Cultivating a Growth Mindset

HOW TO IMPLEMENT A GROWTH MINDSET CULTURE

in a Learning Organization

Didaktikcentrum

How to implement a Growth Mindset Culture – in a School or a Learning Organization
Guidelines on how to create a Growth Mindset School culture.

IO1 of the Erasmus+ project: MindSet Go! 2.0

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Contents

Introduction

This handbook is addressed to you who work as a principal or leader within a school or any other type of social organization where people in their daily work are expected to cooperate to achieve specific goals. The content of the book is about the common goal of creating a school where every individual – children, students, staff, parents, and leaders – gets the possibility to learn and develop. The purpose of the book is to give you as a leader an increased knowledge about how to create a school that strives for continuous development with joint efforts.

In order for an organization to develop, it is required that there is a culture of change - that is, that there is a will and a commitment among the participants to constantly change and develop, and thus to be prepared to change and develop themselves. In your role as a leader, you have probably asked yourself many times why some individuals or work teams seem to develop and work with change than more easily than others. You might also wonder how you as a leader can work to support and promote a culture of change at your school. Our intention is that this text, with the help of various examples, can help you gain access to thought models, methods, and concrete tools that you can use to implement a culture of growth mindset with the aim of creating a good learning culture at your school or within your organization.

The art of changing and creating a learning culture is of course not an easy task. Each school and organization constitute their own specific context and have their own unique history, conditions, and needs. Therefore, this manual will not be able to give you any clear and simple answers that can be directly implemented and used in another practice. Instead, the main purpose of this handbook is to offer guidelines and strategies based on academic knowledge and proven experience that you can use as a tool when relating to your own practice. With the help of theoretical insights and practical examples provided in the text, you can reflect on your own organization and hopefully find ways forward towards a changed and improved learning culture.

The handbook contains three different parts.

In the first part, *Background*, you find a description of the context that is the point of departure of this text. You are introduced to the background of the Erasmus+ project *MindSetGo! 2.0* and get to know the various partners who are part of the project. First, Fridaskolan and Didaktikcentrum who, based on many years of experience in running successful schools in Sweden, are considered experts in terms of leading schools with a shared vision. The content of the manual is taken from this context. You will also be introduced to 5 other schools and organizations that are all partners within this project and are working on implementing a Growth Mindset culture in their respective organizations. The first part of the handbook ends with a section where the concept of Growth Mindset is defined and linked to the concept of a "learning organization".

In the second part, *A learning organization*, you are introduced to Peter Senge's (2006) thoughts on the various components, or disciplines, which work together to create a good ground for cultivating a common culture in an organization.

In the third part, *Guidelines*, you get the opportunity to create a deeper understanding of the various disciplines within a learning organization. This part is grounded in the proven

experience that Fridaskolan has built up during its 30-year development process, and which has proven to be successful in creating a good learning culture. During this process, inspiration has been drawn from both Peter Senge's theories about learning organizations, but also from other theories about organizational development and improvement work. Thus, the content of the various parts is not only linked to Senge's theory but can be traced also to other theoretical perspectives. It is also important to bear in mind that a theory is only in theory easily separable, while in real life it is more complex where its different parts can merge into each other. Thus, some of the examples raised within one of the various disciplines may also be useful and understandable in relation to the others. However, to make the text understandable for the reader, we have chosen to structure the text based on the various disciplines. Each part is illustrated with different examples and strategies that are intended to be used in conversations and practical work within the organization in the effort to create a common understanding of how to foster a growth mindset culture.

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Part 1: Background

In this part, you will initially be introduced to the background to the project *MindSetGo! 2.0* and get to know the various partners who are part of the project. A definition of the concept Growth Mindset and how it is used within the framework of this text is also presented.

1.1 Background of the project

The project *MindSetGo! 2.0* builds on an earlier Erasmus+ project, *MindSet Go!* which was initiated as a reaction to the ongoing debate in media about the poor quality in education in general and about decreasing test results leading to stress, lack of motivation, health problems and an increasing number of pupils who do not finish compulsory education.

The aim of the project *MindSet Go!* was to create a well-functioning network of schools promoting new teaching ideas and methods based on Carol S. Dweck's (2006) theories of "growth mindset". The result from this project is presented here …

Although the project *MindSet Go!* was very successful in terms of implementing growth mindset methods in the teaching practice, it also revealed the need for a holistic approach among different stakeholders and professions within a school or a district. Working ad-hoc introducing growth mindset only in a few classes may result in contradictory messages to students. Therefore, the best results can be achieved when working holistically in creating a growth mindset school culture.

These insights led forward to the project *MindSetGo! 2.0.* In this project, the focus has been not only on the classroom learning and teaching experience, but on how to implement a new approach to learning for the entire organization including all students, school staff and principals as well as parent involvement. One part of the Intellectual Output was to write a set of guidelines that can help principals to work towards the goal of implementing a growth mindset culture at a school or within an organization.

1.2 Partners of the project

In this section, you are introduced to the various organizations and schools that are part of the project *MindSetGo! 2.0*.

1.2.1 Fridaskolan

Fridaskolan is an independently run school founded in 1993 situated in Vänersborg in south-western Sweden. The school welcomes children from pre-school class to year nine and currently has about 500 pupils from ages 6-16. There are also a Frida preschool and a leisure-time centre on the premises. The school is well-known for its relationship building measures and focus on well-being in order to create a good environment for learning. The school's good reputation and successful methods when working with pupils with different learning challenges have made it the first-hand choice for many children with difficulties.

Since the start of Fridaskolan, it was clear to the leaders that current educational research was missing essential parts in relation to leading effective and meaningful school development. Therefore, they sought inspiration and knowledge from new fields outside of "traditional school research". Great interest came to be directed towards organizational theory, communication theory and systems theory since these proved to have a great effect on businesses from a development perspective. Therefore, the leaders at Fridaskolan began

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to transform the research conducted on companies and other organizations into a school context.

In collaboration with the company *Frivolten AB*, which conducts training and consulting based on systems theory, a series of systems theorists such as Gregory Bateson, Ken Blanchard and Peter Senge were introduced. Peter Senge's descriptions of a learning organization in the book *The fifth discipline* (2006) became important for the upbringing of Fridaskolan. All staff also read Ken Blanchard's book *Whale Done!* (2006), which in a concrete way makes it possible to understand the importance of focusing more on what works rather than on what doesn't work. A contact was established with Oscar Öquist who is one of Sweden's foremost systems theorists. Oscar has written several different books about systems theory in Swedish and thus made the complex thoughts of different international systems theorists available in an understandable way. Examples of international systems theorists who, with Oscar's help, became important for Frida Education are Chris Argyris, Donald Schön and Stafford Beer.

The school is based on Systems theory. In a systemic approach, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, a perspective that is easily lost in the complexity of everyday school life. We can easily get caught up in focusing on one part at a time and lose sight of the bigger picture. For students, this lack of context can lead to a feeling of not being in control, which has a negative impact on both well-being and motivation. Thus, Fridaskolan works consciously towards the writings in the Swedish curriculum of compulsory school (Lgr11) about the mission to provide an overview and context.

Based on the systemic approach, it becomes important to focus on how the school's subjects relate to each other. Interdisciplinary work can create a whole greater than its parts. Whatever the content or context of the encounter with children and young people, there are elements and general structures that can contribute to increased learning and engagement. The same goes for the teachers' and staff's approach as well as language use. In systems theory, language is an important tool. It is with language that we describe and thereby shape our perception of ourselves and our surroundings. Our language, both verbal and physical, sends signals that affect our surroundings. We can use language as a tool to change how we perceive ourselves and our surroundings and send positive and empowering signals to those around us.

The collaboration with *Frivolten AB* was gradually phased out, but the collaboration with Oscar Öquist has remained. During the past ten years, Oscar has had the role of senior advisor at Frida Education. Several of Oscar's texts and books have been published by Frida Professional, for example the books *Den seende läraren* (2013, in Swedish) and *Seeing the forest and the trees* (2021).

Hint

This is how we work to implement a Growth Mindset culture at our school

The project has given us the opportunity to share experiences of our development work and best practice examples with colleagues from four other countries. Based on the concepts of

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"Growth Mindset" and "Grit", our schools have promoted an approach where both staff and students dare to challenge themselves, try new things and see failure as a way of learning.

Johan Arnell, Principal at Fridaskolan

In 2020, during the pandemic, the founder of Fridaskolan, Håkan Johansson, held a short but powerful speech to the graduating students - a speech which illustrates the vision that Håkan still carries 30 years after starting the first Frida School.

Hint

Speech to the graduating pupils 2020

I have a dream! A dream of a school where pupils enjoy themselves, learn, feel safe and think that learning is important - yes, maybe even exciting, and fun!

My dream is about a school where everyone is seen, where the teachers enjoy their work and love working with young people. My dream includes setbacks. There is no organization without setbacks. But, at the same time, it is setbacks that opens the door to success. So, to you pupils I want to say: It is the courage and the will to continue that counts. Success will always come!

My name is Håkan. I founded Frida in 1993. That is my dream. Good luck with your dream!

Håkan Johansson, Founder of Fridaskolan

In his speech, Håkan stresses that there is no organization that doesn't face setbacks. But at the same time, it is the setbacks that pave the way to success. We can never know from the beginning exactly what our journey to success will look like, but we can prepare for the journey so that regardless of what pitfalls or hindrances there will be, we can be sure to find a way out. With courage and will, as Håkan says, we will find our right way. This is an example of a growth mindset approach, and part of the vision that sets the direction for the organizational culture at Fridaskolan.

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1.2.2 Didaktikcentrum

Didaktikcentrum is a department for research and development in education. Since its start in 1997, Didaktikcentrum has had a clear focus on development and change work with the aim of contributing to the learning of individuals and organizations. At Didaktikcentrum, a researcher and several development leaders are employed. They all have extensive knowledge of educational research, organization and school development, professional learning, collaboration with businesses and international collaborations. All employees within Didaktikcentrum have experience of working in school as teachers.

Like Fridaskolan, Didaktikcentrum also operates based on a systems theory perspective, which is noticeable both in the content of the training and not least in its form. Systems theorist Humberto Maturana's different dimensions of self-maintaining structures in living systems is an important starting point in the work of Didaktikcentrum.

The staff at Didaktikcentrum are also the authors of this text.

1.2.3 CEIBas Arteaga

The CEIBas Arteaga is an infant, primary and secondary state school, with about 400 pupils and 45 teachers. It is located in Murcia, Southeast of Spain, in a rural village called Sucina with about 2000 inhabitants. The two main economic activities in the area are agriculture and residential states for retired citizens. Both activities attract families from different parts of the world that look for employment in the cultivation of the land or in the tertiary sector. Consequently, there is a rich mixture of nationalities that includes families from Spain, Morocco, Rumania, Belgium, England, China, and Venezuela. This multicultural context is also present in the school and has become the main scope of institutional actions and plans to involve families, children, and teachers.

We are an enthusiastic school always ready for exchanging knowledge and applying new methodologies in teaching. In the last decade, the school has implemented active methodologies such as entrepreneurial teaching, the maker culture, and the outdoor learning approach. It has been done with the help of KA1 and KA2 projects that allowed training and cooperation with other schools.

> ### Hint
>
> **This is how we work to implement a Growth Mindset culture at our school**
>
> *Since we started the project three years ago, we have instilled a growth mindset culture in our school as we believe it is very important for students to work on their mindset. We have carried out different activities for students to understand the importance of having a growth*

mindset. These activities have been done in the different classes once a month, normally in tutorial classes with their tutor.

When joining the project, we created an Erasmus team with teachers who were in charge of the development of the activities that the coordinator proposed in the different meetings we had throughout the year.

Fulgencio Hernandez, Principal at CEIBas Arteaga

1.2.4 Les Tamarins Middle School

Les Tamarins Middle School is located in the town of Saint-Pierre in the south of Réunion Island. It is a small inner-city school with around 500 pupils and 40 teachers.

