In How Far does the Person-Centered Approach offer a Baseline for Developing the Disciplines of the Learning Organization?

Sonja Kabicher and Renate Motschnig-Pitrik
University of Vienna, Research Lab for Educational Technologies
sonja.kabicher@univie.ac.at, renate.motschnig@univie.ac.at

Abstract. Learning organizations build competitive advantage on top of their genuine caring for their members who are in a continuous learning mode integrating reason and intuitions in perceiving current reality and shaping their future. They are connected by their commitment to a shared vision that takes into account the personal visions of individual members. In this paper we investigate in how far the Person-Centered Approach, a branch of humanistic psychology founded by Carl Rogers, can provide the interpersonal basis and associated theoretical foundation for a learning organization. The systematic juxtaposition of constructs from the Person-Centered Approach and disciplines and abilities from the learning organization shows that the Person-Centered Approach clearly qualifies as the basis for (inter)personal development and associated theoretical foundation for a learning organization. Nevertheless, the particular organizational context and situation calls for amendments in special skills and knowledge pertaining to organizational dynamics in order to achieve a person's full competence along all five disciplines of the learning organization.

1 Introduction

Organizational development in general and the concept of a learning organization (Senge, 2006), in particular, acknowledge the vital role of personal development to the thriving of any organization. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, a thorough study of the relevance of person-centered theory and practice to the five disciplines of a learning organization has not been conducted. This is surprising, since Rogers' Person-Centered Approach (PCA), originally developed in the field of counseling and psychotherapy (Rogers, 1951, 1959, 1961, 1970, 1980), since then has been successfully applied in several further areas such as management (Gordon, 1995; Steenbuck, 2005), education (Cornelius-White, 2007; Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; Motschnig-Pitrik and Mallich, 2004; Tausch and Tausch, 1961), health care, social work, communication (Motschnig and Nykl, 2009), and emotional intelligence at work (Ryback, 1998).

In this paper we aim primarily at responding to the following question: In how far can the Person-Centered Approach - in its capacity to address the development of persons, relationships and groups - serve as the foundation for the development of organizations in the sense of becoming "learning organizations"? This gives rise to four derived sub-questions:

- Which features/postulates from the "learning organization" can be matched with constructs offered by the Person-Centered Approach?

- Which features/postulates from the "learning organization" are not addressed in the Person-Centered Approach? Put in a slightly different perspective: What competences are special to a learning organization as a whole and its members as individual learners?

- Which features/postulates from the Person-Centered Approach are not addressed in the "learning organization"?

- Which constructs are particularly emphasized and/or differentiated in the respective theories/approaches? What insight can we gain from the matching of constructs?

Summarizing, our goal is to find out, which aspects of Senge's five disciplines are grounded in the Person-Centered Approach and which are complementary. Furthermore we are interested in the consequences of our findings, both theoretically and practically.

In order to find responses to the research questions we have studied the theory of the Person-Centered Approach and that of the five disciplines in detail. On this basis we have identified central features and constructs that we propose to align in a systematic way by investigating features of the five disciplines and associating them with relevant Person-Centered Approach constructs. The research procedure is reflected in the paper's structure which is as follows: the next chapter briefly introduces the core five disciplines of the learning organization as proposed by Senge (2006), while chapter three summarizes the constructs and scope of the Person-Centered Approach. In chapter four we present a mapping of the features we identified for each of the five disciplines to constructs of Person-Centered Theory. Chapter five summarizes our findings and proposes issues for further research.

2 Disciplines of a Learning Organization

The term "learning organization" is often used to explain what organizations like to be in order to achieve competitive advantage in a global market. It is not enough that a small group of persons or even one individual learns for the whole organization in order to decide on its future. It is rather necessary for an organization to know how to encourage engagement and to realize learning potential at all its levels. Senge (2006) describes the competences special to a particular learning organization by means of the five disciplines personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. As an organization can only learn if all its members learn the following explores the competences and attitudes that individuals need to have in order to act as members of a learning organization.

