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Lessons from the CEO of the First Learning Organization: Jesus and the Early Church

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Learning organizations are an increasingly popular concept that leaders employ to remain competitive in today's complex environment. However, there is also a growing demand for organizations to act ethically and not abandon values in the process. Senge (1990) identified five pillars for a learning organization: individual mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Fry (2003) suggested learning organizations require spiritual leadership. This paper offers a conceptual analysis, demonstrating how Jesus, the ultimate example of spiritual leadership, implemented learning organization principles to successfully transform his disciples into change agents for Christianity. Using Senge's five learning organization pillars as the framework, this analysis draws examples from the gospels to showcase the example Jesus provided. From this analysis, several implications for contemporary leaders become apparent. Leaders must model an example of mastery, seeking a continuous journey of uncovering the truth and encouraging others to do the same. They must create forums that engage learners through questions and storytelling that challenge individuals to examine their underlying beliefs. Leaders must embody courage in setting lofty visions that engage others to push beyond the status quo and inspire learning. They should review existing policies and other tacit norms to remove barriers to the learning needed to achieve the vision, providing collaborative opportunities for teams to develop shared meanings. Last, leaders must empower individuals with the agency to affect change and overcome systemic impediments.

Keywords: organizational learning, systems thinking, mastery, mental models, leadership

With his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990) popularized the idea of learning organizations as a means of remaining competitive amidst a dynamic and interconnected environment. Senge articulated five learning pillars that organizations must embrace: individual mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Senge distinguished learning from the all-too-familiar concept of passively acquiring information. According to Senge, a fundamental mindset shift to a deeper meaning of learning is required. Senge compared this shift to "metanoia" or a type of spiritual rebirth, stating,

Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life. (p. 13-14)

As the environment becomes progressively more complex, organizations are under significant pressure to adapt to change; however, there are also increasing expectations for organizations to act ethically rather than implement learning organization principles in a value-free vacuum (Rowley & Gibbs, 2008). Fry (2003) argued that learning organizations require spiritual leadership, comprising the values that intrinsically motivate followers through hope and faith. This involves inspiring a vision that satisfies follower needs to make a difference and to feel that their life has meaning, while enacting behaviors that embody altruistic love, such as forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy, compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust, loyalty and humility (Fry, 2003, p.695). However, limited research exists connecting spiritual leadership with learning organizations.

This paper offers a conceptual analysis, demonstrating how Jesus, the ultimate example of spiritual leadership, implemented learning organization principles to successfully transform his disciples into change agents for Christianity. Using Senge's (1990) five learning organization pillars as the framework, this analysis draws examples from the gospels to showcase the example Jesus provided, which is followed by a discussion of lessons today's organizational leaders can apply.

Learning Organization Pillars

According to Senge (1990), organizations seeking a learning approach must account for five principles: individual mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. This paper contends that Jesus led the transformation of the early Church by enacting each of these learning disciplines. Jesus encouraged the disciples to seek the truth, challenge assumptions and beliefs, unify toward a shared vision, engage in a community of learning, and recognize the systemic influences and impacts. The following sections dive deeper into each area before summarizing critical takeaways for contemporary leaders who wish to actuate change through learning.

Individual Mastery

According to Senge (1990), personal mastery is a fundamental requirement for organizations to learn. Individual mastery is not a destination but a lifelong journey. Brown et al. (2014) noted that mastery involves gradually accruing knowledge, conceptual understanding, judgment, and skill over time and with continued practice and reflection. Marquardt (2002) defined personal mastery as a demonstrated high degree of proficiency within a particular area. Jesus modeled mastery at a very young age, when his parents found him studying in the temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Luke 2:46-47) and "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

However, beyond just increasing levels of competence, Senge (1990) underscored that mastery involves continually clarifying what is essential to oneself. According to Senge, it is easy to become preoccupied with the day-to-day minutiae, losing sight of one's purpose but individuals seeking personal mastery desire to shed light on reality and regain a sense of direction toward their vision. Senge highlighted that individuals with high levels of mastery are aware of their shortcomings and are in a continuous learning mode to discover the limitations that prevent them from seeing the truth. Personal mastery requires increasing awareness of underlying beliefs that may deceive perceptions of reality (Senge, 1990). Throughout the gospels, numerous examples exist of Jesus' leadership to encourage personal mastery in others.