Les Tamarins Middle School is classified as a "REP+" school. In the French system, this means "priority education network". Teachers are therefore strongly encouraged to find innovative teaching techniques to motivate pupils and give them a taste for learning. It's in this context that the school's educational team has invested in the *MindSetGo!* and *MindSet Go! 2.0* projects.

We are delighted to be part of the *MindSet Go! 2.0* team. This project gives us an opportunity to learn about other cultures and other ways of doing things. It's a very interesting way of exchanging ideas and thinking together to provide the best possible support for our students.

We try to cultivate the spirit of development through various projects, schemes and actions that are close to our hearts, projects that are very effective and beneficial with the pupils we have at Les Tamarins. We have a range of artistic, cultural, and sporting options and practices that enable pupils to work on their self-confidence (judo option, theatre option, school orchestra option, yoga workshop, clown workshop, computer-assisted music workshop, graffiti workshop, etc.).

Through these workshops, we try to develop a mindset among our pupils based on openness to others, letting go, curiosity, the desire to learn and discover, and self-confidence.

We also try to work with the pupils to create a pleasant space, one that they can make their own and feel good about. We have various art workshops, the aim of which is to create rural frescoes with the pupils. We also have an arboretum where plants endemic to Reunion are grown. This area is maintained by the pupils.

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Hint

This is how we work to implement a Growth Mindset culture at our school:

Les Tamarins middle school has been involved in various ERASMUS + projects for several years, with the aim of creating a network of schools that develop and implement new teaching practices and methods based on growth mindset, motivation, and self-confidence. This MindSet Go! 2.0 project, with its focus on growth mindset, is proposed as a response to our pupils' academic and social difficulties, and their lack of motivation and ambition. Over the past three years, we've been able to exchange ideas with our European partners, share ideas and work together on innovative learning strategies and tools. At Les Tamarins middle school, we are spreading this spirit by offering different activities and workshops.

An international outlook is important not only for our pupils, most of whom come from socially disadvantaged families, but also for the teachers and educational staff, who are keen to develop their learning methods.

Georges Prugnières, Principal at Les Tamarins Middle School

1.2.5 Scoala Gimnaziala Nr. 4 Bistrita

In Scoala Gimnaziala in Romania there are about 650 pupils, aged 6 to 15, grouped into 28 classes. About 7% children need special educational resources. These children are integrated in mainstream education, some accompanied by facilitators, and take extra lessons provided by support teachers. The school works according to the national curriculum, issued by the Ministry of Education. Our personal touch can be retrieved in the optional classes we propose each school year: Health education, Art, Conversation in English, Natural and man-made hazards, Folk dances, Our Earth, Personal development – passport for success, How to play chess. We also stress positive education, inclusion, digitalization, and innovative teaching.

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Our pupils come from different social backgrounds, some have one or both parents working abroad or have only one parent at home. There are a lot of difficult situations the staff needs to deal with, we strive to be empathic and to make our pupils find their own way in life, to become the best version of themselves. We insist on every teacher to create a comfortable atmosphere in class, encouraging students to embrace challenges, to make mistakes and to learn from them, to try new things and to be responsible.

Nonformal education, achieved through extracurricular activities, is important to develop the pupils' personality. It is also a way of making it up for the lack of time of certain parents who, due to their jobs, are unable to educate their children. Therefore, we organize social interaction activities, meetings with children and parents, we take part in educational projects focused on ecology, self-development, sports, arts, etc.

We develop good relationships with the local authorities, who are making efforts to meet our material needs, and with the local community, especially parents and other stakeholders, such as NGOs involved in education.

We are open to European cooperation to improve our activity, to reach the European dimension in education, to share valuable experience and to meet wonderful friends!

Hint

This is how we work to implement a Growth Mindset culture at our school:

Changing mentalities is very difficult and hardly measurable. We are committed to developing growth mindset in our pupils, motivating them to make an effort for their future, encouraging them to value resilience and how to cope with problems and embrace challenges. Every school year new teachers come to our school, and we try to make them aware of the benefits of a growth mindset. This year, we have involved parents more, to make them understand the importance of these principles, meanwhile instilling growth mindset principles in our pupils and colleagues.

The lesson plans and activities with pupils and parents that we prepared for the Toolkit and Compendium have all been tested by the initiator as well as by other teachers in school. We discussed and reflected on each of them, trying to find best solutions to implement them.

We presented our project during the meetings with teachers in the county, teachers involved in European projects, the meetings being organized by the County School Authority. We made posters and roll-ups with the project presentation, and we placed them at the school entrance for everybody visiting the school to see. We also presented the project during the new school year beginning festivities, where the local press was invited. Dissemination of the project meetings in Slovenia and Spain appeared in local newspapers and on social media – the school Facebook page.

The holistic approach of growth mindset is the way we use to empower our students, teachers, and the children's parents. For the parents we offer tips on how to deal with the children at home, how to better communicate, how to listen to them, how to approach them at different ages, how to deal with their dilemmas, how to encourage and guide them towards finding

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their true self, instil effort and motivation for learning. Reflection and personal reflection play an important part, offering us the opportunity to further improve and adapt.

Daniela Danea, Principal at Scoala Gimnaziala

1.2.6 Primary School Marije Vere

Primary School Marije Vere (Osnovna šola Marije Vere) is a little above the average size of Slovenian primary school. It is situated in Kamnik, a small town in the northern part of central Slovenia, close to the Alps. About 70 employees take care about around 600 pupils that come from various backgrounds; from totally urban (the school is surrounded by neighbourhood consisting of blocks of flats) to suburban with different socio-economic backgrounds and a great mixture of nationalities. Besides Slovenes many of our pupils originate from the south-eastern Balkans with Albanians being the strongest nationality lately. This gives us a great opportunity to raise our pupils in an environment that promotes and celebrates diversity while appreciating the opportunity to learn from each other. The project *MindSet Go! 2.0* really helps us there.

> **Hint**
>
> **This is how we work to implement a Growth Mindset culture at our school:**
>
> *Our school's motto is »Per aspera ad astra«, which means "through difficulties to the stars". We want to promote the growth mindset so that by exerting real effort we (the pupils, the teachers and other school staff and parents) will achieve the goal of better and long-lasting knowledge thus improving our abilities and skills.*
>
> *We share supportive material produced during this project at teacher and parent-teacher conferences and our school website. We promote the project with the usage of tips or pamphlets to raise awareness of our common goals. We also put a big emphasis on movement*

during our lessons and breaks, therefore, movement and outdoor learning is incorporated into our lessons. We use it from the youngest to the oldest generation.

Damjan Snoj, Principal of Primary School Marije Vere

1.2.7 STEP Institute

STEP Institute is an innovative private non-profit organization based in Slovenia. With a passionate and diverse team of interdisciplinary experts at its core, STEP Institute is dedicated to people development through variety of innovative methods and integrated approaches.

At STEP Institute, they are renowned as bridge builders, bridging the gaps between education and work, business and the public sector, scientific theory and practical experience, and start-ups and established organizations. Their team of experts, educated in psychology, economics, and sociology, brings a unique perspective to address complex challenges with creativity and innovation.

> **Hint**
>
> *STEP Institute's mission is to empower individuals to thrive in their professional and personal life by helping them to discover and nurture their talents, develop crucial professional and soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, growth mindset, mentoring, and coaching.*
>
> *In the MindSet Go! 2.0 project the STEP team encouraged and supported project partners in the process of discovering the transformative power of growth mindset, unlocking their true potential, and starting a transformative journey towards personal and professional development.*
>
> **Blanka Tacer, Project Manager and Trainer at STEP Institute**

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1.3 Definition of Growth Mindset

Carol S. Dweck (see e.g. 2006) is one of the world's leading researchers in the fields of personality, social psychology, and developmental psychology. Her research is about people's beliefs - how they affect their goals and how well they succeed in reaching them. Carol Dweck has identified two different mindsets that will steer the way you perceive yourself, what you want and if you manage to achieve it. These two mindsets are Growth versus Fixed Mindset and can be described as in the picture below (Fig. 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Growth mindset versus Fixed mindset (from STEP Institute)

Citation

A **growth mindset**, proposed by Stanford professor Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset*, describes people who believe that their success depends on time and effort. People with a

growth mindset feel their skills and intelligence can be improved with effort and persistence. They embrace challenges, persist through obstacles, learn from criticism, and seek out inspiration in others' success.

Those who hold a **growth mindset** believe that they can get better at something by dedication of time, effort, and energy. Working on one's flaws, and the process—not the outcome—are the most important components. With time and practice, people with a growth mindset believe they can achieve what they want. The opposite of a growth mindset is a fixed mindset.

https://tophat.com/glossary/g/growth-mindset/

The research on growth and fixed mindset starts from a psychological perspective and deals with individuals' perceptions (beliefs). In the work of creating a culture within an entire staff group at a school, we need to use theories that regard the organization as a system. That is, instead of considering the organization as a set of individual perceptions, we need to consider it as a whole, where several individuals share a common mindset. Based on Carol Dweck's definition of growth mindset, it means that an organization with a growth mindset culture embraces and takes on challenges, acts with perseverance through various types of obstacles or problems, learns from criticism and seeks inspiration in the success of others. Through hard work, over time and with a focus on processes rather than results, the organization can develop in the desired direction.

To understand what it means to implement a growth mindset culture in a school, we can take departure in Peter Senge's thoughts of a learning organization.

Citation

In learning organizations, people "*continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together*".

Senge, 2006, p. 3

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Part 2: A learning organization

In this chapter, you get an overall description of Peter Senge's theory of learning organizations. A review is made of the five parts, or disciplines, which together create a learning organization. The chapter ends with a description of 7 signs of a non-learning organization, and an exercise where you can use different signs to evaluate your own school.

2.1 A learning organization

In his book, *The Fifth Discipline* (2006), Peter Senge describes how five different components interact to create a learning organization. These are Systems thinking, Personal mastery, Mental models, Building shared visions and Team learning. Senge refers to the different components as disciplines to illustrate that we need to work actively to learn to master these competencies or skills. Within the concept of "a learning organization" lies an understanding that this mastery is an ongoing learning process that includes all participants at all levels within the organization. It also means that learning must become part of the daily work within all levels of the organization. Therefore, it is not enough to educate only one or a few employees of the entire organization. It is also not enough that the management makes decisions that employees are expected to follow. For an organization to be successful, there needs to be an ability to take advantage of all employees' commitment and ability to learn.

> ### Important
>
> The five disciplines are interrelated and interdependent to create a learning organization.
>
> - "*Building shared visions* fosters a commitment to the long term."
>
> - "*Mental models* focus on the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world."
>
> - "*Team learning* develops the skills of groups of people to look for the larger picture beyond individual perspectives."
>
> - "*Personal mastery* fosters the personal motivation to continually learn how our actions affect our world. Without personal mastery, people are so steeped in the reactive mindset ("someone/something else is creating my problems") that they are deeply threatened by the systems perspective."
>
> - "*Systems thinking* makes understandable the subtlest aspect of the learning organization – the new way individuals perceive themselves and the world."
>
> Senge, 2006, p. 12

2.1.1 Systems Thinking

A school needs to be considered a complex system where different components are included. The various components, or parts, are connected in a whole and influence each other - they form an ecological system. The Australian researcher Stephen Kemmis provides a picture of a school's ecological system (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 52). He regards the different parts of the ecological system as practices and distinguishes between the following practices in an educational context: Educational research and evaluation, Professional development/learning,

Educational leadership and administration, Teachers' classroom educational practice (teaching) and Students' academic and social practices (learning). The illustration below shows how these five practices interact and influence each other (Fig 2.1). To change a culture, it is not enough to focus only on one part of the system, but the work must involve all practices.
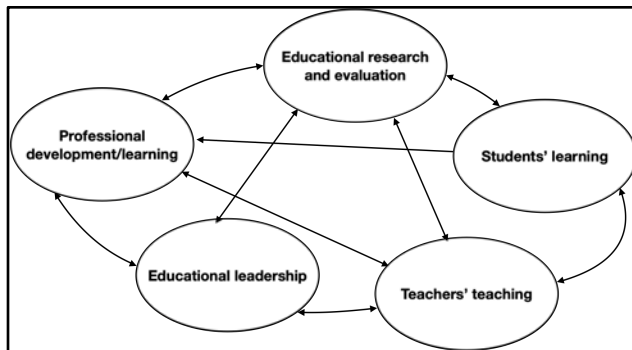

Figure 2.1 The theory of ecologies of practices (modified from Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 52)

Systems thinking is about being able to see the whole and to notice patterns between different parts of a system. Since we are often part of the system ourselves, it can be difficult to see the pattern between the different parts that make up the whole. We tend to see snapshots of separate parts and use these as a starting point when creating an understanding of the system as a whole. The risk of fragmenting reality is that we are not capable to see the best solutions to our problems and that we don't see the full consequences of our actions. We are also deprived of the feeling of belonging to a larger whole.