Personal Mastery. Personal mastery is the discipline for personal growth and learning (Senge, 2006, p. 131) and it describes self-guidance and self-development. Persons with a high level of personal mastery continually expand their competences in order to achieve their genuine goals (Senge, 2006, p.131). This quest for continual learning can be described as lifelong generative learning (Senge, 2006, p. 132). This means to live in a continual learning mode, never to "arrive", to be accurately aware of one's ignorance, incompetence, growth areas, and, at the same time to be deeply self-confident. Personal mastery embodies two underlying movements: (1) to continually clarify what a person truly wants (Senge, 2006, p. 131) and (2) continually learning how to see current reality more clearly (Senge, 2006, p. 132). Persons with a high level of personal mastery have particular characteristics (Senge, 2006, p. 132). "They have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their visions and goals. […] They see current reality as an ally, not an enemy. They have learned how to perceive and work with forces of change rather than resist those forces. They are deeply inquisitive, committed to continually seeing reality more and more accurately. They feel connected to others and to life itself. Yet they sacrifice none of their uniqueness. They feel as if they are part of a larger creative process, which they can influence but cannot unilaterally control" (Senge, 2006, p. 132-133). Thus, to enhance a learning organization, a person's goals need to be in line with a shared vision and shared mental models. In Figure 1 we summarize the abilities of personal mastery as described by Senge (2006).
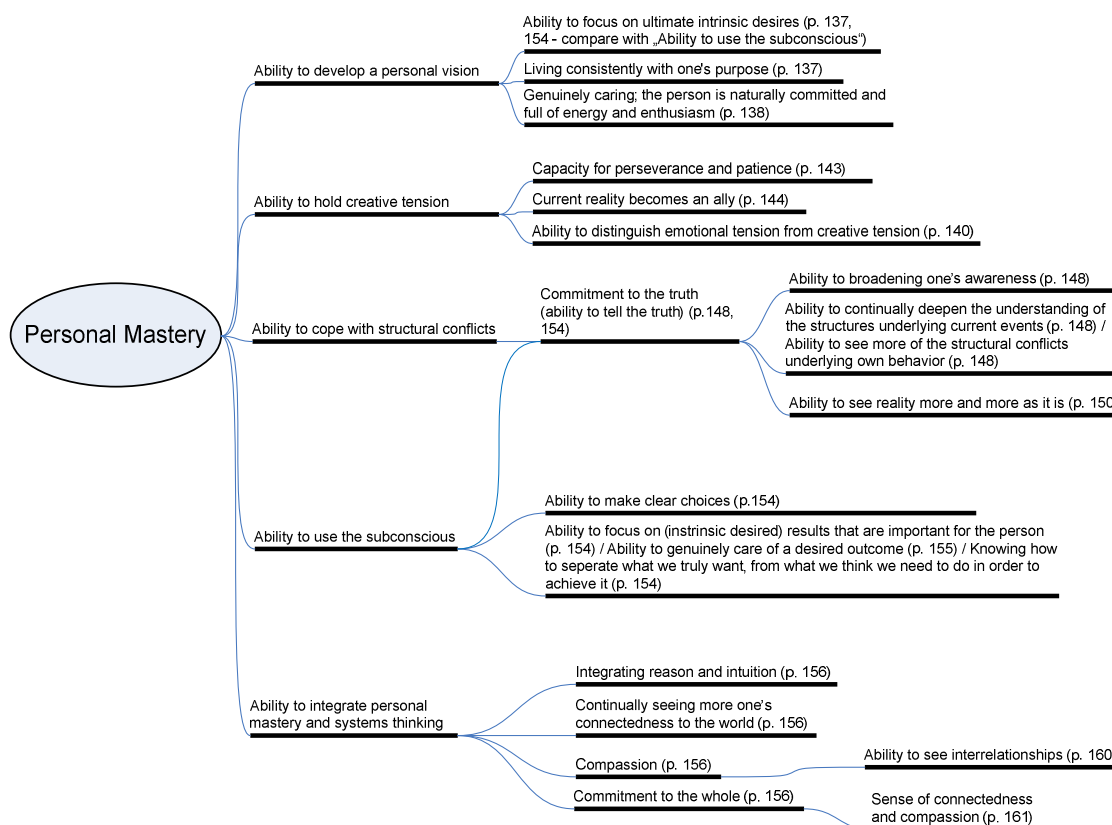
Figure 1: Competences of personal mastery described by Senge (2006)

