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## Learning Blockages

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**Basic formula** (by Peter Senge: The Fifth Discipline. The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization, London 1993): For an organization to survive it is fundamental that its rate of learning  $L$  must be equal to, or greater than, the rate of change  $C$  in its external environment. This is expressed as:  $L \geq C$

Senge and others identified **different barriers** that must be overcome to become a learning organization.

### **The barrier of fragmentation**

The fundamental building block of most organizations is specialization, but unfortunately this tends to go hand in hand with territorial boundaries that divide different functions into warring kingdoms. Specialization might be paramount to grow and enter in new markets. Nevertheless, when it is not balanced with integration, the number of interfaces will increase and the overall organization will lose efficiency and innovation power. Therefore, people lose sight of the interconnected nature of the organization, problems get broken down into sub-problems in a reductionist way, and they concentrate on solving only their own problems, which often results in solutions that create a problem for somebody else.

### **The barrier of competition rather than cooperation**

In Western societies we are trained to compete. No wonder then, that in most conventional organizations competition between sub-units is the dominant mode of behavior. While there is nothing inherently wrong in this, it tends to result in people competing with those with whom they should collaborate and constructively cooperate in joint projects. It also results in a regrettable overemphasis on looking good, which not only reduces collaboration, but also inhibits learning because people have a tendency to conceal what they do not know or do not understand.

### **The barrier of reactivity**

Life is less stressful for people if they only change as and when it is absolutely necessary. In most organizations this means a fire-fighting approach, in which a great deal of attention is devoted to problems when they are known to exist, and this promotes risk-avoidance strategies, which are the main enemy of innovation and creativity. Learning and organizational change need to read the present circumstances carefully and anticipate the roadmap to future.

### **The barrier of authority, power and lack of freedom to voice**

Learning is impossible when single persons in power positions or institutional settings and rules don't allow to think freely and the dependency from power and institutional rule don't favor a dialogue free from fear of sanctions. Institutional settings generate a more or less enabling environment to express new ideas, interests and criticize poor performance in present practice and adverse circumstances. Organizational learning needs spaces for free informal encounter and communication. This should be favoured especially in mixed groups with participants from different organizational levels and functions.