

## Overview

Organizational transformations are most effective when they are understood by, are supported by, and include top levels of leadership. Unless the leaders themselves are willing to get involved in their own transformation, it is unlikely that the organization will evolve into an optimal learning system. W. Edwards Deming himself recognized understanding psychology as an important component of his System of Profound Knowledge (1994). In my discussions with business leaders, this has often been interpreted as related to motivation, rewards/recognition, etc., and, for some types of performance, it is. But business leaders tend to stop short of addressing the issue of “profound knowledge.” Since all levels of the organization are interrelated, there is little hope of increased consciousness on the part of the system if significant figures are not willing to learn about themselves and to confront their own mental models.

The task confronting the change agent (e.g., coach, consultant) at the highest level of the organization is to help upper leadership gain self-knowledge as a pre-condition for influencing reality-based change in the organization. This is not an easy task. Two psychological principles apply: The first is that all high levels of achievement come at the expense of other areas of the personality. The second is that persons who are superior at one area of human functioning tend to be superior at other areas of human functioning. Hence, among executives, we frequently find capable individuals who are functioning at superior levels in narrow domains and who have often deemphasized or neglected the broader context of their lives. The good news is that they probably have the potential to accomplish broader access to their considerable ability; however, it simply has not been a major priority in comparison to traditional business achievement.

To illustrate, we will examine a variable that accounts for billions of dollars of lost revenue, innovation, and commitment to businesses worldwide.

Specifically, we will explore the concept of *resistance* as it affects internal experience and performance. Steps will be offered to help introduce CEOs and other business leaders to new ways of thinking about achieving optimal performance—methods that are supported by science. The gap between scientific knowledge about how human beings operate and traditional business perspectives has not narrowed much over the past decades. Narrowing this gap is becoming increasingly important as the competitive success of businesses in the global economy relies on timely innovation in the creation of knowledge-based products.

This Web site will present several ways to begin gaining current information from top experts in the fields of psychology and business who are on the cutting edge of science. The content will not remain static over time, and your input will be valuable in bringing new knowledge to business leaders. We seek to elevate the purpose of business by helping business leaders add value to their lives and companies by realistically understanding how to align the psychological needs of the workforce (including their own needs) with the business demands of a rapidly changing technological environment.

# Performance and Resistance

by

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In our Web site section *Evolving Principles for Business Leaders*, the following statement is presented:

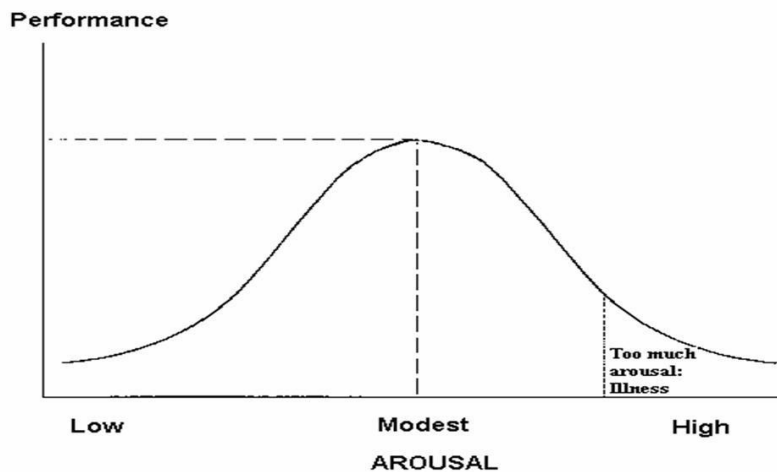
“In most business environments, success is measured by indices such as market share, profits, salary etc. But rarely is success measured by reduction of the gap between individual (and collective) potential and performance. Traditional accountability measures would still apply, but the *means* for achieving them would add personal and interpersonal mastery as major goals and objectives.”

Although there is obviously a lot behind this statement as it applies to business success, the fact is that we ignore it at our peril. In the knowledge-based global world of the future, we need to ensure that all organizational members are free to contribute innovative ideas at all levels of the enterprise, and that they are motivated and willing to do so. Under these conditions, knowledge creation is optimal, and a company can become knowledge-based and innovative in the pursuit of excellence. But this is not always the case, as the following quote from Robert K. Cooper (2001a) makes clear: “It has been reported that 50% to 85% of people believe they could double their productivity ‘if they wanted to’...and they don’t want to.” Why?