Jesus denounced superficial Pharisaic teachings that did not seek to incite genuine understanding (Lee, 2006). For example, when confronted by the Pharisees about the disciples' breaking the hand-washing tradition, Jesus scolded them by reciting Isaiah, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Matt. 15:8-9). On numerous other occasions when the Pharisees questioned Jesus' acts, he rebuked them as hypocrites (Matt. 23:23, 25, 27, 29) for allowing their interpretation of the law, steeped in tradition, to supersede the spirit of the law (Wilson, 2011).

Jesus challenged the purported experts in their understanding of the scriptures and what they believed to be truths. Upon being questioned by Pontius Pilate, he stated, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, John 18:37). It is not that Jesus dismissed the Torah; instead, he provided a new and different perspective that placed human need above religious observance (Wilson, 2011).

In John 14:6 (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016), Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Jesus did not just speak the truth; he embodied the truth (Alexander, 2018). However, there was a rising tension between the glory of God's vision that Jesus represented and the existing climate, even resulting in the rejection by

his hometown of Nazareth (Legg, 2020). According to Senge (1990), individuals with mastery leverage the tension between their visions and current reality to motivate change in a quest for truth. Senge highlighted that people are often overcome with a sense of powerlessness that hinders their ability to achieve their vision. Jesus understood that to affect change, he would need to engage his followers to challenge the embedded assumptions that rendered them with a feeling of unworthiness, updating their mental models to reflect revised theories of redemption for which they were empowered to achieve.

Mental Models

Mental models reflect the deeply entrenched assumptions of how the world works that shape people's thinking and acting (Senge, 1990). According to Johnson-Laird (1983), learning entails unconscious processes. The human brain evolved to maximize efficiencies by categorizing information based on presuppositions derived from past experiences and social input (Berns, 2008). Individuals construct these working models to discern better how the world works (Johnson-Laird, 1983). Embedded mental models enable individuals to judge similar situations and make an educated response (Brown et al., 2014).

However, these models are far simpler than reality; they are incomplete and, as such, do not represent truth (Johnson-Laird, 1983). It is common for individuals to be "misled by illusions, cognitive biases, and the stories we construct to explain the world around us" (Brown et al., 2014, p.104). These belief systems are ingrained early on and influenced by cultural norms, relationships, and expectations, making it difficult to recognize or change them (Hofstede et al., 2010). Senge (1990) highlighted that because the human brain cannot process vast quantities of information, the tendency to make leaps of abstraction derived from these mental models often inhibits learning. Assumptions form the basis of these generalizations, and though they frequently go untested, people treat them as fact (Senge, 1990). Hence, individuals must understand how mental models influence what they see and close the gaps between how they act and the theories they espouse about how they desire to be (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

The culture of the early Christian church held instrumental values that significantly influenced perceptions of acceptable behaviors. These value systems included purity versus pollution, honor and shame, and patronage and reciprocity (deSilva, 2018). Jewish heritage derived from the Hebrew scriptures delineated what constituted purity lines, which correlated to holiness (deSilva, 2018). Any actions that violated cleanliness codes were seen as polluting the holy land and threatened disaster for Israel (deSilva, 2018). Not only was purity a means of staying in God's favor, but it also created a social boundary around Israel as the holy people (deSilva, 2018).

A second significant influence was the idea of honor versus shame. Individuals were taught from a very young age that, to obtain or maintain honor, society must deem them virtuous (deSilva, 2018). The values considered honorable included qualities such as piety, courage in battle, reliability, agreement, and unity; females, specifically, were expected to exhibit modesty, quietness, and chastity (deSilva, 2018). The threat of

shaming one's family or group by displaying dishonorable qualities was a strong motivator for conformity (deSilva, 2018).

A third central viewpoint involves the relationship between patronage and reciprocity. First-century Judea represented significant social stratifications, creating the need for those considered inferior to seek patronage from someone of more significant influence (deSilva, 2018). A patron's favor resulted in a debt of gratitude and created a cyclical relationship (deSilva, 2018). The Jewish relationship with God demonstrated this perspective, with the Hebrew scriptures depicting God as the Patron of Israel, serving as their protector and provider and necessitating honor, obedience, and loyalty in return (deSilva, 2018). Failure to reciprocate could result in punishment and shame (deSilva, 2018).

Each of the above value systems represented the deeply entrenched mental models guiding the behaviors within the setting of Jesus' teachings. According to Argyris (2008), organizations often face learning dilemmas because they fail to recognize that deep learning requires critical internal reflection to uncover the cognitive reasoning that provides the rulesets for one's actions. Senge (1990) highlighted that personal mastery requires uncovering these mental models and challenging these embedded beliefs. Understanding the cognitive maps that drive one's actions leads to updated assumptions, which Argyris and Schon (1996) call double-loop learning. Unfortunately, many people resist this type of learning and tend to defend their existing mental models (Argyris, 2008).