Systems thinking is a prerequisite for creating a learning organization. If we do not have an overview of the whole, we will not be able to see how the other disciplines are connected and interdependent.

> ### Note
>
> *"At the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind – from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something 'out there' to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience."*
>
> Senge, 2006, p. 12

2.1.2 Personal Mastery

As the name suggests, personal mastery is about mastering particular skills. It is about "continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively" (Senge, 2006, p. 7).

In a learning organization, the willingness and capacity of the individuals to learn is decisive. However, it is rare that management in organizations encourages the development of personal mastery so that skills and resources can be used. Many newly qualified teachers are

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driven by a commitment and a genuine desire to be able to influence and make a difference in the lives of children and pupils. But eventually this energy disappears, which will also negatively affect the organization's ability to learn and change.

Another difficulty with personal mastery is that people often feel a resistance to learning. Learning requires a mental effort and hard work, and our intellect wants to avoid that effort as much as possible. Thus, our intellect sets up different cognitive barriers when we try to learn new things. Whereas learning can be described as creating an imbalance by challenging a thought or an idea, the cognitive barriers can be described as a way to maintain or restore this balance. This means that our intellect tries, to the greatest extent possible, to interact with the outside world in a way that primarily confirms what we already know, because it makes us avoid the cognitive effort that learning would involve. A psychological term for this is *assimilation*, which means that new information is changed to fit with what you already know.

This means that even if the vast majority would describe themselves as people who like to be challenged and who want to develop, our brains take various cognitive, or mental, shortcuts to avoid this very thing. When reading this, you might say to yourself *Well, that's probably the case for many people, but not for me because I am very interested in learning and eager to develop*. We are sorry to disappoint you, but that very thought is exactly such a cognitive shortcut. You consider yourself an exception.

The fact is that all humans have an intellect that can be described as a "cognitive miser" (Katz & Dack, 2013, p. 52), which means that we seek the least possible cognitive effort and therefore choose to avoid change as much as possible. Like an ostrich, we stick our heads in the sand. We like to put the problems outside of ourselves and think that it is someone else who must solve them.

Citation

"The discipline of personal mastery starts with clarifying the things that really matter to us, of living our lives in the service of our highest aspirations."

Senge, 2006, p. 8

2.1.3 Mental Models

The discipline of mental models are about different types of assumptions, generalizations and images that influence our understanding of the world and how we behave in relation to the world. These thought models often exist unconsciously within us, which means that we are also not aware of the way in which they control us.

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> **Example**
>
> Let's look at a concrete example from Peter Senge (2006, p. 8)
>
> If a co-worker dresses elegantly, we might draw the conclusion that he lives in a "classy" neighbourhood.
>
> If someone dresses shabbily, we might think that he doesn't care what others think.
>
> Neither conclusion is necessarily true. However, our mental models will certainly influence how we act towards the different people in the example - and will therefore also influence these people in the next step.

In an organization, such as a school, the mental models of the individuals in the system will have great impact on the existing culture. It could be about the view of the role as a teacher, the view of colleagues, the view of learning, the view of pupils and their role, the view of parents or the view of leaders and their responsibilities. Failures often happen because of negative mental models. A great deal of work must therefore be put into making visible and processing existing mental models.

> **Citation**
>
> *"The discipline of working with mental models starts with turning the mirror inward: learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. It also includes the ability to carry on 'learningful' conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others."*
>
> Senge, 2006, p. 8

2.1.4 Building Shared Vision

Having a strong common vision that is shared by all employees within the organization is a prerequisite for creating a successful business. However, it is not enough that only management or leaders carry the vision, or that employees are told to follow the vision. The common vision must permeate the organization in such a way that all employees experience a genuine desire to work and act in line with overall goals, values, and visions.

> **Citation**
>
> *"The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared 'pictures of the future' that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance. In mastering this*

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discipline, leaders learn the counterproductiveness of trying to dictate a vision, no matter how heartfelt."

Senge, 2006, p. 9

2.1.5 Team Learning

The discipline of team learning is based on the understanding that a group's collective knowledge and competence is greater than the sum of the individuals. When groups develop and learn, it means that the individuals in the group also develop, even faster than they would have done individually. The prerequisite for this to happen is that the group has developed the skill to cooperate.

A key factor in the discipline of team learning is dialogue. Through dialogue, or "free exchange of meaning" which is the original meaning of the word, the group can gain access to thoughts, opinions and perspectives that would otherwise not be available to each person. Thus, the group can create insights that reach further than the understanding of each individual.

Note

A dialogue is different from a discussion.

In a dialogue, we strive to make visible the different thoughts and perspectives of the individuals in order to obtain an increased common insight or knowledge.

In a discussion, opinions are exchanged between the various participants in the form of a competition that is possible to win or lose.

There are several obstacles in gaining a genuine collaboration. Many times, we end up defending our own opinions instead of allowing them to be part of a critical review. Such defensive reactions can undermine cooperation. If instead we manage to make these defense mechanisms visible, it is possible to benefit from them for the group's learning.

2.1.6 Summary

The five disciplines described briefly above are essential in the strive to create a learning organization characterized by a growth mindset culture. It is important to remember that the mastery of the five disciplines never reaches an end but is a continuous work throughout life. The more you learn, the more you will realize that you don't yet know or can.

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> ## Citation
>
> *"You can never say, 'We are a learning organization,' any more than you can say, 'I am an enlightened person.'"*
>
> Senge, 2006, p. 10

The five disciplines differ from other, more traditional learning disciplines in working life. The difference is that the five disciplines described here are personal in the sense of being about how we think, what we want and how we work together.

It is important to understand the five disciplines as an approach, and not as a model to be applied. Successful organizations cannot be copied but need to be understood and developed within the framework of their own context.

2.2 Signs of a non-learning organization

It is often easy to read about various success factors and characteristics and feel that much is in line with one's own context. Unfortunately, however, this feeling is often about us not noticing our own preconceptions and failing to critically examine our own actions. The truth is that the majority of organizations do not operate as efficiently as we would like to believe but are in fact quite poor at developing and learning.

Organizations can suffer from so-called learning disabilities. Peter Senge (2006) has identified 7 different learning disabilities that are common within different types of organizations. These are:

- I am my position
- The enemy is out there
- The illusion of taking charge
- The fixation of events
- The parable of the boiled frog
- The delusion of learning from experience
- The myth of the management team

In the table below, the various learning disabilities are briefly described.

Table 2.1 Descriptions and signs of learning disabilities in organizations

Learning disability	Description/Signs
I am my position	Occurs when we feel that we are part of a system where we have no or very little influence. A sign of this disability is when people describe their work as a variety of tasks, but not how these tasks affect the organization as a whole. You do your job and only have responsibility for your area.
The enemy is out there	Occurs when we do not see ourselves as part of the system, and thus cannot see how our own actions affect the whole.

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	A sign of this disability is that people, when something goes wrong, find a scapegoat outside of themselves.
The illusion of taking charge	Occurs when we act quickly without having investigated the cause of the problems.
	A sign of this disability is when people are overly active and **re**act rather than act.
The fixation on events	Occurs when we focus too much on individual events rather than seeing patterns in slow, gradual changes.
	A sign of this disability is that people fragment events and lose the ability to think creatively.
The parable of the boiled frog	Occurs when we lose the ability to see slow, successive processes.
	A sign of this disability is that people are suddenly faced with a problem they did not foresee.
The delusion of learning from experience	Occurs when we do not receive information about the consequences of our decisions.
	A sign of this disability is that the organization is divided into separate units that do not work together.
The myth of the management team	Occurs when there is a climate where we are afraid of appearing insecure and ignorant.
	A sign of this disability is that differences of opinion are silenced and those who have dissenting opinions remain silent.

https://www.peterkang.com/the-seven-learning-disabilities-from-the-fifth-discipline/

Although the examples from Peter Senge's learning disabilities are largely connected to companies, we can draw parallels with the school as an organization. In the exercise below, you can use the challenges derived from the various learning disabilities to evaluate your own school or organization.

Exercise

Does your school suffer from any learning disabilities? Use the following characteristics of challenges as a guide and assess to what extent the statements are true for your school.

I am my position
How common is it that different roles and positions collaborate at my organization/ school, e.g. teachers in different subjects, work together?

The enemy is out there
How good is my organization/school to see ourselves as part of a system, e.g. understanding our own role/part in things that might not go as planned?

The illusion of taking charge
How common is it that we tend to act before thinking through the causes behind a situation

at my organization/school, e.g. giving a student detention rather than having a discussion with the student on the causes of his/her behaviour?

The fixation on events
To what extent does my organization/school work to see the bigger picture, e.g. not to see each event as a sole thing rather than part of a whole?

The parable of the boiled frog
How common is it at my organization/school that we miss out on acknowledging the small changes, e.g. that a student starts to miss some classes and eventually drops out of school.

The delusion of learning from experience
How often do we actively talk about the consequences of our actions and decisions at my organization/school, e.g. having a retrospective meeting amongst colleagues addressing a past situation or project?

The myth of the management team
To what extent does my organization/school support different opinions, e.g. is someone silenced or appreciated when speaking their own mind and bringing up a different perspective?

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Part 3: Guidelines

In this part, you will learn about various examples and strategies that can be linked to the respective discipline of a learning organization. The texts are written based on the proven experience of Fridaskolan from over more than 30 years of work to create a good learning culture.

Within each part, you are introduced to different examples that can be used in communication and work together with the participants within the organization to create a common understanding.

3.1 Systems Thinking

Getting an organization to adopt systems thinking is a process that requires commitment and participation from the entire organization. Through systems thinking, the opportunity is created for the openness and feedback needed for an organization to be able to continuously improve and develop.

3.1.1. Develop a shared understanding of the system

A prerequisite for the organization to become systems thinking is that all employees have a shared understanding of what systems thinking means and why it is important. Metaphors, images or stories can be a way for all employees to understand the principles.

The story of Thomas Edison is an example that can be used for that purpose.

Example

When you think of Thomas Alva Edison, you probably think of the light bulb. What you maybe don't know is that Edison did not invent the light bulb. It was the British chemist Joseph Wilson Swan that invented and patented a similar lamp in 1879. What made Edison famous was instead two other things. First, Edison developed the light bulb so that it could shine brightly and for a long time (the part). Secondly, he created a system into which the light bulb could be plugged in (the whole).

It is not difficult to imagine that Edison, after working hard on his invention for a long time, with the help of others and after many failures, longed to share it with others. But how would that be possible? At that time, there were neither any sockets nor switches to use. A completely new system needed to be created. Wires needed to be run and fixtures designed. Insurance companies became skeptical and demanded that fuses needed to be developed.