## How Drive Influences Performance

One major contributor to this problem is *resistance*. Before looking at an example of how resistance can silently interfere with excellence, we will review a concept known as the Yerkes-Dodson Law, which is presented in simplified form below.

Yerkes/Dodson Law:



This is one of the few relationships in the psychological literature that is reliable enough over a broad range of performance to be labeled a law. The Yerkes-Dodson Law relates a broad range of performance to the general concept of arousal or drive. To simplify, almost any type of *performance* can relate to *arousal*, as shown on the curve above. This relationship is important to business leaders because it shows that performance is optimal at moderate levels of drive. For many, this concept might seem counterintuitive. If a person's performance does not meet expectation, we generally assume that he or she is unmotivated and that, if we could simply light a fire under him or her, performance would improve. As shown on the chart above, this is not necessarily true. The fact is that many

underperformers are conscientious, often perfectionistic, and even anxious about doing a good job and are overly focused on how their performance is perceived. Rather than being unmotivated, their arousal lies somewhere between modest and high on the curve shown above. (I am referring to behaviors that are within the normal range of functioning, not diagnosable psychopathology.)

An aside: Some executives might take the position that it is best to get rid of these underperformers and replace them with workers who are high performers and who require lower maintenance. However, this can be a mistake. For most of us, human development is fraught with levels of stress and trauma. But the brightest and most sensitive among us may be more likely to be negatively affected by it. Because of their ability and sensitivity, they may be more aware of the many subtle messages and contradictions that often lead to feelings of not being good enough to satisfy authority figures. For bright children, emotional development often lags behind intellectual development; because of this, they are more likely to construct internal narratives explaining adult intent in the context of immature emotional development. Basically, the result is that an internal conflict is created: These bright and sensitive children learn how to present what they think their caretakers want them to be, which, in their minds, is often different from what they perceive themselves to be. What is experienced on the inside becomes different from what is presented on the outside. To oversimplify, they reduce this conflict by banishing what is on the inside from awareness and by compromising parts of themselves to cope more successfully with their view of outside demands and expectations. These compromises are never completely successful and are often outside of conscious awareness. Even so, the conflict produces symptoms and sensitivities. The bright, sensitive child may become chronically overly aroused and relegate contradictory feelings to the unconscious to manage the conflict. However, these disowned parts of themselves never really go away. They press for expression,

especially in the context of the workplace demands and expectations put forth by those in authority.

The reason for this brief diversion into development is to make an important point. *It is often the best and the brightest who are the most symptomatic in the work environment.* Unlike their less able and less motivated coworkers, they may be perfectionistic and anxious about their performance and experiencing higher than moderate levels of arousal or drive. They have the most to offer but simultaneously require the most encouragement and support (reduction of arousal). Under conditions that reduce arousal, these bright and sensitive members of the workforce are likely to offer the most creative and innovative solutions to furthering the aims of the company. They are especially important for knowledge based companies, which in the future will be in competition for global market share, but they are important to small businesses as well.

## **An Example**

Now that we have explored how an otherwise normal person can become habitually over-aroused, let's consider an oversimplified example to examine the relationship between performance and arousal at work. If a person's motivation or drive (arousal) is low, then increasing the external pressure on him or her may increase drive and lead to improved performance. On the other hand, a person who is highly motivated and driven to succeed (higher arousal) may respond to increasing external pressure with performance declines. At very high levels of motivation and drive (or anxiety, or arousal), increasing external stress can not only interfere with performance but can even result in illness. In our Web site section *Evolving Principles for Business Leaders*, the following statement represents this extreme: "If you think these principles only apply to psychological functioning and

business effectiveness, it may give you pause to know the following: *There is no state of mind that is not mimicked by the immune system.*”

Although these examples are simplified, the important point is that what happens *inside* the individual affects performance—and there is always something happening inside the individual. This relationship can be significantly influenced by external circumstances. Thus, it becomes apparent that business effectiveness can improve with the application of a psychologically sophisticated understanding of human performance. It is also likely that product quality can be enhanced by understanding how human beings function in the workplace.

## **Some Considerations**

The question is: Why have the workplace conditions that promote performance excellence, moderate drive, and high levels of commitment in workers been so difficult to produce for business leaders and managers? At least two responses come to mind: (a) decision makers do not have an objective understanding of themselves and, hence, they are subject to the early compromises that govern their workers and (b) the decision makers’ psychological and neurological tendencies to closely align their perspective and action with internalized mental models of themselves and the world focus their perception too narrowly. This is especially unfortunate, because the difference between good performance and great performance generally involves a small amount of effort! To fully understand how these internal and external conditions operate requires an understanding of resistance and the conditions than minimize its negative impact on our own performance and that of others.