Jesus constantly sought to open the eyes of others and encourage the rethinking of their beliefs so that they could move closer to the truth. Whereas traditional methods of teaching embraced by Jewish religious leaders focused on repetition and memorization, Jesus asked questions and spoke in parables intended to elicit deep reflection about the underlying principles (Lee, 2006). Jesus did not often provide explicit answers; instead, he inspired his listeners to confront their beliefs and grapple with new insights (Lee, 2006).

A few examples of Jesus challenging accepted wisdom include observing the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14), washing hands before eating (Matt. 15:1-20), eating with sinners (Mark 2:14-17), and questions about fasting (Mark 2:18-22). When asked why he spoke in parables, Jesus stated, "...because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Matt. 13:13). According to Snodgrass (2004), Jesus employed parables as a means of sensemaking. Jesus used familiar examples and visual imagery to connect to his audience and paint a picture they could relate to, such as seeds, taxes, fish, boats, children, and wineskins (Lee, 2006).

Jesus understood that learning requires surfacing previous assumptions and forming new mental frameworks (Lee, 2006). Jesus' methods prompted the learners to engage in the inquiry process using stories and questions that evoked reflection on existing schemas (Lee, 2006). Rather than simply reciting truths, his teaching

techniques forced listeners to discover the truth by unlearning previous beliefs and shaping new mental models, thereby changing behaviors (Lee, 2006).

Shared Vision

According to Senge (1990), a shared vision that builds on personal ambitions is vital to a learning organization's success because it provides the inspiration and focus for learning. A shared vision provides the drive to overcome the status quo and energizes learning (Marquardt, 2002). This shared vision creates a collective sense of identity that motivates action (Marquardt, 2002). Many organizations promote a vision that evokes a culture of compliance, but for individuals to truly commit to the vision, it must embody their needs and desires (Senge, 1990). An inspiring vision evokes an emotional response that creates shared meaning and purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Barna (2018) contended that a "vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants to advance His kingdom and is based on an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances" (p. 28). More generally, a vision looks to the possibilities of the forthcoming time that considers current circumstances and builds on the wisdom of the past (Barna, 2018). A vision paints a clear mental picture of the preferred change (Barna, 2018).

In Mark 1:15, Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was approaching. He called people to a renewed covenant with God and to establish communities typified by service (Bylor, 2008) and founded by the love for God and one another (Matt. 22:34-40). Jesus' message ignited action by instilling a sense of purpose in people of all walks of life (Bylor, 2008). In Nazareth, he announced,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus was able to motivate a movement because the fulfillment of God's vision was a shared desire that created a sense of belonging. It was not restricted to the wealthy or the elite; it included the impoverished and marginalized as well. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asserted that the blessed are those poor in spirit, the mournful, those who are meek, the righteous, those who show mercy, the pure in heart, peacemakers, and the persecuted (Matt. 5:3-10). His actions would continue to embody these principles, eliciting an emotional response and drawing in disciples, regardless of their status, gender, or ethnicity, who all shared a desire for his vision.

In what is frequently termed the Great Commission, Jesus instructed his disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Matt. 28:19). This revolutionary community would cross social, political, and economic barriers (Bylor, 2008). "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Col. 3:11). Hence, God's vision enacted by Jesus invoked a shared calling to long-term revolutionary change (Bylor, 2008), where each person could make a difference.

Team Learning

According to Argyris and Schon (1996), learning organizations seek to transform learning into something more significant than the aggregate of individual knowledge. Senge (1990) indicated that learning organizations require more than individual mastery; they require collective teams that maximize efficiencies through synergized alignment. Organizations must account for the significance of "learning people," necessitating the understanding of how individuals collectively construct reality within their organizations (Antonacopoulou, 1999). More than just a collection of knowledge, organizational learning involves the context of shared meaning that provides the framework for action (Ayas, 1999).

Jesus often engaged crowds in learning and healing their sick, such as during the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29), teaching in parables (Matt. 13), feeding the five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21), and feeding the four thousand (Matt. 15:29-31). He recognized that learning is a social activity where people adopt new behaviors by observing, modeling, and imitating the practices and attitudes of others (Bandura, 1977). As Elkjaer (1999) stated, "The individual is not an isolated entity who encounters society, but a social being, shaped by and shaping society" (p. 82). According to Berger and Luckman (1966), the dialectical relationship between individuals and their social locations forms the basis of one's reality. This duality of learning is a crucial concept that learning organization leaders must recognize and embrace.

