levels of mastery in the discipline - disciplines start to converge while keeping their subtle distinctions

Essences
- HOLISM
- INTER-CONNECTEDNESS

Principles
- STRUCTURE INFLUENCES BEHAVIOR
- POLICY RESISTANCE
- LEVERAGE

Practices
- SYSTEM ARCHETYPES
- SIMULATION

SYSTEMS THINKING

(Senge 2006: 385)

Essences
- BEING
- GENER-ATIVENESS
- CONNECTEDNESS

Principles
- VISION
- CREATIVE TENSION VS. EMOTIONAL TENSION
- SUBCONSCIOUS

Practices
- CLARIFYING PERSONAL VISION
- "HOLDING" CREATIVE TENSION
  -- FOCUSING ON THE RESULT
  -- SEEING CURRENT REALITY
- MAKING CHOICES

PERSONAL MASTERY

(Senge 2006: 385)

Essences
- LOVE
- OF TRUTH
- OPENNESS

Principles
- ESPOUSED THEORY VS. THEORY-IN-USE
- LADDER OF INFERENCE
- BALANCE INQUIRY AND ADVOCACY

Practices
- DISTINGUISHING "DATA" FROM ABSTRACTIONS BASED ON DATA
- TESTING ASSUMPTIONS
- "LEFT-HAND" COLUMN

MENTAL MODELS

(Senge 2006: 386)

Essences
• COMMON-ALITY OF PURPOSE
• PARTNERSHIP

Principles
• SHARED VISION AS "HOLOGRAM"
• COMMITMENT VS. COMPLIANCE

Practices
• VISIONING PROCESS
-- SHARING PERSONAL VISIONS
-- LISTENING TO OTHERS
-- ALLOWING FREEDOM OF CHOICE
• ACKNOWLEDGING CURRENT REALITY

BUILDING SHARED VISION

(Senge 2006: 386)

Team Learning

- Dialogue – Ethymoligy:
  - Greek „dia" = „though"/"with each other"
  - Greek „logos" = „word"
  - Def: „a sustained collective inquiry into everyday experiences and what we take for granted"
  - Becoming newly aware of the context and processes of thoughts

  „Dialogue is like jazz; skillful discusion is like chamber musik" (Senge et al 1994, p.354)

Team Learning

- Discussion – Ethymoligy:
  - Lating: „discutere" = „to smash to pieces"
  - Promotes fragmentation
  - There are skillful and non-skillful (unproductive) discussions
  - Skillful: understanding the forces within the team members, getting inquiry skills, collaborative reflection
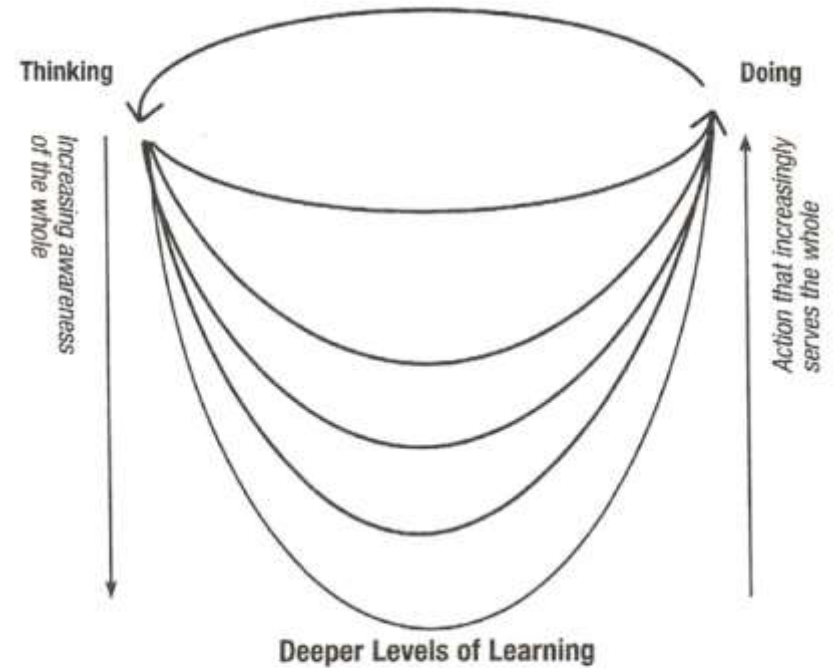
Ways of learning