The point here is not just theoretical. What these considerations are designed to illustrate is that something occurs within each of us that complicates how we

respond to external demands in ways that reduce the predictability of our responses to ourselves and others. If there were no way to benefit from this knowledge, then understanding it would be little more than an academic exercise. Fortunately, that is not the case. The fact is that business leaders and managers can benefit personally from self-knowledge and become more effective at creating an organization where an enlightened work force *wants* to double their productivity. So what keeps this from happening in practice? A little history may shed some light on the answer.

Many businesses still rely on an organizational culture from the industrial age that is reflected in the now well-known statement attributed to the Henry Ford, the inventor of the automobile and founder of the Ford Motor Company. He was reputed to say, in essence, “All I need is a pair of hands and I have to take the whole damn person.” Although it may have been possible to hold this view in the industrial age and at the same time remain competitive, this is increasingly unlikely today as *knowledge becomes the product* of most globally positioned companies—and many small businesses as well. To a greater extent than ever, companies are reliant on creativity and innovation to achieve their purpose and maintain a competitive edge. When knowledge is the product, companies can no longer ignore internal experience because performance and business consequences are too great. The business that requires an energized, committed, and innovative workforce can no longer keep the workforce invisible. It must learn to see the “other” to derive optimal benefit from the system in which both leader and worker are interdependent. Management consultant Peter Drucker has noted that the number one practical competency for leaders is empathy. Unfortunately, there is a zero correlation between IQ and empathy.

In his paper “The Road to Empathy,” Dr. Frank Lachmann (2008) offered a definition of empathy that may make sense here. Empathy may be thought of as a

method of gathering information about the subjective life of another person. It plays a role in understanding what another person is experiencing. In simpler terms, it enables a person to connect with others by putting him- or herself in “another’s shoes.” An important point is that the capacity for valid empathic understanding *requires* that one take an objective view toward oneself that is generally obtained through reflection. For the recipient of this type of understanding, being seen empathetically releases creative energy that, under the right conditions, can support a steady stream of innovation that contributes to maintaining a competitive edge in the marketplace. Robert K. Cooper recognized that 40 to 50 percent of an organization’s profit margin fluctuations are predictable based on employee feelings and opinions. A quote from “The Road to Empathy” might offer encouragement to those who don’t think they have the capacity for empathetic understanding: “Empathy, like any skill, can be acquired and enhanced by training and learning” (p. 52).

Treating everyone in an organization as if their internal life were inconsequential can result in hidden performance costs to a company. Not only is each individual’s performance affected differently by internally and externally generated stress (i.e., arousal), but their interactions with others in the organization also affect organizational performance in unpredictable ways. In addition, leadership biases (based on their mental models) must be considered, because their power to influence change in their organization can greatly magnify their influence on performance.

## **An Illustration**

Based on their individual history, leaders who are under-aroused (a somewhat common condition among extroverted personalities) will tend to

respond to high levels of stimulation with improved performance. (More accurately, they respond with improved performance within the limited domain of their mental models.) The greater the pressure, the better they perform. In fact, they often develop habits (outside of awareness) that result in familiar patterns (e.g., procrastination resulting from having too much to do) that actually maximize external stress and (from their perspective) improve their performance. As it is said in science, all things are held constant—they believe that their perception of what makes them and others tick is correct. Like all of us, they assume that relative success *is* success and rely on benchmarks to establish that their company is doing well relative to their peer group.

Business leaders in the example cited above are likely to create environments involving high levels of stress and pressing deadlines that create a powerful sense of urgency in their organization. (In fact, this is often listed as desirable in the value statements of many corporations! One can only hope that *urgency* means a high level of excitement and energy associated with innovation.) But, outside of his or her conscious awareness, that same leader may tend to hire employees who tend to be over-aroused (e.g., highly anxious) because these people are likely to be more compliant in responding to the demands of the under-aroused extroverted leader. Adding urgency and stress to the complexity of the work environment creates additional stimulation for the leader who is able to be more fully engaged by these circumstances. However, this is not the case for over-aroused workers who are producing less because their drive level is now beyond optimal.

