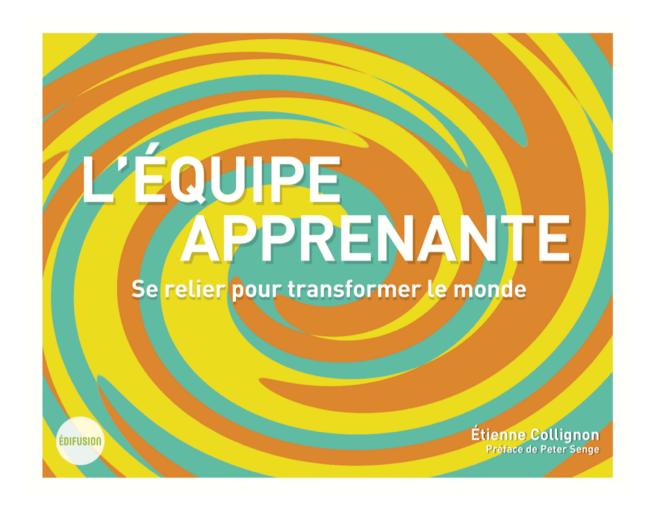# FOREWORD Peter Senge

Increasing recognition of the importance of teams has been one of the most important developments in management in the past three decades. Traditional organizations were structured around hierarchy as the key organizing concept. While hierarchy has not disappeared, making it effective in a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world requires people doing much more than pleasing their boss. They must work together to make sense of their rapidly changing context and to continually innovate in how they create value. Without learning at the level of working teams, relying too much on hierarchy creates blindness and rigidity, a surefire formula for shorty-lived organizations.

This is why team learning was always a core discipline in all our work on learning organizations. It is why few innovative businesses today do not organize in teams. It is why the most innovative management schools, have done the same, like the Finnish Team Academy, whose over-arching vision, 'creating *teampreneurs*' - people skilled at creating value together - succinctly encapsulates the movement. And, it is why more and more organizations outside business, like governmental organizations, NGOs and schools are evolving toward team-based designs.

But, it is one thing to know teams matter. It is another to do teaming well. Etienne Collignon's new book is an important step in a field where too often lip service substitutes for practical know how.

For me, that practical know how is grounded in concrete experiences of the magic of teams that both transform how they work and become catalysts for change on a larger scale.

Most of my own work today centers on transforming primary and secondary education. As the sole societal institution with a time horizon that extends beyond fifty years, basic innovation in school is an inescapable element to basic innovation in our contemporary unsustainable way of living. We all know that the immense social and ecological imbalances in the world mean that our societies must change. While governments are key in guiding that change and business is a key institution in innovating the products and processes that will enable that change, school needs to build the awareness, skills and values for what it means to live together well on an increasingly small planet.

With almost seven million students, California has the largest the state education system in the US, a country where education is mostly led and managed by states not the national government. Today, we are deeply engaged in statewide changes to advance "compassionate systems" tools and ideas as a core organizing approach to leadership at all levels, from the classroom to the school, to the district and beyond (https://www.systemsawareness.org).

The work in California started with about fifteen people who represented a larger network of 80 who constitute the "System of Support for Expanded Learning SSEL,' a network of programs that reaches almost a million of the most at-risk students in the State. "Expanded learning" is a major priority in California, which spends more than the other 49 U.S. states combined on such programs. The core team of fifteen was formed as a microcosm of this larger network, including people from the State Department of Education, county offices who coordinate local programs and a variety of large and smaller NGO's who are the program providers.

The SSEL network had a history of divisiveness. Many groups compete for funding, are distrustful of county offices and disconnected from the State Department of Ed. In short, it was a large and complex system characterized by the internal politics and rigidity one would expect in an established bureaucratic government hierarchy.

Not surprisingly, the inter-personal and institutional conflicts within the larger network were also present in the core team, and the conversations got very difficult very quickly. Part of the difficulties were inescapable - when you are working with children, people care a lot, and, in this setting, they know that this kind of programming can make a big difference for the future for kids in extreme poverty, literally a life or death difference for some. The irony is when you care deeply you can become judgmental very quickly. You get very angry and frustrated when the bureaucracy does not move and budgets change beyond your control.