- habitual actions are most likely in a state of fear/anxiety – true for institutions as well

- though learning occurs, but its reactive learning

- all learning integrates thinking and doing – deeper levels of learning are possible

- what differs is the depth of awareness – clarity of action and purpose

Ways of learning

"Downloading" mental models

Reenacting habits

Thinking

Doing
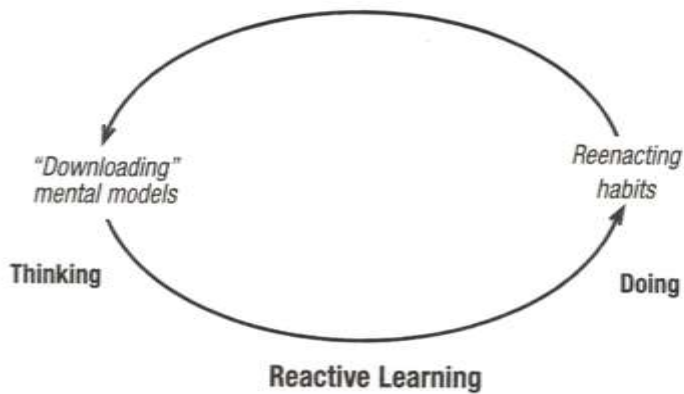
Reactive Learning

All learning integrates thinking and doing. In reactive learning, thinking is governed by established mental models and doing is governed by established habits of action.

Thinking

Doing

Increasing awareness of the whole

Action that increasingly serves the whole

Deeper Levels of Learning

Deeper levels of learning create increasing awareness of the larger whole—both as it is and as it is evolving—and actions that increasingly become part of creating alternative futures.

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Tripple –*Loop-Learning*

Figure 3.1 Three different levels of learning

Organisational rationale and contexts → Practices, norms and policies → Actions → Results

Single loop learning change actions to correct mismatches and errors based on practices, policies and norms