For example, the traditional leader will believe that things are going well because the company is gaining market share relative to benchmarks established in relation to their “competitors,” who are operating in similar ways and, not surprisingly, getting relatively similar outcomes. But an organization that is well

suited to the leader's temperament and succeeding by consensually agreed-upon standards may not be experiencing an optimal competitive advantage. Remember the principle mentioned previously: Success can be measured by reduction of the gap between individual (and collective) potential and performance. In the information age, good enough levels are nowhere near optimal to sustain high levels of creative performance and innovation.

The traditional organization described above can actually experience relative success using standard business indices (even with the added provision of medical benefits). But it is unlikely that it would ever form a learning organization in which the disparity between performance and potential is continuously decreasing over time. The problem here is that leaders often assume that others in their organization function in the same manner as themselves (i.e., with similar mental models), and this is generally not the case. More importantly, if people were fortunate enough to know how their own mental models influence the structure and function of their lives, they may actually discover that they wouldn't want them to. In the words of poet David Whyte, "Work, paradoxically, does not ask enough of us, yet exhausts the narrow parts of us we do bring to its door" (1994, p. 22).

## **Some Steps to Recapture Commitment**

I am reminded of a seminar I attended several years ago in which a panel of Fortune 500 CEOs lamented the fact that, generally, hiring a new CEO to head a corporation only results in squeezing more out of the 10 to 30% that workers give to the job. But rarely is the 70 to 90% that is left at home ever tapped! Robert K. Cooper has lectured regarding the neuroscience of leadership, and his book *The Other 90%* (2001b) offers perspective on this issue. For our purposes, his point is that both business leaders and the workforce would be more productive—and I

might add more fulfilled—if they had access to their full energy and commitment at work. However, this is unlikely to be achieved using industrial age paradigms and mental models established in childhood that remain essentially unchallenged. Nevertheless, the information age is upon us, and the knowledge-based products we need to create require that we further our understanding of how people in organizations function, and, *more importantly, how we ourselves function* .

But what is a business leader who is not psychologically trained supposed to do? Workers have their own psychological histories (commonly referred to as baggage), and it is impossible to know all of the complexity that naturally occurs in environments consisting of groups of people. This is especially true when one considers Whyte's (1994) observation that, below the surface of our professional lives lie mental models based on unresolved parent-child relationships, along with unresolved emotional demands of coworkers, an inability to deal with abuses in childhood, and a deep longing for self-protection at almost any cost. Just thinking about all this seems to make the task even more daunting. Fortunately, this level of knowledge is not needed from business leaders or members of the work environment, nor is it attainable, given our current stage of human understanding. Nevertheless, there is still much that can be done to reduce the disparity between an organization's performance and its potential.

In the knowledge-based society of the future, it is important to recognize that people are at their best when the conditions in their environment support optimal levels of performance. These conditions are different for every person, but the ultimate goal is that moderate levels of arousal need to be created and maintained. How can this be accomplished in an organization in which people bring unique histories to work, their roles require different skill sets, and they experience conscious and unconscious normal levels of resistance to change? Because it is unrealistic for every member of the workforce to receive expert coaching, the best

way for an organization to become conscious and encourage full participation in the organizational purpose is to create an architecture that encourages personal and organizational development. We will focus on this later in greater detail. However, here are a few ideas to consider. They alone can significantly contribute to high levels of commitment and work performance if they are implemented with consciousness and humility:

1. Moderate levels of arousal (associated with optimal performance) are more likely to be maintained when individuals feel seen, heard, valued, and respected. Resistance is minimized under these conditions.
2. People only invest in what they themselves create. Involve the workforce at a genuine level as much as possible in major initiatives affecting the company, starting with the vision.
3. Commitment to a relationship or an organization is a function of the possibility of growth. Where there is no growth potential, there is no commitment. Invest in the personal mastery and development of all members of the enterprise, and, as a result, you are likely to be richly rewarded.
4. Where knowledge is the product, the highest levels of performance are achieved by developing and involving the frontal lobes<sup>1</sup> of the brain (both leaders and workers) in the application of functions. This is most readily achieved in an environment where reflection is encouraged and people feel safe in consistently doing the harder thing.

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<sup>1</sup>The frontal lobes are the most recently evolved area of our brains and have the capacity to override prior learning if they are engaged frequently. Because the frontal lobes have the highest concentration of endorphin receptors of any part of the body, this results in higher-order thinking and simultaneous feelings of well-being. Additionally, they are associated with high levels of commitment, contentment, and excellence.