Jesus understood that to achieve God's vision, he would need to develop a team of leaders who could then develop other leaders (Garrot, 1941). Legg (2020) highlighted that Jesus employed a pluralistic leadership model where his disciples were given the authority as change agents to participate in the team-centric vision. Jesus specifically called twelve disciples to share in the daily activities of his ministry (Garrot, 1941). These individuals could bear witness to Jesus' public works but also had access to private instruction and inquiry (Garrot, 1941). They could observe his actions and deeds but they could also fully experience his discernments and attitudes that shaped the expected norms of behavior for them as they carried out the vision (Garrot, 1941).

From this opportunity to engage in a profoundly saturated and constant learning experience, the disciples uncovered more than what is expressed in mere lectures; they developed a community of shared meaning of the truth of what it meant to live out the principle of love (Garrot, 1941). Jesus provided these immersive learning experiences of his character before sending the disciples out in teams of two to practice their newly formed beliefs (Mark 6:7-12).

Organizations transfer knowledge through explicit policies, procedures, and rulesets but can also convey expectations through tacit norms (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

Individuals within organizations continuously engage in sensemaking, attempting to reconcile past experiences with new contextual perceptions (Weick, 1995). Cultural behaviors reflect collective perceptions, ways of thinking, and feelings about things (Schein, 2017). When members engage with one another in a dialectic process that uncovers hidden assumptions and reconstructs their mental framework, they co-create knowledge (Yeo & Gold, 2011) and generate shared meaning (Weick, 1995). In this way, organizations can learn to learn, much like the disciples and early Christian church.

Systems Thinking

According to Senge (1990), systems thinking is a process that allows one to see cause and effect from a more holistic perspective. Organizations are like dynamic organisms as opposed to static entities (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Systems thinking addresses the fact that many interdependencies create non-linear consequences (Meadows, 2008). A systems perspective enables one to better understand the big picture as opposed to reacting to singular events (Senge, 1990). This system includes the complex nodes of inputs, outputs, and feedback loops that serve to intensify or stabilize behaviors (Meadows, 2008).

The behavior of Jesus' audience reflected the systemic effects of the various social, political, economic, and religious ideologies at play. The historical persecution of the Jews, demolition of their temple, and occupancy by first the Greeks and then the Romans led to a conviction to preserve the well-being of the Jewish people and their place in God's covenant (deSilva, 2018). According to deSilva, the Jews approached their situation by utilizing three strategies: embracing some degree of assimilation within the dominant Gentile culture, political independence, and spiritual purification that attempted to renew covenantal promises.

At the time of Jesus, Judea was an imperial province of the Roman empire, and though the Jews were allowed to continue practicing their ancestral laws, such as Sabbath observance, Roman legions were stationed there (deSilva, 2018). This political system resulted in the payment of harsh taxes from a predominantly agrarian society and oppressive suffering, where the price of resistance appeared too high (Bylor, 2008). The Roman ideology placed significant value on maintaining order and respect for authority; however, they were content leaving the local government, the high priest who presided over the Sanhedrin, to regulate internal affairs (deSilva, 2018). As can be seen in John 11:48-50, the high priest Caiaphas made attempts to forestall disturbances arising from Jesus' teachings, preferring to handle the matter internally rather than risk Roman authorities intervening with potentially disastrous consequences for the entire Jewish community (deSilva, 2018).

Although first-century Judaism represented multiple different sects, such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes, the keeping of the Torah was a unifying principle that demonstrated commitment to the covenant made with God and the means of remaining in God's favor (deSilva, 2018). In a similar vein, the temple served as a focal point for Jews as the place where God would hear their prayers and accept their

sacrifices, renewing their connection with Israel as the chosen holy people (deSilva, 2018). Each of these aspects contributed to a rationality in which the actors became objects of ideologies that dictated their behaviors. Senge (1990) highlighted that from a systems vantage point,

We give up the assumption that there is an individual, or individual agent, responsible. The feedback perspective suggests that everyone shares responsibility for problems generated by a system. That doesn't necessarily imply that everyone involved can exert equal leverage in changing the system. (p. 78)

Systems thinking cautions leaders to remove limiting factors rather than force change and to beware of addressing the symptomatic behaviors instead of the root issues (Senge, 1990).