Double loop learning change practices, policies and norms

Triple loop learning change overall organisational rationale and context
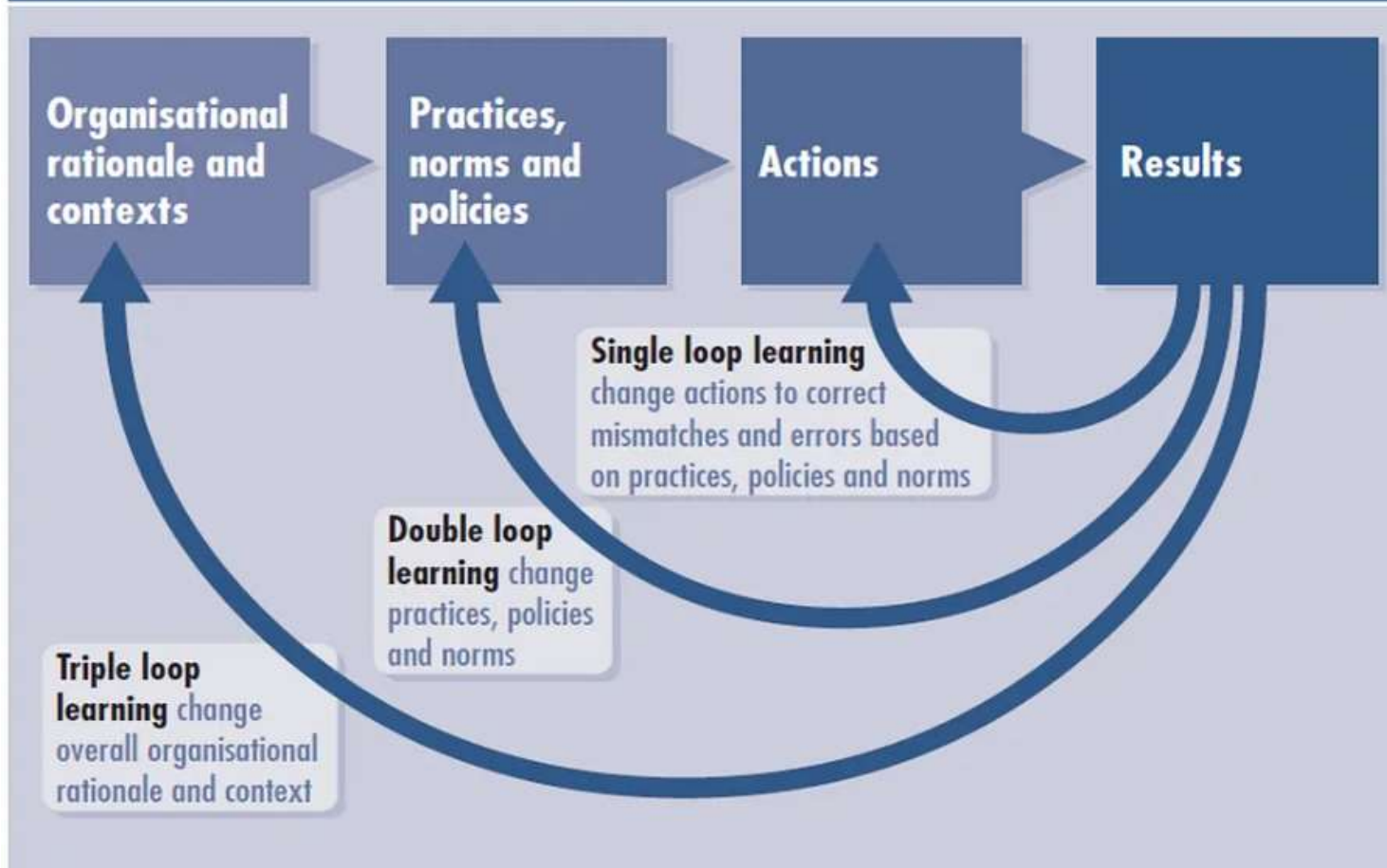
|	**First Order**	**Second Order Change**	**Third Order Change**
Desired Outcome	"More (or less) of the same."	Reform	Transformation
Purpose	To improve the performance of the established system.	To change the system to address shortcomings and respond to the needs of stakeholders	To address problems from a whole-system perspective
Partici-pation	Replicates the established decision making group and power relationships	Brings relevant stakeholders into the problem solving conversation in ways that enable them to influence the decision making process	Creates a microcosm of the problem system, with all participants coming in on an equal footing as issue owners and decision makers
Process	Confirms existing rules. Preserves the established power structure and relationships among actors in the system	Opens existing rules to revision. Suspends established power relationships; promotes authentic interactions; creates a space for genuine reform of the system	Opens issue to creation of entirely new ways of thinking. Promotes transformation of relationships with whole-system awareness and identity; promotes examination of the deep structures that sustain the system; creates a space for fundamental system change

Group discussion

- Relate your experiences in an exemplary organisation to the five disciplines?

- To what extent would you characterize it as an learning organisation?

The capacity to suspend

Normally our thoughts have us, rather than we having them.