After much work, Edison found a solution to the problem, and was finally able to show his invention. He organized a premiere showoff in New York. Many people were invited but didn't quite know what to expect. When Edison turned the switch, Menlo Park lit up. The audience had not seen anything like it. The experience of the lighting system was magical, and Edison was called the Wizard of Menlo Park.

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With the support of the story of Edison and the light bulb, we can create an understanding of the importance of a system and how all parts of the system are needed and important for the whole. In dialogue, we can also translate the principle of the system into another context.

Exercise

Edison needed a system to make a light bulb shine brightly and for a long time.

Think of "school" in terms of a system, and discuss the following question: *Which parts are needed to make pupils shine brightly and for a long time?*

Another way to build a shared understanding of the system within which we are a part, can be to identify and visualize the system in different ways. For example, this can be done by visualizing processes, roles, and relationships (Fig. 3.1).
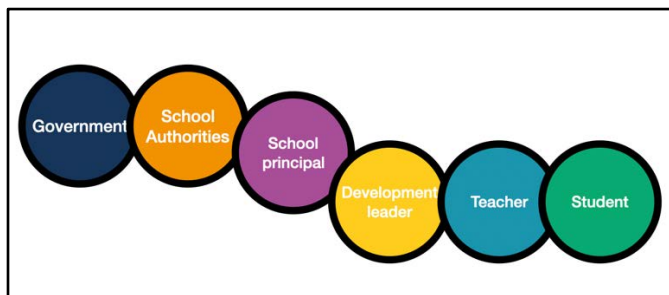

Figure 3.1 An exemple of a steering/support chain in an educational context

Exercise

What does the steering/support chain look like when it comes to development work at your school? What different kinds of roles and processes do you have?

In what ways does communication/dialogue take place in the interface between the different roles? Which information/feedback will be important?

Drawing a steering/support chain for the development work in your organization can be a useful strategy to make roles and boundaries visible. At the same time, it can help the organization to gain consensus and a greater understanding of both the whole and the parts of the system, as well as how the parts can contribute in different ways to the good of the whole.

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With a common understanding of the whole and the parts of a system among all employees, it becomes possible for everyone to contribute to the good of the whole. At the same time, a feeling and understanding is created that all parts are needed for the system to function well. It is only when all the parts become a whole that a school, as we think of it, emerges.

Citation

"Interacting wholes (as of living organisms) are more than the mere sum of elementary particles."

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holism

3.1.2 Strive to see the forest and the trees

All parts of a system are connected and form a whole. Because the parts are connected and influence each other in different ways, it becomes important to be able to switch perspectives and look at both parts and wholes. We usually tend to note only separate parts of a system. To be able to focus on the whole, we need to create distance. It is particularly difficult to capture the whole when we ourselves are part of the system. Therefore, we need to find strategies to step out of the frame and take a step back.

Hint

Let's look at an example.

Imagine that you are standing right in front of a painting. What you see are blobs of different colours sitting next to each other seemingly without logic. If you take a few steps back, you can instead take in the entire motif of the painting and the smaller blobs of colour suddenly make sense. They become important to the motif.

To be able to think wisely about each part of a system, we must find strategies to create a distance and look at the whole. To understand how distance can help us create a holistic understanding, we can use the metaphor "the hot air balloon".

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Example

Imagine you are lost in a forest. You have no way of knowing which direction is right to find your way out of the forest. Suddenly a hot air balloon appears in front of you. You climb in and lift off the ground.

With the help of the hot air balloon, a distance is created, and you get a different perspective of the forest. When you look at the forest from above, it becomes much easier to think about which path you should choose to find your way out of the forest. The distance and the change of perspective become crucial to being able to see the whole and think wisely about the next step.

An organization needs to collect different strategies to be able to create distance in different contexts. Here are some examples of strategies:

- **Being each other's hot air balloon**
  In reality, colleagues can act as each other's hot air balloon. Imagine that a person is faced with a challenge and cannot see which course of action is best. The change of perspective is created by the colleagues asking the person questions. Through the questions and answers, different perspectives than those of the individual person are often captured.

- **Change of rooms**
  Sometimes we can be helped by changing rooms or places when it is particularly important to be able to create distance and see larger wholes. If we stay in the place where we operate in everyday life, the environment can make it difficult to let go of what is right in front of us because many things around us remind us of just that. This becomes a hindrance if we want to have dialogues that require a change of perspective. Changing rooms can be a way of avoiding reminders from what lies closest, while at the same time it can be a signal that the work to be done requires us to create a distance and take in a bigger picture.

- **Not knowing position**
  Anyone who is not part of a system has different opportunities to see and think about the system than someone who is in the middle of it. This opportunity can be used in different ways. On the one hand, we can take help from someone who is not part of the organization, to observe something or conduct interviews. The person who has a "not knowing position" can ask different questions and contribute with different reflections than the people within the system. We can achieve the same result if we let different parts of the system help each other to create distance. In relation to development work, for example, two different work teams could act as each other's critical friends. When you do not know the details of a context, you can ask questions that can contribute to a change of perspective.

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3.1.3 Act in favour of "the whole"

In everyday life, it is easy to create an image of a context based on only a small amount of information. We tend to see snapshots, individual events, cases, and use these when making decisions. In schools, teachers and leaders are faced with a variety of critical issues during the day and many decisions are made quickly without much time for reflection. The consequence is often that the solutions do not contribute to the desired outcome, that the problem recurs or that additional challenges are created as a result of our decisions.

Let us take an example from the school context.

> **Example**
>
> A student comes to the teacher and describes that she is currently in a stressful situation with a lot of schoolwork. Therefore, she wishes to change a date for a deadline in the teacher's subject. The teacher, who wants to create good conditions for his students, changes the date for the task. The student is pleased.
>
> However, soon the teacher gets a complaint from another student who is unhappy with the new date as he has struggled to change other commitments to prepare for the deadline.
>
> A third student shows dissatisfaction with the new date because it conflicts with another activity in a different subject.

The example shows how a decision taken with the best intentions but too quickly and based on a narrow view of the context, in this case the individual student's experience, can create new challenges for other parts of the system.

With systems thinking, we can understand the system and find strategies that give us more options to act in a way that is as good as possible for as many people as possible. A system can be divided into different levels: script and case. Case stands for the individual events and script stands for the overall level, the whole that is formed by the individual parts. To act in favour of the whole, it is important that decisions are made based on the overall level where you are responsible. We can gather information and understandings with the help of cases, individual events, but need to make decisions based on the script.

To avoid too many decisions at the case level and instead make decisions and act with the best interests of the whole in mind, the following strategies can be helpful:

- **Give yourself time**
  Quick decisions, when we don't take the time to look at things from the script level, often cause problems. Thus, we need to give ourselves reflection time. This can easily be done by just listening to the stakeholder as a first step and then ask to return with a response later in the day. In addition to creating more time to think, this strategy also gives the recipient a signal that his or her question is important and therefore needs deeper thoughts.

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- **Use the concepts script and case**
  With the concepts script and case, colleagues at a school, supported by the common language and understanding, can help each other make decisions at the right level.

- **Collect more information**
  To avoid making decisions based on our preconceptions and single snapshots, it is wise to collect different perspectives by listening to different people.

To work in favour of the whole does not always mean that everyone is or will be happy. But if one understands the system and gets information about the reason for a decision, most people can feel that it is ok, even if it is not necessarily the best for that particular person. In relation to the example with the student who wanted a different date for the deadline, this means that she may be disappointed if the date remains, but at the same time she can understand the decision.

3.1.4 To understand is to see the pattern

Patterns are important in systems thinking. By paying attention to patterns, we can gain a deeper understanding of the system, see more options for action and create the feeling of "being one step ahead" - to act instead of reacting.

When we can create distance from the system in different ways, we also get the opportunity to see patterns. In the patterns that emerge, we gain insights about different alternatives of action. One can read the game and predict what will happen.

When Wayne Gretzky, one of the most successful ice hockey players of all times, was asked about his winning strategies, he replied: "It's simple. I always go where the puck isn't yet". By creating mental and/or physical distance from your everyday life, you can learn to read the game better and thus create the conditions to be one step ahead. We cannot see into the future, but we can identify patterns that can serve as a forecast of the system's future behaviour. Thus, to understand is to see the pattern.

Let us refer to the school context to make this more concrete. In Sweden, teachers have meetings with pupils and their parents every year. During these meetings, different areas of development for the pupils are highlighted. For example, this could be about pupils' verbal activity in the classroom. A pattern that often emerge is that many pupils have the same area of development, and that the developmental area often persists and returns during the pupil's school time. This pattern is interesting in several ways. Why is it that several pupils seem to have the same challenges? And why do pupils not seem to develop these abilities or behaviours over time?

It is easy to look at this from an individual perspective, where the responsibility for change lies with the pupil. However, with the support of the visualised pattern, we can think about this in a different way. What if a change in the teaching situation could make a difference, for all pupils with the same goals?

Let's use the example of pupils not being verbally active in the classroom, to see how that pattern can help us understand this problem from a wider perspective and find a solution that lies outside the capability of the single pupil.

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> ### Example
>
> When looking more closely at the teaching situation, we find that the most common way for a pupil to be verbally active in the classroom is by raising his or her hand to answer the teacher's questions.
>
> What could be done to change the pattern of the teaching situation not to address one pupil at a time? What would happen if, instead, pupils were to conduct dialogues in pairs?
>
> Suddenly, more pupils will be verbally active. There will be more chances for each pupil to practice the ability to express themselves orally and the students will also get the opportunity to talk in a smaller context than in front of a whole class.
>
> By focusing our attention on wholes, patterns, and contexts, we can understand a challenge in new ways, see more options for action and bring about a sustainable change – we can make a difference that is a difference.

Systems thinking is about looking at wholes, patterns, and contexts instead of separate and delimiting events. With a systemic perspective, we can make sustainable decisions and act in a way that makes a difference and that works well for as many as possible. An expression by leadership guru Russel Ackoff captures the aspiration found in systems thinking. Instead of putting time and effort on individual cases, which costs a lot of energy, focus on communicating the rules which apply to everyone.

> ### Citation
>
> "*Don´t fight the system, change the rules and the system will change itself.*"
>
> Russell Ackoff

3.2 Personal Mastery

As part of a learning organization, personal mastery is a key factor. Personal mastery is about the individual's will and capacity to learn. It is about knowledge, abilities, and understandings,

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as well as an attitude of curiosity and the will to strive towards a goal. As all individuals in an organization develop and learn, it contributes not only to the individual's progress and commitment, but also to an increased flexibility and adaptability within the organization in a changing world. Overall, personal mastery can contribute to success at both the individual and organizational levels.

Citation

"*Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs*."

Peter Senge, 2006, p. 129

3.2.1 Creative tension – a key factor

An individual person can on the one hand express a desire and a goal of wanting to learn and develop, and on the other hand do something completely different. Every individual has a current situation, i.e. his or her reality (where we are) in relation to what is desired (what we want). The space between these two, the vision and the current reality, generates a creative tension, a strive to bring them together. Creative tension is a key to personal mastery because it contains a driving force and a movement.

Although personal mastery is an individual process, it can be highlighted in a collective context in different ways. Below you will find two different strategies that can help the individuals to find their creative tension.

- **Time to reflect**
  In the context of development work, it is a good idea to set aside time for individual reflection to promote each individual's personal mastery. The reflection can be about letting everyone think about their current situation and formulate a relevant next step in their learning towards the common goal. In the next step, it can be a good idea to involve colleagues in the learning process, for example, to make other perspectives visible or to discuss different strategies.
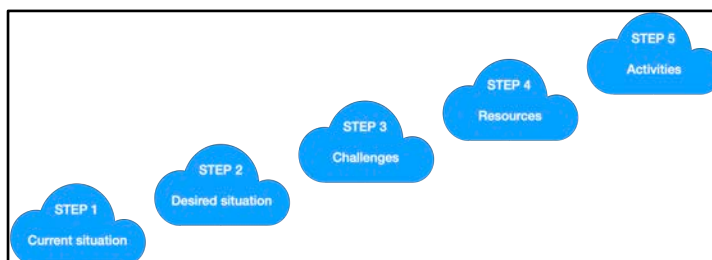
Example

A group of development leaders at a school take part in a training for leading professional learning. The goal of the training is to deepen the understanding of professional learning and to give the participants tools to be able to lead a group of teachers in a way that contributes

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to learning. As part of each training session, time is set aside for each participant to individually reflect on their current situation as a development leader, i.e. about their strengths, knowledge and abilities.