From this perspective, perhaps the most important condition necessary to create an organization that is continually expanding its ability to create a desired future is the top leadership's (especially the CEO's) willingness to be curious about themselves outside their leadership and business roles. In essence, they must begin to define personal mastery more broadly, become curious about others, and eventually evolve from power struggles to tolerance, acceptance, and appreciation to ultimately discover that, underneath it all, we are more similar than different. This perspective involves knowing oneself as one truly is, and has enormous power because it is aligned with the psychological needs of the workforce in a way that begins to create the culture for addressing the simple principles listed above. People in the organization will begin to sense that a different type of expectation is being put forth. They will feel "seen" and will sense that the organization is itself capable of learning and that their needs, goals, and aspirations can be closely aligned with those of the work enterprise of which they are a valued and respected part.

When curiosity about the real self exists at the leadership level, the entire organization can realize its potential and become a conscious enterprise. In other words, the organization can become aware of what is really important: that the functional capacity of each member of the organization (i.e., what he or she can actually accomplish) closely approximates his or her innate capability and that he or she is excited about offering his or her best to the organization in accomplishing the vision of the enterprise. Having read many books on organizations, I was quite excited to discover one that offered a relatively sophisticated understanding of human organizational functioning and that developed the architecture for implementing that understanding in creating an organization that is capable of learning. That recently revised seminal work is *The Fifth Discipline*, authored by MIT's Sloan Business School professor Peter Senge. Although the mechanics of

creating a learning organization are beyond our scope here, the concept is indispensable for the future of knowledge-based organizations. Abbreviated information on the disciplines that must be mastered to create a learning organization follows.

First, let's explore a concept that is pervasive in all our lives. It is often unconscious, yet must be understood and addressed to recover the energy, commitment, and enthusiasm that are often not available in the work setting and frequently left at home. *Resistance* is closely tied to performance, and it is behind many of the frustrations experienced by both the leadership and the workforce in most organizations.

## **Resistance**

**“Nothing living will obey.”**

**—Margaret Wheatley<sup>2</sup>**

Resistance is pervasive. Even bacteria become penicillin resistant. In many ways, resistance is linked to survival. At the human level, it can be viewed as an attempt to preserve the integration of the organism, and it occurs at biological and psychological levels. In business, it is primarily psychological resistance that needs to be understood—and appropriately managed—to narrow the divide between an organization's performance and its potential. In fact, psychological resistance may be the single most important force keeping organizations from reaching their potential.

A technology analogy might help to make sense of this concept. We are all born with a “source code” that establishes the upper limit of our multiple capabilities. Throughout life, we are *forced* to write “software programs” that

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<sup>2</sup>Personal communication.

permit us to interface with the external world. Rarely do these programs allow us to take full advantage of our original source code. This is because life is not perfect, and all of us must write and rewrite software to make the best use of our interface with the external world.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to have encountered moderate consistency during our development can form relatively stable compromises. If these compromises are effective in context, they are repeated and refined and eventually become the mental models that determined our view of the outside and of ourselves. As is the case in the acquisition of many skills (e.g., walking), these models become tacit over time, yet continue to operate to *create* the world we see. This is a hard concept to grasp, but, for the unexamined life, most of our actions are designed to “validate” our mental models. Through the subtle recreation of familiar paradigms (i.e., models based on our past), we actually make choices that recreate a familiar “world.” These tacit models serve as the lenses through which we not only see, but also contribute to what we see. They create a way of unconsciously imposing the familiar structure and function of our earlier compromises on new experiences by recreating the world we knew over and over again. In this respect, it can be said that those of us who seldom “update our software” (i.e., increase our self-knowledge) recreate a *familiar* interface with the world that allows us to experience a measure of familiarity and control. But—at what cost?

The system described above applies to all of us, as no one is able to apprehend complete reality (i.e., the ebb and flow of stimulation) except through some form of organization. Those of us who perceive ourselves as successful were probably fortunate enough to have experienced a developmental history that permitted us to “write software” that used enough of our source code to create a measure of effectiveness and well being in our lives. For individuals, personal

mastery can be defined as continually updating our software to allow greater utilization of what our original source code permitted. We can never be more than our potential, but most of us are not even close to what we are capable of becoming. In the words of Cooper (2001a), “On average, we use less than 10% of our potential brainpower at any time and develop 1/100th of one percent or 1/10,000th of our potential brain power over a lifetime.” In other words, our software programs are too limiting, and, because we design the world to preserve our image of ourselves and our comfort levels rather than disrupting the system through software “redesign,” we don’t even know it.