- David Bohm, physicist
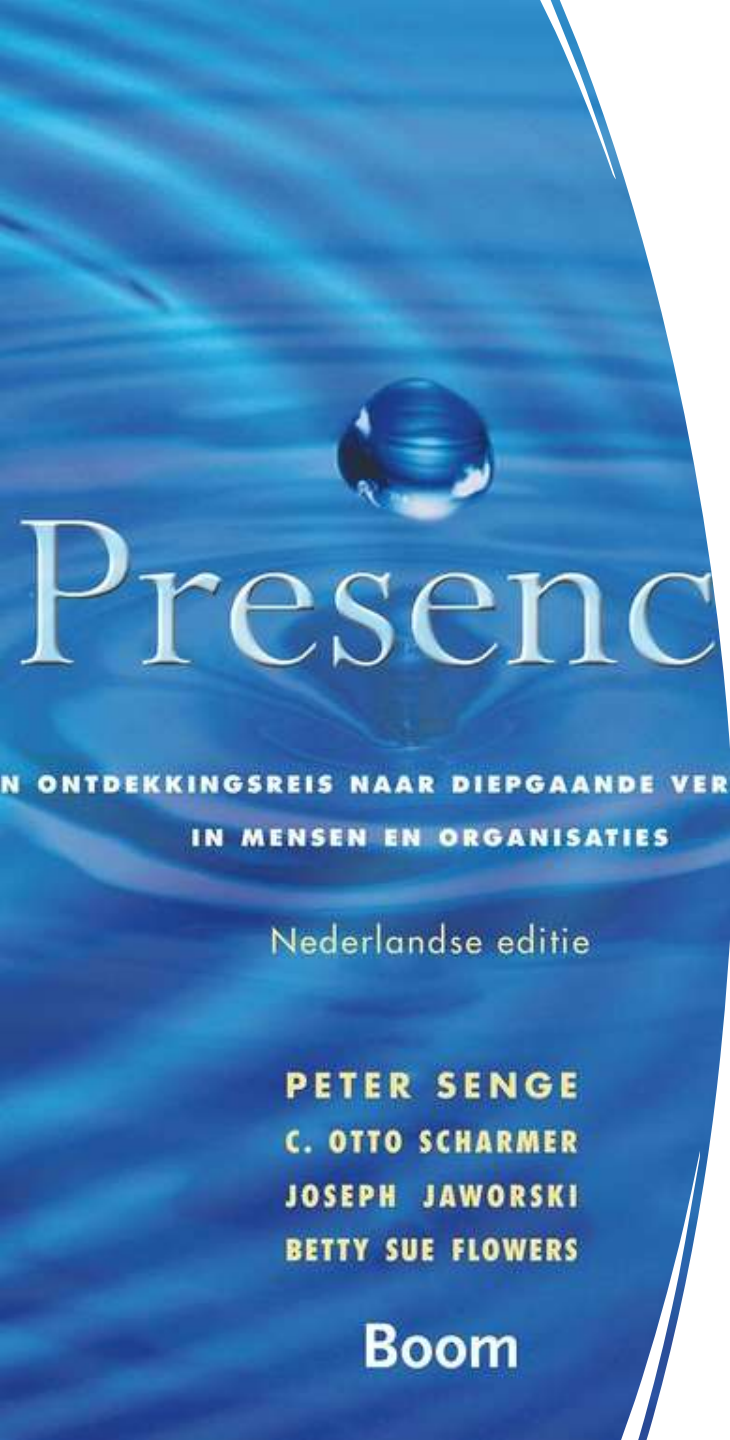
Instruction manual to the human mind

- seeing freshly starts with **stopping our habitual ways of thinking** and perceiving

- we begin to **notice our thoughts and mental models** as **the workings of our own mind**

- **becoming aware** of our **thoughts** will make them to **have less compelling influence** on what we see

- suspending the thoughts in front of us allows us to **"see our seeing"**

- when we begin to develop the capacity for suspension we almost immediately encounter the "fear, judgement, and chattering of the mind" – the voice of judgement, which is covering our creativity, for us individually and for groups
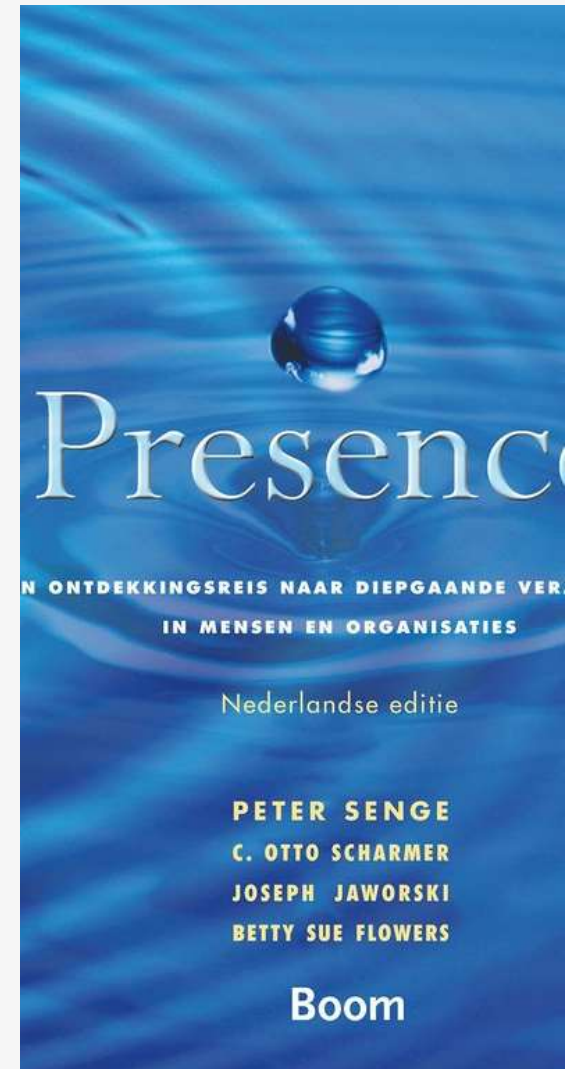
U Process: 1 Process, 5 Stages