During the training, the participants also get to put into words what they wish and/or want to achieve in their role as development leaders and what they can do to move in the desired direction. The individual reflection is supported by a few reflection questions.

Example of reflection questions:

1. What are your strengths as a development leader? When do you do your best job as a development leader? (Current situation)

2. What is particularly important to you in your role as development leader? What is particularly important to the group that you lead?

3. What can you try to do to take steps in the desired direction? Motivate. (Desired situation)

- **Meta-reflection**
  The exercise "Time Travel" is another way to make visible the current situation and the desired situation to give space for the creative tension. The exercise can be adapted to different roles and contexts according to the focus of the development work.

Exercise

In the exercise "Time Travel" two people guide each other in a personal reflection about their current situation and their next step. To their help, the participants have a guiding support in the form of a manual and four pieces of paper with the headings: *Today*, *Resources*, *In the future* and *Meta perspective*. These notes are placed on the floor in front of the participants (see picture below). When the participants have put the notes on the floor and decided who will begin to reflect and who will be the guide, they follow the steps in the guiding support.

**Instructions to the guide**

Say the following:

1. Stand at the note "Today" and gaze towards "In the Future" (about 6 months from now). Describe how you want to contribute to students' inclusion and/or learning (considering your role and the existing conditions).

2. Stay where you are and gaze towards the note "Today". Describe your current

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situation when it comes to contributing to students' inclusion and/or learning. What do you do today? What do you see? How does it feel?

3. Walk to the note "In the Future". Describe your situation as if you are in the future (Note! Be sure to use the present tense as you are in the future). What do you see? What do you do? How does it feel?

4. Walk back to the note "Today" and gaze towards "In the Future". What resources do you have to reach the future position? Think about all different kinds of resources: economic, material, personal, relational, social etc.

5. Now, let's both stand at the note "Meta perspective". What are our thoughts about what was just said? What could be a first step towards the future situation?

Meta perspective	In the future
	Resources
	Today
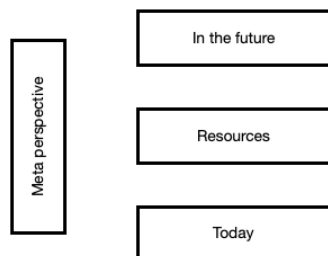
By directing our gaze in different ways to the gap between the present state and the next step, we can pay attention to the creative tension to let it motivate our personal mastery.

3.2.2 Personal Mastery builds on inner motivation

Although personal mastery is a prerequisite for a learning organization, it is important that it is not perceived as top-down decision, but that the aspiration comes from within and is based on an inner vision of all individuals. Therefore, it cannot form a mandatory part of a development work but needs to be chosen by the individual. If an organization communicates the idea of personal mastery in different ways, clearly encourages initiative and sets aside time for reflection on the organization's and the individual's vision, and uses strategies to make the creative tension visible, a climate is created that makes personal mastery attractive and can contribute to every individual choosing to embrace it.

When something is personal, when it comes from within the individual and is related to their own interests and values, motivation, and commitment increase. When you work on your personal mastery, you are more likely to be motivated and want to take responsibility for your own development and success. The following strategies can be used in this aspect.

- **Maturana's domains**
  One strategy to give space for the individual's vision is to structure meetings based on Maturana's domains. This contains an idea of co-creation where the personal perspective is given room to achieve a common understanding.

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> **Note**
>
> Humberto Maturana (1928-2021) was a Chilean biologist and philosopher who defined three different domains in which humans move in different interpersonal activities.
>
> - The *Aesthetic* domain: value-based actions, respectful and ethical relations
>
> - The *Explanations* domain: change or development work, reflection, exploration of different ideas
>
> - The *Productive* domain: laws, rules, right and wrongs, rights and obligations, linear thinking

We can use the idea of the different domains when we plan for and carry out meetings to create good conditions for co-creation. To solve different tasks together, a meeting or a conversation needs to move through each of these domains.

- The aesthetic domain, *the personal room*, is about giving space for our personal values, our vision and our feelings and getting to explore and share these personal perspectives with the group.

- The explanations domain, *the idea room*, gives room for curiosity and to make visible different points of views. In this room, diversity is crucial, and the aim is to deepen the common understanding. The conversation should not include values.

- The productive domain, *the decision room*, is the part where, based on the above, we find a common way to translate the group's thoughts into decisions and practical action.

By activating the three "rooms" that Maturana defined, space is given for the personal perspective and reflection based on the individual vision. In addition to contributing to co-creation, this also has a symbolic value in an organization.

To succeed in creating good meetings where co-creation takes place among the participants, we must set aside time to plan meetings and their various parts. An important part of the meeting is the *context description* where the purpose of the meeting is clarified, and all participants have the opportunity to see how the meeting will provide space for each of the mentioned domains/rooms. The common understanding of the meeting contributes to a sense of calm among the participants. For example, this means that the participants who are expecting the meeting to be in the decision room, can understand that it needs to be preceded by a joint work activity. In the same way, the participants who are looking forward to being in an idea room are informed that there will be time set aside for this.

- **Think, Pair, Share**
  Another way to work with the individual vision and reflection is by using the conversation structure TPS (Think, Pair, Share).

Example

TPS is an acronym based on the words Think, Pair, Share. It involves three steps.

First, every participant is given a moment to think for themselves and to list various thoughts and suggestions regarding the current content or question.

Second, the participants have a dialogue in pairs where they highlight their various suggestions and, if possible, list even more thoughts that they can find together.

Third, everyone shares their thoughts with the large group.
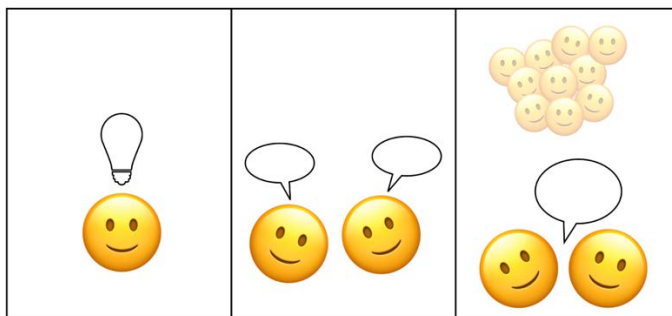
With the support of this conversation structure, it is likely that the group will have access to many more and a greater range of collected suggestions than if they had not used any conversation structure at all.

Important

When turning to an entire group asking them to come up with suggestions, it often happens that someone in the group immediately brings up a spontaneous idea or thought. This makes it easy for other participants to be influenced by that proposal and for other possible proposals to be missed.

To avoid this and instead give room for many different perspectives, the leader of a group can use the conversation structure TPS. This structure is at the same time a way to highlight the importance of every individual's unique perspective and contribution to co-creation.

In conclusion, it is important to ensure that personal mastery is kept personal. This increases individual motivation and commitment, encourages personal responsibility, and enables the individual's unique contribution to make a difference, while at the same time, the organization is strengthened to face a constantly changing environment.

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3.2.3 Personal Mastery – an ongoing process

The personal mastery is not to be considered a method or a task but a process, a way of relating to one's work. To contribute to an individual choosing the personal mastery, it is wise to create a climate in the organization that encourages this in various ways. Highlighting and talking about the personal mastery and its importance for the individual and the organization is one way. Metaphors and images can also be helpful.

A figurative way to understand the importance of personal mastery is to think that all the people who work in the organization **are** the organization. If all individuals in the organization develop in a desirable direction, the organization develops. It doesn't have to be very big changes, and everyone doesn't have to learn or do the same thing, but with all individuals moving forward, the conditions are created for a learning organization.
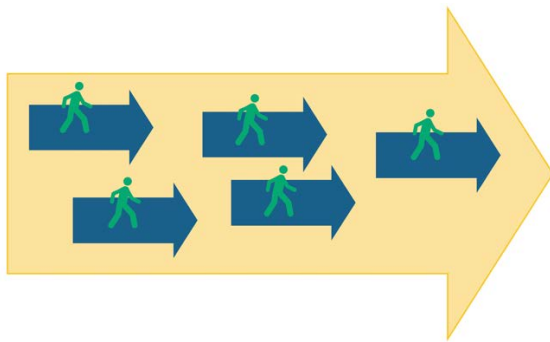
By using a picture, like the one above, the organization gets a common image for the understanding of the personal mastery. The picture can contribute to understanding that:

- the individuals in an organization are the driving force and the movement forward in development work
- everyone's learning steps count
- each person takes steps based on where they are
- learning should be a challenge that is manageable and gives space for creative tension
- the personal vision is the foundation of personal mastery

The picture can be used in various contexts to remind everyone and draw attention to the work on personal mastery.

- **The leader as a role model**
  One strategy that can contribute to building a climate that encourages learning and development for everyone is to be a role model as a leader. This can be done in several ways, for example by being open, sharing your own personal mastery and talking about challenging areas that you are curious and where want to develop and learn about.

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When individuals choose and are embraced by the personal mastery, a commitment is created which contributes to taking initiative and a personal responsibility.

3.2.4 Learning requires a cognitive effort

Definition

The researchers Steven Katz and Lisa Ain Dack defines learning as "a *permanent* change in thinking or behavior".

Katz & Dack, 2013, p. 3

Learning is a strenuous mental process. Since learning requires hard work, our intellect wants to avoid this effort. Thus, our brain gets in the way when we try to learn new things by setting up mental barriers. Mental barriers can be described as a way to maintain or restore the balance, which is put out of place when our thoughts are challenged in the process of learning. As a result, our intellect wants to interact with the outside world in a way that primarily confirms what we already know to avoid the mental effort that learning entails.

This means that even if we would describe ourselves as people who like to be challenged and who want to develop, our inner selves take various cognitive shortcuts to avoid this.

Hint

Are you thinking to yourself:

"*Well, that's probably the case for many people, but not for me because I am interested in development work and good at learning.*"

Sorry, that very thought is such a mental shortcut. You consider yourself an exception.

The fact is that we all have an intellect that can be described as a cognitive miser, i.e., we strive for the least possible cognitive effort and therefore choose to avoid challenging our thoughts as much as possible.

> **Important**
>
> Be aware of the **cognitive miser**!
>
> He tends to think as little as he can. He is wired to avoid deep thinking and take the easy way out as much as possible. His natural tendency is to be lazy when it comes to hard thinking.
>
> Katz & Dack, 2013, p. 52

When we are working in contexts where we strive for learning, we need to consider the appearance of cognitive misers. Every participant's cognitive miser will work hard when the group is exposed to a learning situation. There is also a risk that the participants will, more or less consciously, confirm and support each other's cognitive misers in different ways.

An example of when this happens in a conversation is when participants act towards each other in a way that does not contribute to learning. For example, this can be shown by the participants confirming each other or agreeing with what the others say. That type of acting will keep the conversation on a superficial level where no one is challenged within the context of the conversation. The effort that, for example, questioning or negotiating would entail is avoided. The conversation will certainly be experienced as pleasant but will most likely not lead to learning.

If we do not plan for enabling learning, our meetings, exercises, and dialogues will not be more than just activities. We do things together, we talk in dialogues, and we share each other's experiences, but it won't contribute to a permanent change in the participants' thinking and doing.

So, what can we do to prevent the barriers that the cognitive miserly creates from arising? There are different strategies.