Based on high achievers’ tangible successes, one might mistakenly think that they are utilizing more of their capability than their less successful counterparts. In reality, this may or may not be the case. I am reminded of a psychological principle from my student days that goes something like this: “All extremely high levels of achievement come at the expense of other areas of the personality.” Often, the greatest external “success” is achieved by those whose environments were depriving, not because they had a better source code, but because their options were so limited. In other words (and employing another analogy), they compulsively honed the magnifying glass to create a very narrow beam that has the potential to start a fire, rather than positioning the lens where it could create greater clarity and take in a broader view of the self and others.

The intensity of the narrower beam can be so focused that these high achievers are often not attuned to things that must be seen to create a more effective system. One might say that their software afforded them visible success at the high price of operating in a restricted horizon. Although the *content* of their lives may have changed dramatically over time, the software was rarely, if ever, updated. The consequence is that enhanced business sophistication has been built on unnecessarily limited self-understanding in which long-standing templates

govern high achievers' relationship to events and reduce their effectiveness as leaders. The point here is that functional access to their source code (i.e., innate capabilities) is restricted to narrow avenues of experience and that vital interactions from broad-ranging access are missed. It is these very interactions that enable us to see ourselves in perspective and develop a capacity for empathy that can liberate creativity and innovation—not to mention positive energy and commitment in ourselves and in the workforce.

Hence, if the leaders are self-satisfied but unaware (recall the tale of the emperor's new clothes), then the potential of the workforce can never be realized. This is true even if members of the workforce have greater functional access to their own potential than members of the leadership have. The fact is that members of an *unconscious* organization headed by an overtly successful but unaware leader are not likely to experience performance excellence in themselves or their workforce. There are few organizations that can overcome a culture based on leadership "software" that limits their functional access to their own broader capacity. It is probably this, more than anything else, that narrows what is possible for an organization and contributes to a culture that limits commitment, restricts creativity, and slows, if not halts, true innovation.

In general, resistance is *minimized* in situations in which people feel seen, heard, safe, and respected. Resistance is likely to be *maximized* in environments in which people feel invisible, unimportant, and controlled and are not treated as a vital part of the enterprise. For example, an employer who is well-intentioned, compensates his employees well, and rewards merit might be surprised to discover that these same people behave in ways that indicate little commitment to their work. On the other hand, the employer who legitimately offers less tangible rewards but includes employees at each stage of tasks to be accomplished and *genuinely* demonstrates interest, curiosity, and respect in response to their input

minimizes resistance. The relationship among external rewards, intrinsic commitment, and contribution to the organization are clearly illustrated in a recent book by Daniel H. Pink entitled *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.

The subjective experience of resistance may vary and can include anxiety, anger, lethargy, reduced commitment, deception, or, for the completely non-insightful, no identifiable subjective state at all! However, resistance will inevitably manifest itself through its impact on drive or arousal and, thus, its effect on work quality. The under-aroused worker may further reduce his or her commitment to work, or his or her anger may be expressed as aggression. Somewhat confusingly, the *observable* effect on drive is not easy to predict or discern. Almost certainly, it will not enhance the quality of performance, which, in the knowledge-based product world of the future, is critical to achieving excellence.

So, why is being seen, valued, and respected so powerful? The answer to this question starts at birth. Most of us enter this earth ready to thrive. Instantly, we are forced to breathe on our own and to engage the interface of our bodies with the newly discovered external world. In essence, we have the source code for our life and are beginning to write the programs that will allow us to realize this potential. Because the environment is not perfectly suited to address our needs, we will encounter frustrations almost immediately. Our initial response to this frustration is crude physical resistance, or pushing back, to urge the environment (i.e., usually the mother) to respond. At first, this seems to be a magical process. We are hungry and in need of nourishment, and we respond to the tension with crying. Generally, the need is met within a short period of time and, over many such experiences, we begin to learn that we can communicate with our world in a manner that results in

our needs being met. But no caretaker is perfect, and every developing child brings a unique array of constitutional tendencies to the table.