1. Co-initiating:
uncover common intent
stop and listen to others and to
what life calls you to do

5. Co-evolving:
embody the new in ecosystems
that facilitate acting
from the whole

2. Co-sensing:
observe, observe, observe
connect with people and places
to sense the system from the whole

4. Co-creating:
prototype the new
in living examples to explore
the future by doing

3. Presencing:
connect to the source of inspiration and will
go to the place of silence and allow the inner knowing to emerge

PRESENCING INSTITUTE

The U-Process (developed by Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Adam Kahane *et al.*)

1) **sensing:** deep inquiry into their mental models through seeing reality beyond filters (**mental models, systems thinking**)

2) **presencing:** moving from there to a deep process of connecting with purpose and visioning, individually and collectively (**personal mastery, building shared vision**)

3) **realizing:** then moving into rapid prototyping to translate visions into concrete working models from which feedback can be collected and further adjustment made (**team learning, systems thinking**)

The U-Process (developed by Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Adam Kahane *et al.*)

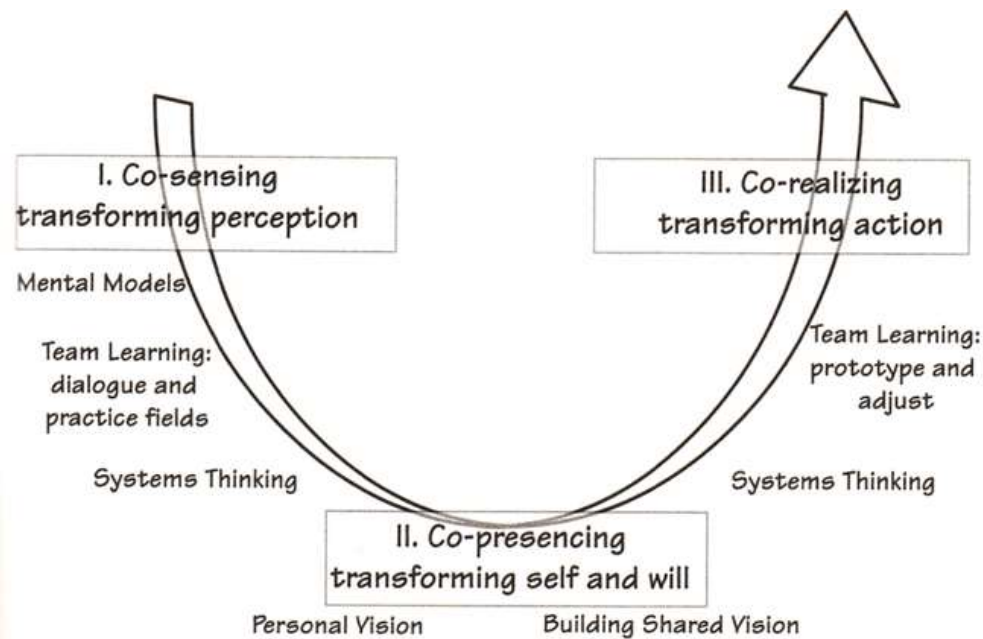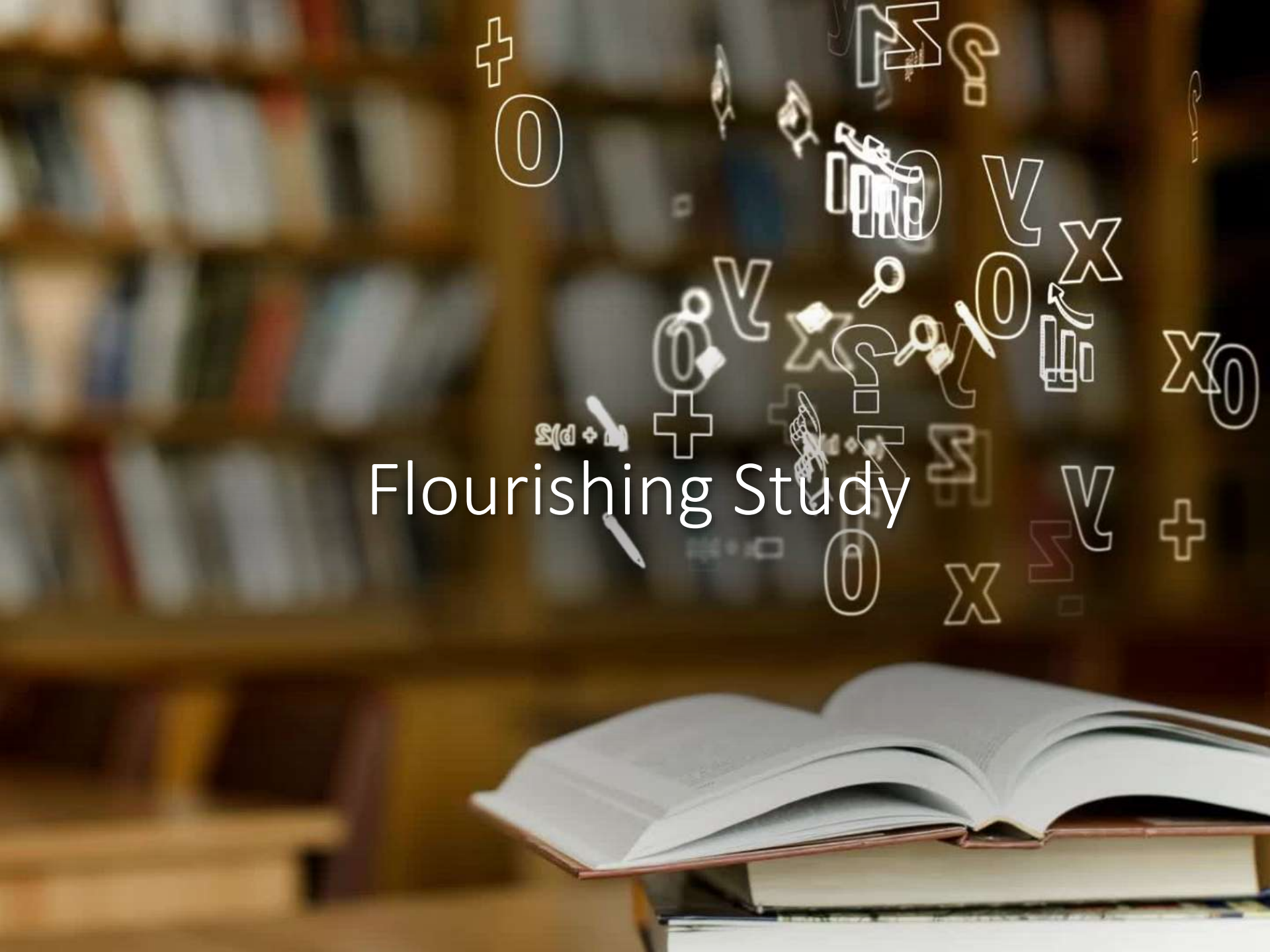- can provide a **framework** of how the five disciplines can be used in time

Figure 1. The U Process and the Five Disciplines

The U-Process (developed by Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Adam Kahane *et al.*)

- the five disciplines are used while moving down the U-process but have different emphasis during these stages

