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III. Developing a model of the 'learning organization'

III. 4 Distributed leadership

Since LO concept emerged, leadership has been considered one of the cornerstones of this concept. Garratt placed leadership in the center of information flows, playing the main role in the LO, synthesizing and interpreting information and learning how to adapt to changes in the environment (Garratt, 1987). According to his ideas, all the responsibility for learning in the organization seemed to go to leaders. In this sense this concept was in accordance with the traditional conception of leadership existing at that time, called 'transactional leadership', where leaders were judged to be organization goal setters and strategists that took "the initiative in offering some form of need satisfaction in return for something valued by employees, such as pay, promotion, improved job satisfaction or recognition" (Sadler (2001:418) and were completely responsible for the organization's future.

At that time there was, however, another trend in leadership literature about what was named 'transformational leadership'. According to this tendency, the leader would be involved in a "process of engaging the commitment of employees in the context of shared values and a shared vision" (Sadler (2001:418), being able to "win the trust and respect of followers", "paying attention to the needs and development potential of followers", "delegating, coaching and giving constructive feedback", asking for new ideas and proposals and inspiring and motivating people (Bass & Avolio in Sadler (2001:418)). Initial developments of leadership (Pedler et al., ; Senge, 1990) in LO were grounded, in my opinion, on these ideas, having become trust, engagement, delegation, coaching and feedback keystones in LO leadership

(Senge, 1990; Kelleher, 2004; Goh & Richards, 1997) closely connected to the idea of empowerment (Senge et al., 1994).

Both 'transactional' and 'transformational' leadership theories put workers in a passive position as followers of leaders that were always at the top of the organization. It was a 'centralized' leadership. What LO literature has mainly contributed to leadership theory, from my point of view, has been the idea of a distributed leadership where all members of the organization could participate in policy making (Pedler et al., 2006) and leadership is spread out through different organization levels ('local line leaders', 'executive leaders' and 'internal networkers or community builders')[1] (Senge, 1996). So, leadership in LO could be described as a new 'distributed transformational' leadership.[2]

However, top managers are still expected to play an important leadership role in the LO.[3] Leadership and shared vision are closely connected. The LO leadership should be the inspiring power engine which promotes the emergence of a common vision from the fusion between top managers' vision and personal visions of organization members. This vision will be the compass

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[1] "Local line leaders, who can undertake meaningful organizational experiments to test whether new learning capabilities lead to improved business results. Executive leaders, who provide support for line leaders, develop learning infrastructures, and lead by example in the gradual process of evolving the norms and behaviours of a learning culture. Internal networkers, or community builders, the "seed carriers" of the new culture, who can move freely about the organization to find those who are predisposed to bringing about change, help out in organizational experiments, and aid in the diffusion of new learning." (Senge (1996:4)) On-line version.

[2] As Dixon pointed out (1994) discussing leadership and organizational learning can be judged to be incongruent since organizational learning theory defends that leader's ideas should be put into question and tried by organizational members rather than be assumed because they are coming from a higher level of the organization. This pretended incongruity is overcome by the concept of distributed leadership.

[3] Senge added three new leadership functions for top leaders. Leaders should be designers, designing "the governing ideas of purpose, vision, and core values by which people will live", "policies, strategies, and structures that translate guiding ideas into business decisions" and "effective learning processes"; teachers, "bringing to the surface people's mental models of important issues"; and stewards, serving the people they lead and "the larger purpose or mission that underlies the enterprise" (1990b). Carrying out these functions, the leader has to be a continuous learner, as someone who is permanently reflecting on his assumptions, mental models and ways of acting in order to generate own learning and future action, that must be able "to coach, to mentor, to accept critique and alternatives (and) to question dominant views"(Finger & Brand (1999: 151)). The principle is that leaders should put into practice their own learning behavior before trying to implement LO changes in the organization. Otherwise, leader's behavioral incoherence could be one of the reasons for failure when implementing LO model.

for LO pillar implementation. The traditional hierarchical organization where the vision derived from the top management and was not put into question is judged to be incompatible with LO because questioning is essential for learning in this context, and only shared visions can inspire and engage people in a common learning project (Senge, 1990). Thus, I would add that LO leadership should be 'inspirational' in the sense proposed by Adair (2003) and vision "an act of creative imagination – the ability to see what no one else has seen or imagined possible." (Adair (2003:145)) Distributed leadership and common vision are the principles that inform the other LO aspects. That is why in the model they have been placed around the circle which includes the rest of LO elements.