- **Conversation structures**
  By thinking about the structure of a dialogue, we can prevent the barriers to arise. One example is the TPS structure described earlier in this text. This conversation structure prevents a single voice from setting the tone and limiting the number of perspectives.

The structure of a conversation can also be used to control who talks to whom. If the participants are free to choose conversation groups, they are likely to choose a person with the same mindset, experiences or thought models as themselves. This will lead to the conversation being based on confirmations rather than on challenging each other's thoughts. As a leader, you can challenge this pattern by consciously working with different group constellations.

> **Note**
>
> As a leader of a dialogue or collaboration in the context of development work, you need to plan for how the participants should be divided into different groups. Above all, it is important

that there is some kind of variation when it comes to group constellations. Letting the participants change groups and collaborate with different people will provide them with the opportunity to meet many different thoughts and ideas that can challenge their own.

- **Try out in practice**

  As part of development work, the leader can also use a structure where the participants need to try new ways of acting in different contexts. The trial should be in line with the desired outcome and include something new that is not already done, as it is about challenging oneself. The experiences that come with this trying-out-in-practice, become a foundation for the group to be able to reflect upon in a more objective way. The aim is to deepen their understanding of a certain issue.

These strategies work in different ways to challenge the cognitive miser. For one, gathering experiences by trying something new gives room for individuals to explore something that may not be in line with prior thoughts. Moreover, the dialogues that aims to share these experiences contribute to raising different perspectives that can deepen understandings and challenge thoughts and ideas.

The personal mastery can be considered a space to take advantage of the skills and resources that exist in the organization. Every individual has unique talents, experiences and perspectives that will contribute both to the organization as well as to society.

> ### Citation
>
> *"People with high levels of personal mastery are more committed. They take more initiative. They have a broader and deeper sense of responsibility in their work. They learn faster*."
>
> Peter Senge, 2006, p. 133

3.3 Mental Models

To develop an organization in a desired direction, many aspects need to be considered. One such aspect is mental models. It's our assumptions that guide our actions. Often, the mental models that stipulate our view of the world and our actions are not conscious. This means that our taken-for-granted beliefs are often not reflected upon and sometimes even untrue. Therefore, individuals need to scrutinize their assumptions in order to make progress in their way of thinking and acting.

Citation

"Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Very often, we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior."

Peter Senge, 2006, p. 8

To become a learning organization, individuals, regardless of their different roles and responsibilities within the system, need the opportunity to scrutinize their own mental models. There are shortcuts to growth, it happens when each employee takes steps in the desired direction. One such step is to understand more about the significance of mental models and which ones that are favourable in relation to the desired direction.

Leaders can't impose new mental models on employees, but it's possible to create good conditions for learning and development. Leaders need to lead by examples and reflect on the assumptions and mental models that guide their own actions. Having mental models is not a negative thing, it's a human necessity.

The challenge is to make the different origins for decisions and actions conscious. A common mental model among leaders can be: "This is not a problem for me, but it is for my employees." This is an example of how our intellect hinders learning. Researchers Katz and Dack (2013) describe it as different barriers that hinder our individual development. One of these barriers is seeing ourselves as exceptions. This barrier might explain the mental model mentioned above.

Note

Cognitive barriers are natural for every person and shouldn't lead to blame. The point is to make our behaviours visible and thus create conditions for conscious choices.

One way to illustrate how mental models influence behaviour is to look at the world of sports. The following example is inspired by sports psychologist Johan Plate.

Example

Swedish basketball was once in a period of lacking sporting successes. After much distress and consideration, the Swedish basketball association turned to a consultant to put the organization on a new track.

One of the first things the consultant noticed was that the Swedish basketball logo showed a basketball hoop and a basketball that just fit into the hoop. This logo was widely used in communications to those involved in Swedish basketball, from emails to the national team's

clothing. A common belief or mental model that had taken hold was that to score in basketball, the ball needed to hit the exact centre, otherwise it wouldn't go in.

To challenge this mental model, all coaches in the country were told to let all players climb up to the rim to check the size of the ball in relation to the rim diameter. For many players, it came as a total surprise that there was such a large available space for the ball to pass through.

When on the playing court, it's difficult to accurately determine proportions without actively changing your perspective to gain a revised understanding. Coaches could see that players' behaviour changed with the new mental model. When they placed shots, it was done more relaxedly, with greater confidence, and with the assurance that the ball would go in. Sweden didn't immediately become a world leader in basketball, but it was still a difference that made a difference.

Maybe you've tried throwing a basketball at the hoop without realizing which mental model was affecting you. Maybe you've stood on a golf course to make a putt that you "easily should make," but missed. Next time, it might be a good idea to approach the hole and check the size of the hole relative to the ball. **Is it reality that guides our behaviour, or is it our perception of reality?** It can make a significant difference.

Hint

What prevailing mental models would your organization need to scrutinize to see if they even hold true?

One person who worked extensively on making our mental models conscious and challenging our beliefs was Hans Rosling. He and the Gapminder organization worked during many years to make people reconsider their views by presenting facts about the state of the world. Just as the mental model about the size of the basketball rim turned out to be inaccurate upon closer inspection, Gapminder has helped many organizations and individuals to make decisions based on what research tells. At Gapminder's website it is stated that "*Gapminder identifies systematic misconceptions about important global trends and proportions and uses reliable data to develop easy-to-understand teaching materials to rid people of their misconceptions.*" (https://www.gapminder.org/about/)

Through extensive surveys, Gapminder has identified what people believe to be true about the world. In areas where the gap between what people hold true and the actual reality was the largest, Gapminder, with Hans Rosling at the forefront, created presentations that challenged the audience's beliefs. Many times, it was revealed that people's perceptions of the world's development in education, poverty, and equality were more negative than justified.

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Important

What happens in people's behaviour when they have an unreasonably negative view of the world?

Hans Rosling was a master at meeting the audience at their misdirected mental models and using concrete tools to demonstrate the actual development and status of the world.

Another area to examine to uncover mental models are aesthetics. Most people have fixed ideas about their ability to, for example, draw or sing. For many adults, the thought of standing up and singing in front of a group would be horrifying. Many children, however, paint and sing with great boldness. But most of them stop at a certain point. You might think, well, that way we won't have to hear people sing of key around you. But what if the world is missing out on several talented singers due to a negative comment? And what happened with the initial joy of singing for the individual?

Example

If you ask an adult to draw a picture, you can most likely determine at what age they stopped drawing. Do you think that the person stopped because she/he no longer enjoyed drawing?

It's likely that something about how the child's drawing was received by others changed at a certain point, and the child felt that the result was no longer satisfying. Thus, the child's mental model of their artistic skills changed.

The mental model that "I don't like to paint" can also become strong, but it's never too late to explore new horizons. Following this line of thought, it's also worth reflecting on how you, as an adult, wish to respond to and comment on children's artistic (or other) expressions.

Our assumptions in relation to different skills, like drawing, vary depending on whether our own mental models emphasize with innate talent or with the importance of practice. Most likely, everyone agrees that the classic nature vs. nurture question requires nuanced reasoning. It's not as easy as to think, "I'm really good at singing," and magically become a good vocalist.

Many people would likely recognise that mental models have held them back from daring to try something. However, it's interesting that many who stopped painting or singing as kids in a supportive environment can find their way back to the joy of creation and take small steps forward, even from a low starting point. Likely, their mental model of their own ability will be revised.

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In what artistic or athletic situations do you recognize that your mental models have hindered you?

It's not just within the field of art that our mental models can hinder our learning. In the classroom, a recurring internal monologue occurs in each student alongside instructions, like the one in the example below.

Example

Imagine a teacher asking a question to be answered by the students. It's likely that the expected answers could be categorized into three alternatives:

Alt. 1: *I just hope I don't embarrass myself.*

Alt. 2: *I need to answer quickly and "win" against the others.*

Alt. 3: *Interesting, this situation is an opportunity to learn something new.*

This categorisation is, of course, simplified, but you can probably recognize that you fall into one of these groups when faced with a challenge. If these three categories were to be evaluated, the last alternative that sees the situation as a learning opportunity is probably the most desirable. Therefore, the school should strive to create a culture where pupils have the opportunity to focus on learning rather than comparing themselves to others.

Hint

Reflect on situations where you have unknowingly fallen into the three different mental models: 1) avoiding embarrassment, 2) competing with others, or 3) seeing a learning opportunity.

The fact that mental models influence our actions is natural and something that comes with being a human. The challenge is that mental models often have a negative impact on an individual's actions. It's only when the mental model is made conscious that its influence becomes apparent, as in the case with the basketball hoop described above. Let's look at another example from the world of sports.

Example

What do you see, the goalkeeper or the net?

When ice hockey players were interviewed, it turned out that most players saw the goalkeeper when they were about to shoot to score.

But what characterised the most notorious goal scorers was that they instead saw the net behind the goalie.

When focus was on the goalkeepers, they often appeared mentally large and nearly impossible to get past, but when focus shifted to the net, the goalie's presence felt diminished.

Systems theory describes the art of choosing where to direct your gaze. This involves the important ability to consciously choose perspectives to make wise decisions. In the school's relation-rich everyday life, it's easy to get caught up in the present situations and do more of the same (even though it doesn't work). By intentionally changing your perspective, the everyday becomes new, leading to new insights that can create alternative courses of action. In an organization that aims to develop the mental models of the employees, it is often successful to talk about a change of perspective.

Exercise

"*We prepare in calmness and we act in storm.*"

Following these wise words of the deceased Buddhist monk Björn Natthiko Lindeblad, what could be a suitable scenario for your organization to engage in dialogues around?

3.4 Building a Shared Vision

The speech "I have a dream" by Martin Luther King is well known to many of us. In its essence Martin Luther King talks about a future that is not here yet, he is painting a picture of what could be, thus "I have a dream". This serves as a great example of the essence of a vision.

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Citation

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!"

Martin Luther King, 1929-1968

Having a clear and inspiring vision that is embodied by the organization is paramount to success. A vision that is shared by the organization acts as a guiding star and gives each employee direction and purpose in their efforts. It is the lighthouse that unites the people and the teams within the organization, aligning goals and giving inspiration. A strong vision that is embodied within everyone in the organization will light a spark of passion that will result in achieving the unachievable.

Note

In its simplest form a vision is the answer to the question "What do you want to create?".

A **personal vision** is a picture, reminiscent of what you as an individual want to create.

A **shared vision** works in the same way, painting a picture for an organization, and it creates the foundation for belonging and inspires collaboration and co-creation.

In contrast to strategies, visions aspire for what can be rather than seeing how one can tackle the current situation. Strategies focus on **how** we do things, not **why** we are doing things. In that regard visions have a clear relationship with systems thinking that was described earlier in this text.

Hint

For more inspiration on why and how to find your "why", further reading in the book *Start with why* by Simon Sinek can be recommended.

Although it might seem easy to "find your why", implementing it into an organization in the form of a shared vision is not for the faint of heart. It is not as easy as for the leader to draft and live the vision and thereafter tell the rest of the organization to fall in line, it requires tenacity. Building a shared vision is hard work that involves intentional effort, effective communication, and clear leadership.

In this chapter we'll dive into the wonderful art of creating and implementing a shared vision that lights a fire of passion within each employee and the organization as a whole. Just like John F. Kennedy said: "We'll put a man on the moon by the end of this decade and bring him back alive".

3.4.1 The importance of a shared vision

Often, it is the founder's personal vision(s) that is shared by the organization and starts to build a common identity. If you think of it, it's hard to imagine that a company like IKEA would have been built without the vision of Ingvar Kamprad "to create a better everyday life for many people", or that Apple would become the world's most successful company without the vision of Steve Jobs and Steve Wosniak referring to computers as a "bicycle for the mind".