- this process helps to bring a very diverse group to a profound place of connection, with one another and with what it is there is to do
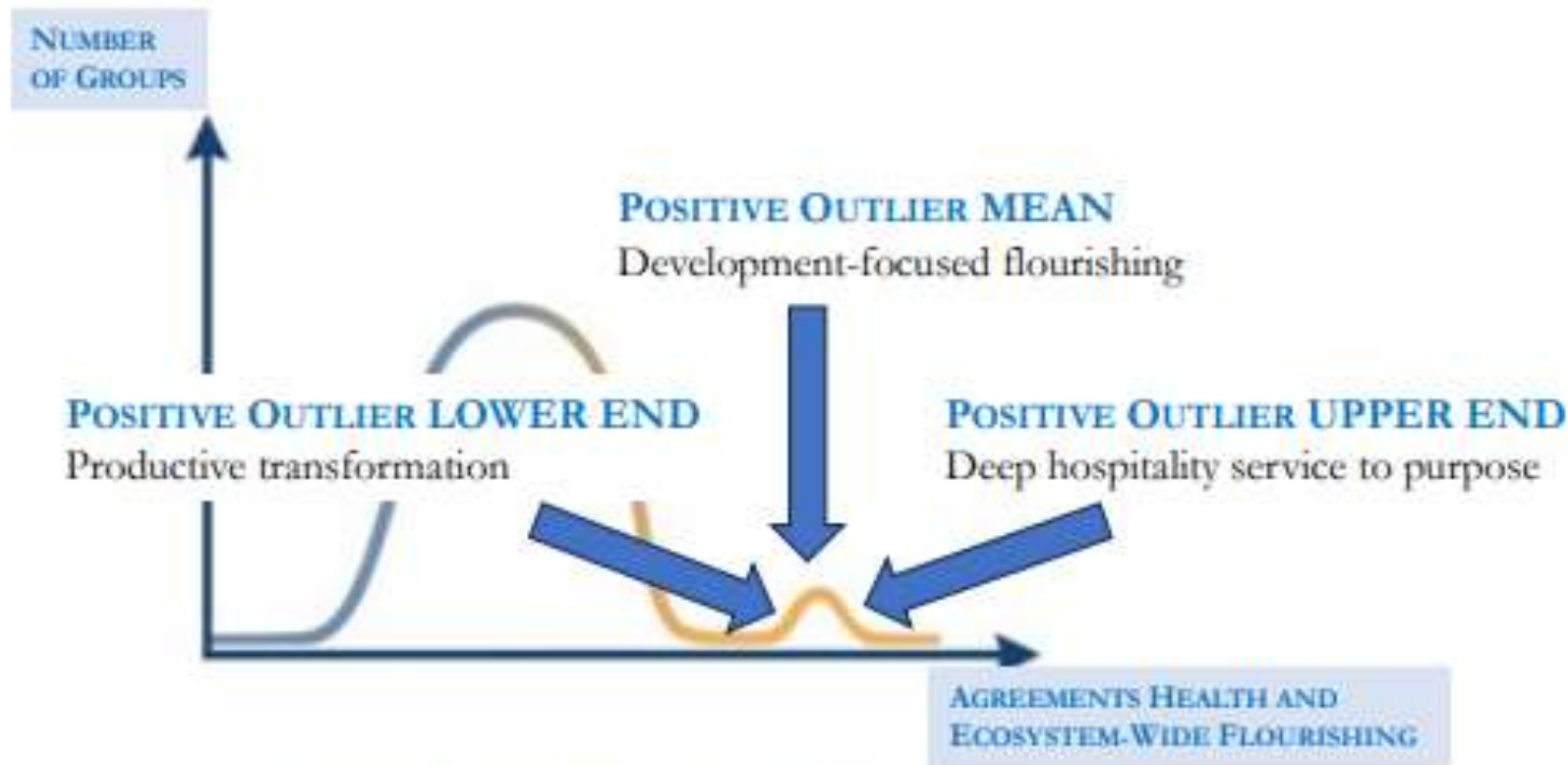
Flourishing Study

Figure 5: Positive Outlier Mean, Lower and Upper Ends

(Ritchie-Dunham 2023)

1. Clarify the Purpose Gap.

- Make visible the deeper shared purpose that brings a group together, so that they can collaboratively see and commit to closing the gap between the current and the collectively desired state.