Jesus' teachings considered his listener's environment to create a radical systemic intervention whereby redemption was a matter of self-agency. Jesus was able to reshape outcomes without changing the entire system, at least initially; instead, he removed the limitation imposed on the system by updating the mental models of the constituents. Where in the past, they believed salvation was awarded based on keeping the Mosaic covenant, Jesus challenged the underlying beliefs so that listeners no longer saw themselves as objects; instead, they became the subjects (Branson, 2016).

Senge (1990) stated that systems thinking is the cornerstone of the learning disciplines because it shifts the mindset of the participants, whereby they no longer see themselves as helpless reactors; rather, they become sanctioned influencers of their reality, creators of their future. Through Jesus' transformative learning techniques, he changed his followers' philosophy to one of empowerment, enabling them to become agents of the glory of God through their commitment to the truth.

Implications for Contemporary Leaders

According to Northouse (2022), leadership is a process of influencing people to accomplish a shared goal. Today's environment makes it highly challenging to keep abreast of dynamic complexities that require near-constant change, necessitating learning at all levels of the organization (Senge, 1990). So, how can a leader influence the learning process? While Senge (1990) provided a framework for learning organizations, Jesus provided authentic examples from which contemporary leaders can take heed.

Fry (2003) articulated a theory of leadership that conflates spirituality with the learning organization paradigm by addressing intrinsic motivation that satisfies follower needs to fulfill a sense of calling and membership. According to Fry, followers experience a realized sense of calling when leaders create a vision where members feel they can make a difference, and that their contribution has meaning. Followers' sense of membership results when they feel understood and appreciated because the leader expresses altruistic love through behaviors exemplifying values such as forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy, compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust, loyalty, and

humility (Fry, 2003, p. 695). Fry argued that spiritual leadership is not separate from, rather inclusive of, more mainstream intrinsic motivation leadership theories such as transformational leadership and servant leadership as well as values-based and ethical leadership approaches.

Jesus exemplified this type of leadership while simultaneously demonstrating the positive impact of creating a learning organization. Although frequently associated with religion, spirituality represents a fundamental human need to fulfill a greater purpose and feel connected to something beyond oneself, hence offering a viable leadership solution in today's secular organizations, and not limited to religious organizations (Fry, 2003). As such, Jesus' example can provide useful lessons for today's contemporary leaders in all industries seeking to transform their organizations to a learning orientation. The following sections discuss some key takeaways for leaders of both religious and secular entities.

Model Courageous Learning Behaviors

It is of fundamental importance that leaders recognize their influence as role models for learning behaviors. Leaders must demonstrate commitment to transforming into a learning organization (Marquardt, 2002). Organizational members observe what is essential to leaders through their behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Just as Jesus did, today's organizational leaders must also lead by example and strive for personal mastery. Leaders play a critical role in establishing an organization's culture (Schein, 2017), and, like Jesus, contemporary leaders must orchestrate forums for learning where participants are encouraged to question underlying beliefs through critical inquiry and reflection (Marquardt, 2002).

As evidenced by Jesus, building a learning organization requires abundant courage. The scriptures depicted Jesus as courageous in all he did up until the moment of his crucifixion. Similarly, courage was crucial for the disciples and other members of the early church as they made great leaps of faith and overcame resistance to their ministry. Today's leaders also require courage to earn the trust and commitment of followers regardless of how daunting the changing landscape may seem (Beer, 2020). Courageous leaders do not let fear impede actions and, even in unfavorable circumstances, speak the truth and do what is right (Everett, 2021). It takes courage for leaders to push their organizations to reach lofty visions that move beyond the status quo (Beer, 2020). According to Barna (2018), a vision requires change, which inevitably involves risks that include the possibility of failure; however, leaders must embrace the faith necessary to overcome that fear, replacing it with energy, hope, and assurance.

Establish Learning Congruency with Tacit Norms

Leaders desiring to develop a learning culture should look to uncover any incongruencies with practices and espoused intentions. Just as Jesus criticized the Pharisees for giving precedence to canonical traditions over spiritual intention, leaders should evaluate current policies to ensure they elicit the intended systemic results. As policies dictate the conversion process of information to decisions, leaders must be aware of their impact on learning actions (Forrester, 1994). This evaluation should not be limited to formal policies but should also examine informal decision-making frameworks that result from "habit, conformity, social pressures, ingrained concepts of goals, awareness of power centers within the organization and personal interest" (Forrester, 1994, p. 58).

