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Systems Thinking

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SYSTEMS THINKING

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An organization is defined as a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or pursue collective goals. (Businessdictionary, 2016) The needs of an organization could be a financial, social, moral, or a combination of multiple needs. Nonetheless, a root word in word organization is, ation. The root, ation, means the act or process of doing something. (Marriam-Webster, 2016) This root word creates an important distinction in the term, organization, because the root word suggests constant movement, action, or change. Peter Senge's idea of learning organizations and systems thinking speak to the continuous act or action of learning and development in an organization.

Senge (2010) describes systems thinking as a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively. Those that use systems thinking, consider the whole of a system, group, or organization, rather than the part, to make decisions that are more meaningful. According to Senge (2010), a learning organization begins as systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team-learning work in concert with one another.

To understand a learning organization and system thinking, it is important to understand each component as defined by Peter Senge, in his book, "The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization." First, personal mastery describes people who consistently realize the results that matter most to them and approach life in a specific way to achieve those goals. Second, mental models are the perspectives one has as shaped by his or her experiences and philosophical beliefs. Third,

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building shared vision is the common outlook and goals shared by multiple members of the organization. Fourth, team learning is the act of learning as a collective group through dialogue. Fifth, systems thinking is considered the fifth discipline because it integrates the four other disciplines, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice.

(Senge, 2010)

The Big Picture

Goals and objectives are key aspects of any organization, regardless of the organization's purpose. The goals of an organization are typically attained, not by one member's efforts, but through the collective efforts of many, or all members of the organization. Margaret Rouse (2016) defines organizational goals as strategic objectives established to outline expected outcomes and guide employee's efforts. However, organizational goals cannot be achieved by focusing on a small segment of an organization. Systems thinking makes the small aspects of a learning organization understandable. This is achieved due to the new ways in which individuals perceive themselves, their world around them and their organization. Senge (2016) suggests that at the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind. That is, members begin to see their connection to the organization and how their own actions create problems or solutions.

Common Theme

During the semester, we were asked to complete three projects. The first project focused on the Universal Design Model (UDL) of teaching. The UDL project required the recreation of a standard, worksheet, objective, lecture, or test-based activity with an incorporation of UDL. The second project focused on a technology implementation project that served as a proposal for a new and innovative use of technology in the

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classroom. This project incorporated the constructionist and constructivist worldview to frame the selected project. The third project asked to design a flipped classroom with a series of instructional materials to engage students outside of the classroom.

All three projects, carried out over the course of the semester, connected with a common theme of technology and how technology functions a tool to improve the larger landscape of K-12 education. According to Peter Senge, a learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. (Senge, 2016) In each project, the reality was; a UDL project, aimed to improve individual learning with specific techniques and technologies; a technology implementation project, intended to increase student engagement and achievement through dynamic technology-facilitated lessons; and a flipped classroom project, designed to improve the learning environment, by using technology to teach new content at home and facilitate collaboration in the classroom.

Each project had a connection with learning organization and systems learning, because they all required sounds understanding of and planning for micro aspects of the organization or environment as a whole to improve overall success. Additionally, with the involvement of students, teachers, curriculum designers, parents, technology, and policy makers, a narrowed perspective is likely to limit the success of each project. This parallels a member's limited perspective as described by Senge. Senge suggests that narrowed perspectives create limits to an individual's reality, and therefore decelerates an organization's active movement towards a learning organization. (Senge, 2016)

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