A broad set of stakeholders in the US state of Vermont came together to see and collaboratively contribute to Vermont's energy future, committing to shifting from 0% to 90% of the energy for electricity, heating, and transportation coming from within the state by 2050 (Colnes, 2013; Ritchie-Dunham, 2014).

(Ritchie-Dunham 2023:7)

2. Engage the Required Perspectives.

- In service to a deeper shared purpose, engage the unique voices required to see, understand, commit to, and close the gap to that deeper shared purpose.

Employees in a textile mill used this process for the company as a whole, recommitting to the charter of each group, as cross-company groups to share and decide on cross-functional issues on a weekly basis, and within each team meeting to stay on purpose.

(Ritchie-Dunham 2023:7)

3. Identify Those Living at the Next Level.

- The agreements that support the next level, the desired state of the deeper shared purpose, and eventually with that purpose inclusive of serving more complete forms of EWF, are not part of the existing agreement structure. If they were, the group would already be closing the gap. The positive outliers have found ways to identify those who are experiencing the desired results and experiences reflected in the deeper shared purpose. When they find these groups, they meet with them to uncover the differences in their agreement structures that enable that group to achieve the desired experiences and results.

A farmer in Bolivia showed up at the annual market with fatter cows than everyone else, year after year. When his neighbors asked for his secret, he told them that he did not know what he did that was different, so he could not give them the secret recipe. They were welcome to visit to figure it out for themselves. What the others knew was that the farmer was consistently getting a different and better result than they were, so he must be doing something different. They visited him and, while many things he was doing were the same, they quickly saw what he was doing that was different. They went home and applied it immediately with great success.
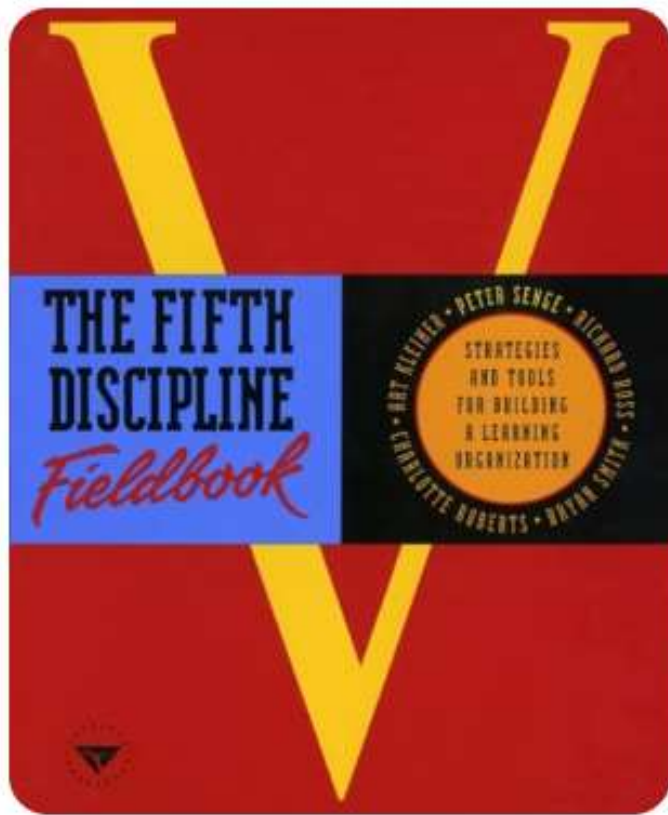
(Ritchie-Dunham 2023:7)

Questions

- Do you have experiences with learning organisations / organisational learning?

- Who is learning: Organisations or the people in the organisations?

- How is, what you learned today connected to the concepts/frameworks you got to know during the module?

Further Literature/Reserach

- Societies for Organizational Learning:

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  - Https://globalsolcommunities.org/
  - https://sloanreview.mit.edu/tag/organizational-learning/

- https://hbr.org/2008/03/is-yours-a-learning-organization

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- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327321232_30_Years_of_Building_Learning_Communities_A_Dialogue_with_Peter_Senge_Otto_Scharmer_and_Darcy_Winslow_-_Part_II

Thank you!

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Video: Peter Senge: "Systems Thinking for a Better World"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QtQqZ6Q5-o

-> Video Link