If delays are too long, and our needs are frustrated too often, we may create a model of the world that depicts it as a place that does not value us and is nonresponsive to our needs. In a highly simplified manner, this mental model creates tension between us and the environment. But we must still live in the world. The mental models of ourselves and the outside world (i.e., “programs”) are developed on the basis of compromises and limited use of the source code that establishes access to our potential in context. The organism adapts, and all systems comply with the model as if that were the source code. But humans are even more adaptable than computers, and new programs can always be written. One way this can be accomplished is through individual experience with a trained professional who can offer coaching. However, no organization can afford to provide its entire workforce with the means to obtain this focused commitment to personal mastery. Fortunately, all is not lost. The organizational paradigm noted earlier has the potential, in capable hands, to accomplish some of this on a system-wide basis. The following is an overview of what I consider one of the most important works dealing with the knowledge-based business world.

## **The Learning Organization**

The most successful organizations of the future will be learning organizations. Learning organizations, as described by Peter Senge, are those that have mastered the ability to create their own futures. The comprehensive identification of the essential ingredients for optimal organizational effectiveness is one of Senge’s outstanding accomplishments and represents great news for leaders who are willing to take on the challenge. Unfortunately, many well-intentioned

organizational leaders are not free enough of their own defensive operations to see this reality clearly. Embracing change must start at the top. It requires great trust and courage and can only be successfully accomplished under conditions of relative safety, trust, and respect. Only leaders can permit the organization to begin the journey of gradually strengthening reality-based perceptions while simultaneously diminishing the ever-present need for self-protection, which contributes to psychological and organizational stagnation.

In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge identifies the core disciplines that must be mastered to create a learning organization. What distinguishes learning organizations from traditional authoritarian types is the mastery of these disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. *Personal mastery* is the discipline of developing our personal vision by focusing our energies and developing a clearer view of reality. *Mental models* are the deeply ingrained beliefs and generalizations that influence how we interpret the world and how we take action. Mastery of these two disciplines can be greatly facilitated by individual coaching. *Building shared vision* refers to the need for a vision to be shared, if not cocreated, by all members of the organization. *Team learning* is the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter in a genuine “thinking together” (e.g., a dialogue). Mastery of these two disciplines can be aided with individual coaching but requires structured group participation as well. *Systems thinking*, the fifth discipline, is the recognition that organizations are bound by an invisible fabric of interrelated actions.

Using a simplified dichotomy of consensually validated *reality* and image-protecting internal psychological processes (i.e., *defenses*), we can begin to envision what might be required to transform a traditional industrial-age organization into a learning organization. Although the proportions vary, all human beings operate in both of these domains simultaneously. The beliefs, attitudes, aims, and motives that

underlie our behavior are only partially accessible to us at any point in time. A commitment to psychological growth is a commitment to enlarge consciousness. Much of David Whyte's book *The Heart Aroused* is devoted to understanding what is required of the individual who wishes to achieve *personal mastery* and a deeper understanding of his or her *mental models*. According to him, we are not only required to face our fears but to face the mother of our fears as well.

In essence, although we may be aware of what we think we fear, our perceptual reality itself is influenced by processes that operate outside of awareness. The illumination of this side of experience is the essence of what "know thyself" means. Knowing oneself requires great courage but has the potential to enhance the functioning of the individual and organization beyond what is generally attempted by those who seek to influence change for improvement. This is no small task; it is best accomplished with the supportive arm of one or more trustworthy and knowledgeable guides who are independent of the organizational structure. In his insightful book on leadership, *Synchronicity*, Joseph Jaworski (1996) discusses the formation of the American Leadership Forum. Using courage coupled with grace, he was able to assemble perhaps the greatest thinkers on leadership in the country into a single room to brainstorm and create the program. This group formulated a series of eight propositions, which would serve as guiding principles for the program. The number one principle? "The trouble with American leaders is their lack of self-knowledge" (p. 96). Once some degree of self-mastery is achieved in this domain, we will be in a better position to contribute meaningfully to *creating a shared vision* and to participate in *team learning*.

Most of this Web site is devoted to promoting CEO and executive development in ways that are not readily available to most high-level leaders and executives. This overview shows how just one pervasive psychological variable, if it is not recognized or understood, can not only influence performance but also

affect the future competitive position of an organization. The remainder of this Web site is designed to offer transformational learning products depicting current, research-based approaches for mastering key issues that must be addressed to create a business enterprise that is able to learn and transform itself as a result of having an understanding of human issues that influence performance and productivity in organizations.

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