Some visions start as a reaction to the competitive landscape that they are in. One of the most well-known examples of this is Pepsi who had the vision to beat Coca Cola. But what will happen when this goal has been reached? There is a high likelihood that the vision loses energy and that the employees become passive or, even worse, defensive.

Looking at the goals of successful athletes, they are not about beating the competition or to win championships, instead they are about perfection, to become the best athletes they can be, trying to beat themselves rather than their opponents. One of the world's most successful alpine skiers, Ingmar Stenmark, with 86 world cup wins, had the goal of "skiing a perfect run" something he thought he never accomplished.

> **Note**
>
> A good vision is something unattainable, something you'll never reach, just like Apples current vision "to make the best products on earth, and to leave the world better than we found it".
>
> There is no final destination in leaving the world better than we found it.

The shared vision inspires every employee to a higher purpose, something more than just the transaction of labour in return for money. The vision is something that you strive for and that becomes a part of your everyday work.

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> ## Example
>
> At Fridaskolan, the mission is to "educate backpackers" but the vision is something larger, something more, namely "to have a positive impact on all schools in Sweden".
>
> Every day as the teachers and leaders at Fridaskolan work on educating backpackers (as opposed to charter travellers) they also strive to be a positive force for all pupils and all schools in Sweden.

The vision is closely aligned with an organization's raison d'être, that is the reason for existing, the *why*. Tesla Cars is not in the business of building cars, but in the business of electrifying transportation. In the same way, Volvo Cars is not in the business of building cars, but in the business of making sure that no one is killed in traffic.

A shared vision is something that the organization can hang on to when things rapidly change or get tough, it can be a haven on a stormy sea, something one can rely on and relate to when a challenge arises.

> ## Important
>
> The shared vision is what lights the spark of passion within the organization resulting in achieving the unachievable!

3.4.2 Building a shared vision

Shared visions are grown out of individual visions, it is within the personal vision one finds the commitment and energy for the shared vision. Bill O'Brien former CEO of Hanover Insurance Company states that commitment is personal, it grows out of the individual's own values and ambition. True commitment in a shared vision always has its roots in a personal vision. Sadly, many leaders and organizations fail to acknowledge this personal aspect and instead decide what vision the organization should have in the future.

One way to look at a vision is to view it as a fractal, a geometric shape that is built up by smaller versions of that same shape. Think about the Russian dolls, Matrjosjkas, that can be hidden in one another. Regardless of what part you observe or what level of magnification, you'll always see the same shape reappearing. In relation to a shared vision this means that the vision does not change as more and more people join, it just becomes more true and vivid.

To build a shared vision, one must start with supporting each individual's own journey on creating their own visions. This is described further in the chapter about *Personal Mastery*. As individuals have their own personal mastery, they can join forces in creating a shared vision. Shaping a shared vision often results in a creative tension between the different personal visions which must be acknowledged so that one can build on that energy rather than avoiding friction. We need to use the different creative forces in a positive way and try to make use of all the momentum, just like in the martial art of judo where you try to make use of your opponent's movements rather than trying to stop them.

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As a leader, you can build on those employees who have a clear picture of the vision and are making use of this creative tension in a positive direction. The leader must always be aware of the balance between supporting the employee's personal mastery and making sure that it is in line with the organization's ambition and core values, to calibrate the vision.

> **Note**
>
> An important task of a leader is to **calibrate** the organisation, to "adjust the settings" of the tone and climate of the employees as well as of the values and norms in the organization.

It is also important to bear in mind that the creative task of drafting a vision seldom comes out of an organized planning process, more commonly this happens serendipitously when different individuals interact with each other. Therefore, to start articulating and creating the shared vision, the leader could benefit by having several interactions with different individuals within and outside the organization to start building the greater picture.

The following strategies are important when building a shared vision.

- **Involvement**

As previously stated, building a shared vision requires both involvement and commitment from key stakeholders: employees from different parts and levels of the organization as well as external stakeholders. By involving different stakeholders in the process, you get access to different perspectives as well as creating space for involvement from the participants.

- **Purpose**

A shared vision should have a clear and compelling purpose that aspires to each employee's ambition. It should answer the question of the organization's "raison d'être", that is, the "why" or reason for existing. For example, as earlier mentioned Apples vision of "to leave the world better than we found it".

- **Values**

It is important to make sure that the vision aligns with the organization's core values, it should reflect the norms, beliefs and principles of the organization and its culture. For example, look at the outdoor clothing company *Patagonia* and their sustainability profile, everything they do, they do for future generations. The founder Yvon Chouinard took the matter so far that he donated the whole company to two trusts and stated that earth is now our only shareholder.

- **Communication**

Clear and effective communication is one key when creating and living the shared vision. Using different channels to communicate the vision, how important it is, and how the organization is progressing towards the vision are good strategies. For example, this could be done by sharing examples of success stories from employees or teams within the organization that have embodied the vision and showed it in practice.

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- **Connection**

As described above, a strong shared vision has its roots in each employee's individual vision. Each person within the organization should have a clear understanding of their own objectives and the shared vision. For example, a design team can have an objective to test several designs on a number of different persons before narrowing down to three main design proposals.

- **Co-creation**

Fostering a culture of collaboration and co-creation, building a shared vision requires a culture where the employees feel empowered to contribute with their ideas and work towards the common goal of the organization. Encourage open dialog and knowledge sharing, make sure that employees from different parts of the organization interact with each other. For example, look at pharmaceutical and biotechnology company *AstraZeneca* that put up sofas and coffee machines in the corridors to encourage researchers to interact with each other and mingle.

- **Support**

No one is a master from day one, support employees in their journey towards embodying the shared vision. Help them develop the skills necessary to contribute to the shared vision, offer training, mentorship resources etc. For example, celebrate individuals and teams that exemplify the vision in their work, recognise desired behaviours and instil pride and ownership.

3.4.3 Strategic Narrative

One way to align values and purpose and communicate the shared vision is to write a "Strategic Narrative". A strategic narrative is a concise, compelling story that communicates an organization's vision. It is a special kind of story that tells who you are as an organization, where you have been, where you are and where you are going. It could be viewed as a roadmap that guides everyone in the organization and tells them why their work and contribution is important.

The strategic narrative does not come out from customer interviews or analyses of competition but rather as a story that comes from within the organization almost as if the organization was a human. The strategic narrative is more based on relationships and how the individuals in the organization can relate to it. It can often be written as a story from the future where one can follow one or several individuals on a normal working day. What does that look like, who are they interacting with, what are they working on, how are they working, etc.

As an example of a strategic narrative, let's look at Jane Simpson's story of the first day as a student at an upper secondary school in 2028.

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Jane arrives at campus by the autonomous shuttle pod that has started to replace both car and bus commuting in later years.

As she walks up to the school building, she takes a spatial computing pad out of her backpack, which instantaneously recognises where she is and gives her directions to the correct classroom.

She has already met and interacted with all her teachers and classmates in the school's virtual reality environment.

Her first lesson of the day is a lesson combining history and social science and the topic for the day is the roman empire. The teacher starts the lesson by asking all pupils to put on their spatial glasses. In the blink of an eye, they are "transported" directly to the roman senate and a debate on water supply.

All students take part in the debate as senators and discuss the topic with the other senators, the discussion is vivid and as close to reality as possible can be.

After the debate, Jane joins her classmate Marge face to face to reflect and discuss their experiences and hand in a report to their teacher.

3.4.4 Embracing the shared vision

One can never force or persuade individuals to join the shared vision, each individual will have their own relationship with the shared vision, some will embrace and live it to the fullest, some will not. It is a matter of perception of how the individuals view themselves and their role in the organization, which can be compared to a dance between leaders and employees.

Hint

Different perspectives of a vision can be illustrated through the story of the two stonecutters working on the pyramids in ancient Egypt.

They were both doing the exact same task but for one of them the job was about cutting out perfect blocks of stone, whereas for the other it was building the pyramids.

It is important to remember that attitudes towards the shared vision can change over time. Individuals' commitment can evolve based on their experiences, engagement and understanding. As earlier mentioned, it is important to constantly work with communication and support as well as provide opportunities for involvement and growth. Doing so can increase commitment in the shared vision within different levels in the organization.

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Exercise

Use the list of possible attitudes towards a shared vision created by Peter Senge (2006, p. 203) to see if you can identify one or several of these within your organization.

Commitment
Wants it. Will make it happen. Creates whatever "laws" (structures) are needed.

Enrollment
Wants it. Will do whatever can be done within the "spirit of the law."

Genuine compliance
Sees the benefits of the vision. Does everything expected and more. Follows the "letter of the law." "Good soldier."

Formal compliance
On the whole, sees the benefits of the vision. Does what's expected and not more. "Pretty good soldier."

Grudging compliance
Does not see the benefits of the vision. But, also, does not want to lose job. Does enough of what's expected because he has to, but also lets it be known that he is not really on board.

Noncompliance
Does not see benefits of vision and will not do what's expected. "I won't do it; you can't make me."

Apathy
Neither for nor against vision. No interest. No energy. "Is it five o'clock yet?"

As the shared vision gets clearer by communication, there will be an increased commitment and engagement. The shared vision starts to spread within the organization due to a natural reinforcing process as people start to live and talk about it. As momentum increases, more and more individuals engage in the shared vision. As a result, different understandings of what the shared vision is can begin to appear. If these different understandings start to grow, there is a risk that limiting factors for the shared visions growth starts to spread within the organization.

To prevent the shared vision to go off track or, even worse, die prematurely, there is a need to regularly follow up and calibrate the process. There is also a need for a strong and clear leadership focusing on effective communication and providing the resources and support needed.

Note

Building a shared vision is neither an end destination nor a project that ends at certain point of time. It is an ongoing process towards a goal that never will be reached.

One way to prevent the shared vision from going off track or die prematurely is to arrange recurring meetings where everyone gets the opportunity to talk about their own understanding, experiences, and journey towards the shared vision, thus creating a common understanding in a bigger sense.

Embracing a shared vision is one sense no different than any other change, as the shared vision often includes organizational change and adaptation. In this process, some individuals react with more resistance than others.

3.5 Team Learning

Citation
"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Aristotle

The quote above fits well when describing team learning, as it is based on a group of individuals functioning as a whole, a team. A prerequisite for team learning is that individuals within a group share a common purpose and a common goal, and that they know how to complement each other in various ways to enhance each other's abilities. When this is achieved, the power of co-creation becomes evident, where the collective knowledge of the group becomes greater than the sum of the individual members' knowledge.

When individual members within an organization develop and learn entirely on their own, it rarely holds significant importance for the organization. On the other hand, learning that emerges within a group has the potential to spread and influence the organization. Concurrently, the individual members within the group also develop, often at a faster rate than if they were learning on their own.

A group needs to manage complex issues, understand how to collaborate effectively, and recognize and respond to how the group's actions also impact other groups or structures of the larger system. The likelihood for success in this process is improved when working through co-creation. Another crucial component is that the group develops relevant abilities and strategies during the process.

3.5.1 Meeting strategies for co-creation

In theory, it's easy to think that a group's collective knowledge is greater than the sum of the individual members' knowledge. The challenge lies within finding strategies that contribute to reaching this point as a group. The group's shared understanding of the ambition as well as the understanding of useful strategies can contribute to this process.

Using the tools of systems theory for effective meetings is one strategy. These tools are used by the leader of the meeting. While simple in themselves, they can contribute to clarity, participation, and the potential for co-creation within the context of the meeting. The three tools for an effective meeting are context description, joint action, and a beautiful ending.

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- **Context description**
  A context description creates clarity in what should be done in a meeting and how long it should last. By defining the roles among the participants in the meeting and the different assignments, an understanding and confidence is created among the participants. This often contributes to strengthened relationships.

We need to set aside time to understand the context. A context description is a tool used to create meaning among the participants and to make it easier for the participants to be active and to use the available time in an efficient way.