In monthly meetings over about a year and a half, the team worked on learning how to "build a container" or a safe environment to "hold" their emotions and judgments. They practiced with basic learning tools such as the ladder of inference to reflect on their own assumptions and the system thinking iceberg to think together about how they often got caught in just reacting to events and not dealing with deeper structural sources of problems. During this time, they also served as periodic conveners of regularly scheduled meetings of the larger 80-person SSEL network. This gave the core team the opportunity to share their learning and engage others with the same learning tools applied to their own practical management challenges. Gradually, the tenor and productiveness of the larger network meetings started to shift.

The man formally responsible for the SSEL network, the State Director for expanded learning, had had a personal mission to change how SSEL worked since coming into the job from outside government several years earlier. His personal commitment was the strength of his leadership, and he really understood the importance of the deeper personal and inter-personal work to shift the interior climate of the core team and the larger SSEL, so they could form better working relationships with all their external stakeholders, program providers, schools and school districts, and ultimately students and families. He knew that these relationships were very fragmented, that there was little trust, and that, if you didn't get through that and get to a place where people could really start to listen and talk with each other honestly, nothing would change. In practice, he was very good himself at the "container building" work, bringing people together and creating a safe space, starting with his own openness and vulnerability. Sometimes, people in formal leadership positions think the work to build a team is about others and are reticent to do the personal work themselves. He was willing to do that. He understood that the quality of his presence was more important than any single action, that he and everyone would make mistakes, become threatened and close down, and he had the willingness to face these challenges in himself.

This project is now in its fourth year. It will undoubtedly take many more to extend this spirit of openness, mutuality and willingness to learn to the large number of organizations that ultimately affect results for students and teachers throughout the state. But it has been a powerful experience in cultivating the seeds of collective intelligence and the role of generative teams in larger systems change processes. The basic function of the core team was to create a space for the larger SSEL network. As they worked through difficult

breakdowns and conversations that elicited cognitive and emotional reactions that previously would have caused defensiveness and hostility, they were both building their collective capacity and walking a path that would point a way for many others. As they developed a sense of collective ownership for how they showed up in the SSEL network, they were well aware of the possible benefits that could eventually be achieved for poor children throughout the State of California.

After about six to nine months, people in the other parts of that State Department of Education would start to hear about this group and getting interested. The sort of collective intelligence developing in the core team and the SSEL network can be palpable. You can sense it through the energy in the room where a meeting is occurring. In the SSEL network meetings, after the second or the third one, many people were noticing that things were very different. Today, they talk about the "generativeness of the social field," one way we are starting to calibrate or measure this collective intelligence. A social field always exists and the difference between one characterized by fear and distrust versus excitement, respect and deep listening is one we can feel it. People express emotions honestly people are often moved listening each other. There can be lots of conflict, but it is expressed directly with little inter-personal anger. There is a sort of collective emotional maturity. The two lead facilitators in the process, Mette Boell and Robert Hanig said that they often felt deeply moved by people's candor and willingness to be vulnerable.

One of the many team-learning tools that proved very useful one was David Kantor's Four Player model. One of the world's most eminent system family therapists, Kantor's basic orientation is the dynamics within a group, where he brings a simple yet deep family systems perspective based on four types of 'speech acts' and associated roles: moving, following, opposing and observing or "by-standing." The team used the tool regularly and discovered many ways they consistently undermined themselves. Michael, the director, was expected to behave as a mover. But he was extremely good as a bystander and very good at supporting people, and at just being present, quietly holding the space. By working more explicitly for all to be more effective in all four roles, the team became more balanced and less dependent on any one person. It proved a crucial stage in developing their capacity to "create a container."

Kantor's work is one example of how Etienne synthesizes great team thinkers. His book offers a wonderful diversity of perspectives. For example, while Kantor's helps work helps team diagnose and shift dysfunctions in team dynamics, Johannes Partanen, founder of Team Academy, is passionate advocate for collective creativity. Etienne Wenger has had great influence in his work on communities of practice and Frédéric Laloux's work on culture brings yet another perspective.

It is essential to develop teams. They are the key connector between the personal and the transpersonal, the organizations and larger social systems that we all seek to help evolve and be more effective. Failing to address this is a basic shortcoming of many otherwise worthwhile change initiatives. In my view, it is hard to start deep change at large scale. The small team I have been describing is starting now to have a large impact, which would have been impossible without ongoing work to transform their own team culture. In this way, the real work of large-scale change is anchored in individuals and teams. Skipping the personal and team levels of change dooms many lofty change aspirations to being only superficial.