Jesus' approach to teaching highlights that learning may be best achieved by asking questions and telling stories that require deep reflection. According to Mezirow (1991), transformational learning is necessary to uncover hidden assumptions and update mental models. Preskill and Torres (1999) indicated the necessity for "evaluative inquiry," which consists of asking questions, dialogue, and reflection to preempt revised actions. Schein (2017) emphasized that learning cultures commit to inquiry to reveal truth through a dialogic process that reveals embedded assumptions. Critical reflection involves understanding why these beliefs exist and challenging their validity (Mezirow, 1998).

Unfortunately, organizations often miss profound learning opportunities because of environments enveloped with hubris, where leaders do not value asking questions because they see it as a challenge to authority or a means of displacing judgment or blame (Preskill & Torres, 1999), not unlike the culture in Jesus' time. Organizations can also create barriers to reflection when performance goals prioritize action over thinking (Preskill & Torres, 1999). These obstacles reinforce that, for organizations to transform into learning cultures, they must embody a commitment to "learning to learn" (Schein, 2017).

Empower Others to Affect Change

Leaders seeking radical change must recognize the need to trust and empower individuals within the organization. Jesus understood that systemic change would require the actions of the collective. He taught his disciples so they could fulfill the Great Commission. As Fryar (2007) points out, Jesus developed a mentality of "we" (p. 162). Similarly, today's successful learning organizations recognize that they must empower employees with trust and authority to contribute optimally to the organization's vision (Marquardt, 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2017) highlighted that extraordinary performance is only possible when there is a shared sense of responsibility, stressing collaboration as a critical ingredient for high performance. Great things cannot happen from the work of just one person (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Collective leadership creates amplified results (Anderson & Adams, 2016).

As the teachings of Jesus highlighted, developing a sense of self-agency plays a crucial role. The work of Dweck and Leggett (1988) indicated that developing a growth mindset can play a critical role in how one sees their ability to influence outcomes. When people have a fixed mindset, they believe that their abilities are predetermined and, hence, feel the need to prove their worth continuously; contrastingly, people with a growth mindset believe their capabilities are malleable and seek learning opportunities that influence their growth (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

This dichotomy of perspectives marks a distinction between believing someone is inherently an expert versus the understanding that one possesses the potential to become great, given the proper training and opportunities (Dweck, 2016). The gospels demonstrated this pivotal divergence of mindsets: the Pharisees, who were thought to be the experts, resisted learning while the commoners who followed Jesus were more willing to embrace new ideas and challenge assumptions. Hence, change does not necessarily come from those who may seem to know everything, and so it behooves leaders to develop a growth mindset within their constituents and develop the potential in others.

Conclusion

The nature of today's increasingly complex and dynamic environment, characterized by aspects such as global competition, geographically dispersed supply chains, diverse workforce demographics, technological disruptions, escalating political and social unrest, and universal threats such as climate change, increasingly necessitates that organizations rely on the knowledge and talents of their employees (Hughes et al., 2014). As a result, there is a widespread focus on creating learning organizations. Senge (1990) identified five pillars: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Leaders seeking to build learning organizations must understand how each of these principles relate to learning, but perhaps more importantly, they must understand what leadership behaviors to employ.

Fortunately, contemporary leaders can draw lessons from the leadership of Jesus. As the transformational leader of the Christian church, and the exemplar of spiritual leadership, Jesus demonstrated how to create a learning organization. As a leader, he understood mastery as a journey to discover the truth. Jesus embodied the truth and helped his followers uncover their mental models that presented barriers to seeing the truth. He courageously engaged them in active learning through inquiry and stories that prompted critical reflection on their hidden assumptions and beliefs. Jesus motivated learning by inspiring listeners toward a shared vision of redemption for anyone who practiced core values of service and love for others. This vision would be achieved through a community of shared learning where people became empowered to affect change. Followers learned they could be the agents of their destinies rather than passive actors within the prevalent systems.

The twenty-first century demands this type of leadership. In this modern era of corporate scandal, political tension, and social stratification, the global community requires learning organizations led by people who provide hope, and a means by which

people feel they can contribute to a greater calling as part of an organizational environment that values one another. Jesus provided a model that today's leaders can follow to enact this kind of change at a global level. Though this list of lessons learned from Jesus' example is not exhaustive, it creates a launching pad for tangible actions today's leaders can enact. Contemporary leaders seeking to increase their organization's learning capacity can draw from these examples Jesus supplied as the founder of the Christian church and an early pioneer of the learning organization model.

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