A context description includes the following:

- **Time**
  As the leader of a meeting, you need to inform the participants of how the time will be used during the meeting. You can also talk about time in a longer perspective – how many sessions they will take part in and how much time will be needed before the work is completed and the goals are reached.

- **Place**
  Many meetings take place in a specific physical or digital setting, and the participants are often well aware of "where they are supposed to be" during the session. In some meetings, the participants are to change rooms for a coffee break or for work in smaller groups. Information about place and how it will be used helps to comfort the participants.

- **Relationships**
  In a meeting it is also important to clarify the different roles among the participants. Sometimes different roles are needed in different work tasks. It is also important to clarify values and policies in the group, e.g., how we can help and challenge each other in a positive way, how we can boost each other, how we all can contribute to the meeting. In relation to team learning, this part of the context description is particularly important. To be able to co-create as a group, all participants in the group need to be regarded as equally important. Therefore, even if an organization is somehow hierarchically structured and there is a leader for the meeting, the roles in this co-creation need to be clarified.

- **Assignments – Purpose & Goals**
  In order for the participants to feel secure and to facilitate for them to contribute to the meeting in a good way, it is important to clarify the content and the tasks of the meeting. This includes talking about the purpose and goals of the meeting and the specific activities that will be included. Since a group's common purpose and vision is a prerequisite for team learning, this part of the context description also becomes particularly important.

Another strategy to create effective meetings is a joint action.

- **Joint Action**
  A joint action helps the participants to find focus in the meeting. The participants are immediately involved in the content. Through the joint action the participants get a

At the start of a meeting, all participants come from different situations and contexts. A joint action causes the participant to leave their own thoughts and end up in a common focus. In this way, the participant goes from his or her individual perspective to a "common mind". There are different ways to do a joint action, but it is all about all participants becoming active early in the meeting. They can work to fulfil different purposes:

- to recapitulate former meetings
- to arouse curiosity to a specific content
- to strengthen relations

Which joint action you choose to start with is determined by the purpose of the meeting and which content will be the focus during the meeting. The joint action should help the participants find the focus on what awaits, and not further reinforce the feeling that they are in a different state-of-mind. Ideally, you also want to create curiosity and an interest in the content that will follow during the meeting. Regardless of the type of joint action, it is important that everyone becomes involved, for example in a dialogue.

The third strategy to create effective meetings is a beautiful ending.

- **Beautiful Ending**
  A beautiful ending helps to "close" the meeting in a good way. By having a beautiful ending, it becomes clear to the participants when the meeting ends, but it also creates an opportunity for learning. The leader "sees" the individual and how their individual parts contribute to a collective learning. From the things said in the beautiful ending, the leader also learns what is important to develop in future meetings. It is important as a leader to plan so that there is time for a beautiful end and to keep that time.

At the end of the meeting, all participants get a chance to put into words their insights and thoughts about what was important during the meeting. It creates participation in the group but is also valuable information for the leader. If there is time, the beautiful ending is best done by allowing all participants to say something based on a given question. Alternatively, this can be done in writing.

Hint

An example of a Beautiful Ending:

What is the most important thing you learned today?

3.5.2 Dialogue – the most important tool in a team

In the context of a group's co-creative work, it becomes important to distinguish between dialogue and discussion. Both modes of communication are necessary, but the group primarily needs to develop its ability to engage in dialogues.

> **Important**
>
> The primary purpose of a **dialogue** is to listen to each other and exchange thoughts and ideas. The dialogue focuses on building a shared understanding and seeking insights and solutions.
>
> A **discussion**, on the other hand, involves clarifying opinions and presenting arguments with the intention of convincing others. This type of communication may be necessary when a group is approaching a decision.
>
> To reach the group's potential and collective knowledge, the decision-making phase needs to be preceded by dialogue.

Dialogues need to be characterised by openness that provide a safe and forgiving environment where each participant feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts. Listening is key in a dialogue. Participants are present and focus actively on understanding each other to foster collaboration and a mutual understanding. Dialogue encourages exploration of different perspectives and the common search for the best possible solution. To engage in fruitful dialogues, the group needs to develop different skills and find strategies that support them along the way. Below you will find some different strategies to foster good dialogues.

- **Planning the structure of the dialogue**
  Through the use of conversation structures, the leader can create active participation while also distributing speaking opportunities within a group. This is especially important in contexts where the goal is to capture each individual's knowledge or understanding. TPS (Think Pair Share) mentioned earlier is an example of a conversation structure that provides all participants with time to reflect and formulate their own thoughts before moving on to the next step of trying their ideas against someone else's. Transitioning from individual reflections to dialogues in pairs, and then raising a question to the group level is one way to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and that a variety of thoughts and knowledge is brought to the surface.

- **Trialogues**
  In a trialogue participants form groups of three individuals and engage in a discussion based on three roles. One person has the role of an interviewer and poses questions to the person who is assigned the role of interviewee. The interviewee shares his or her thoughts with the others by answering the questions from the interviewer. The third person takes on the role of an observer. The observer listens actively during the interview and afterwards provides reflections on what was said during the interview. The trialogue takes place during a predetermined time slot e.g., 15-25 minutes in total or 5-8 minutes/interview (for example, 5 minutes for the interviewer and 2 minutes for the observer). During this time, the participants in the group switch roles two times and engage in two more interviews following the mentioned format, ensuring that all participants in the group take on all three roles.
  The trialogue provides space for everyone's voice to be heard, and furthermore, it gives a significant emphasis on listening, which is crucial for team learning.

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- **Building a common language**

  Another strategy for co-creation and collaboration is to build a common language. By a common language, we refer to key words and key concepts that are understood and used by everyone. One challenge with all communication is the difficulty of knowing how one person understands what another person says. There is a risk of assuming that everyone else thinks and understands something in the same way. By actively working with different words and concepts, a common language can be established within a group or organization. One way to build a common language is to actively listen for useful terms and intentionally incorporating them into various dialogues or texts. Words and concepts can also be used, for example, in a joint action, allowing participants to understand and internalize these concepts as part of their own active vocabulary.

3.5.3 Making assumptions visible

For a group to co-create and function as a whole, it is crucial to pause for a moment and understand what drives our actions or thoughts – in other words, to understand the assumptions we rely on. This applies to individual members as well as to the group. Our natural instincts often lead us to take mental shortcuts to avoid thinking deeply. Researchers Steven Katz and Lisa Ain Dack describe how these mental shortcuts can be understood as a series of barriers that prevent us from considering all possibilities, cause us to focus primarily on confirming our hypotheses rather than questioning them, and lead us to spend too much time on what is most obvious. The risk of this behaviour is that we might make decisions that don't lead us in the desired direction because we haven't taken the time to deeply understand a problem and have based our decisions on false assumptions.

The following model (Eriksson, 2021 cited in Wennergren & Carolsson Godolakis, 2022) can be used to understand this dilemma in a theoretical way (Fig. 3.2).

Focus	Problem	Solutions
Hidden structures within the organization	**2.** **Where are we?** Identify causes to the visible problems	**3.** **Where are we going?** Short term goal that will minimize problems in the organization
Observable problems within the organization	**1.** **Where are we?** Identify obvious (visible) problems	**4.** **How do we do?** Efforts to improve the organization

Figure 3.2 Planning tool for analysis (Modified from Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013)

What often happens after having identified a challenge within the organization is that we immediately start thinking about actions to be taken, that is going directly from step 1 to step 4 in the model. Doing so, there is an obvious risk that the actions we take will not solve the identified problem.

To avoid inaccurate decisions, it is important to take the time to conduct a deeper analysis of the situation where you try to uncover the causes and consider your objectives – your goal. This means going through all four steps in the model. The model can be helpful in creating a shared understanding of the barriers that might hinder us and how we collectively need to act to overcome them.

Below you will find three different strategies that can help us in making assumptions visible.

- **Taking time to reflect**
  As humans, we often tend to jump into practical actions in various situations. We can probably all relate to the satisfying feeling of "getting things done" and taking action. To prevent this tendency from overshadowing a group's progress, it's important to find strategies that help us stay engaged in a deeper reflection or analysis before making decisions. We can turn to Maturana's domains, as described in the chapter on personal mastery, and as part of a meeting, allocate time for the "idea room" before going into the "decision room". This approach involves setting aside time for both aspects within a meeting and create a shared understanding of the importance of not rushing into decisions too quickly.

- **Critical friends**
  A group can also develop the ability to act as each other's critical friends in various contexts. A critical friend is someone who genuinely supports you while challenging your ideas and actions to help you grow and improve. Being a critical friend is not easy as it requires a balance between supportive and challenging aspects, as well as a

safe and trusting relationship where honest feedback and challenges can be exchanged in a constructive manner. Critical friends can be a valuable tool for making assumptions visible and contribute to new perspectives. In a work process, moments for critical friend interactions can be planned, especially during parts where it's important to pause and reflect with a greater depth.

- **Working with Scenarios**
  Another strategy to challenge thought processes and creating space for innovative thinking or diverse perspectives is through various types of scenario exercises. The advantage of using scenarios is that none of the participants has a personal connection to the scenario. This makes it easier to see the entire context surrounding the scenario, unlike if one were personally involved. It can also make it easier for participants to be critical or explore new ideas.

Below you will find an example of a scenario that can be used to explore different perspectives.

Example

At a school somewhere in Europe, a leader is leading a group of colleagues. Since collaboration and dialogue are important aspects of their interactions, the leader has arranged chairs in a circle in the room, something the group is not used to.

Most of the participants in the group don't make a big deal about it and take their seats. However, one of the participants reacts when he/she sees the arrangement and clearly indicates that he/she doesn't want to sit in the circle with the others by taking a seat at a chair outside of the circle instead.

Question: *What strategies can the leader use to address this situation?*

Scenarios often benefit from focusing on something relevant to the participants' own reality.

Becoming a team of learners and working together as a unified entity is an active effort, both to create this mindset and to continue functioning that way over time. The different strategies can advantageously be applied to various forms of co-creation, and at the same time contribute to building a shared understanding and awareness of this process.

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Concluding Remarks

This handbook was addressed to you who work as a principal or leader within a school or any other type of social organization, where people in their daily work are expected to cooperate to achieve specific goals. The purpose of the handbook is to give you as a leader increased knowledge about how to create a school culture where everyone strives for continuous development with joint efforts – in short, a learning organization.

The content of the book is about the common goal of creating a school where every individual – children, students, staff, parents, and leaders – works to learn and develop. The handbook builds on the experiences and knowledge from Fridaskolan that has been gained by working with students, parents, teachers, and leaders in the field of education during more than 30 years. With the help of various examples and strategies that we use in our daily work at Fridaskolan, our intention was that this text would help you gain access to thought models, methods, and concrete tools that you can use to implement a culture of growth mindset with the aim of creating a good learning culture at your school or within your organization.

In the work of creating a culture within an entire staff group at a school, we take departure in theories that regard the organization as a system. This means that instead of considering the organization as a set of individual perceptions, we consider it as a whole, where several individuals share a common mindset. Based on Carol Dweck's definition of growth mindset, it means that an organization with a growth mindset culture embraces and takes on challenges, acts with perseverance through various types of obstacles or problems, learns from criticism and seeks inspiration in the success of others. Through hard work, over time and with a focus on processes rather than on results, the organization can develop in the desired direction.

To understand what it means to implement a growth mindset culture in a school, the examples and strategies from Fridaskolan are framed in relation to Peter Senge's thoughts of a learning organization. Peter Senge (2006) describes five different components: *Systems thinking*, *Personal mastery*, *Mental models*, *Building shared visions* and *Team learning*, and how they interact to create a learning organization. Furthermore, Senge refers to the different components as disciplines to illustrate that we need to work actively to learn to master these competencies or skills.

We hope that this handbook will guide you on the long and complex, but at the same time amazingly exciting journey that it means to create, shape, and maintain a learning organization!

Best of luck!

Didaktikcentrum, 2023

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