Mental Models. Mental models can be described as eyeglasses through which persons see the world. They are assumptions and generalizations, as well as deeply held pictures and symbols of how the world works which influence persons' perceptions. Mental models shape how persons act (Senge, 2006, p. 164) and they can transform to problems when "they become implicit – when they exist below the level of [a person's] awareness" (Senge, 2006, p. 166). They can impede learning but also accelerate learning (Senge, 2006, p. 167). To promote a learning organization, individuals need to manage their mental models. This means that they are able to surface, test and improve the internal pictures of how the world works (Senge, 2006, p. 163). Core competences (and at the same time characteristics) of a person that effectively works with his/her mental models are, for example, to face up to distinctions between espoused theories (what we say) and theories-in-use (the implied theory in what we do), to recognize "leaps of abstraction (to notice our jumps from observation to generalization), to expose the "left-hand column" (to articulate what we normally do not say) and to balance inquiry and advocacy (skills for effective collaborative learning) (see also Figure 2).

The distinction between espoused theory and theory-in-use refers to one basic reflective skill namely to use gaps between what one says and what one does as a vehicle for becoming more aware (Senge, 2006, p. 177). Because it is hard to see theories-in-use, a person who tries to manage his or her mental models uses help of another person - a "ruthlessly compassionate" partner (Senge, 2006, p. 178). When a person "moves from direct observations (concrete "data") to generalization without testing" then leaps of abstractions occur (Senge, 2006, p. 178). In order to spot leaps of abstraction the person first has to ask him-/herself what he/she believes about the way the world works (Senge, 2006, p. 179-180). It is important to be

willing to consider that a particular generalization may be inaccurate or misleading. "If you are willing to question a generalization, explicitly separate it from the "data" which led to it. […] Where possible, test the generalizations directly. This will often lead to inquiring into the reasons behind one another's actions" (Senge, 2006, p. 180). Persons who continually manage their mental models see how their mental models operate in particular situations and articulate what they normally do not say. The most productive learning usually occurs when persons combine skills in advocacy and inquiry referred to as "reciprocal inquiry". This means "that everyone makes his/her thinking explicit and subject to public examination. This creates an atmosphere of genuine vulnerability. No one is hiding the evidence or reasoning behind his/her views – advancing them without making them open to scrutiny. For example, when inquiry and advocacy are balanced, I would not only be inquiring into the reasoning behind others' views but would be stating my views in such a way as to reveal my own assumptions and reasoning and to invite others to inquire into them" (Senge, 2006, p. 184-185). Furthermore, Senge describes some guidelines for advocating one's own views and for inquiring into others' view. When advocating one's own view the person makes his or her own reasoning explicit, encourages others to explore one's view and to provide different views, and actively inquires into others' views that differ from the own. When inquiring into others' views the person states his/her assumptions clearly and acknowledge that they are assumptions, states the "data" upon which his/her assumptions are based, asks questions if he/she is genuinely interested in the others' response. The guidelines however will be of little use if the person is not genuinely curious and willing to change his/her mental models of a situation – in other words "practicing inquiry and advocacy means being willing to expose the limitations in your own thinking – the willingness to be wrong. Nothing less will make it safe for others to do likewise" (Senge, 2006, p. 187).
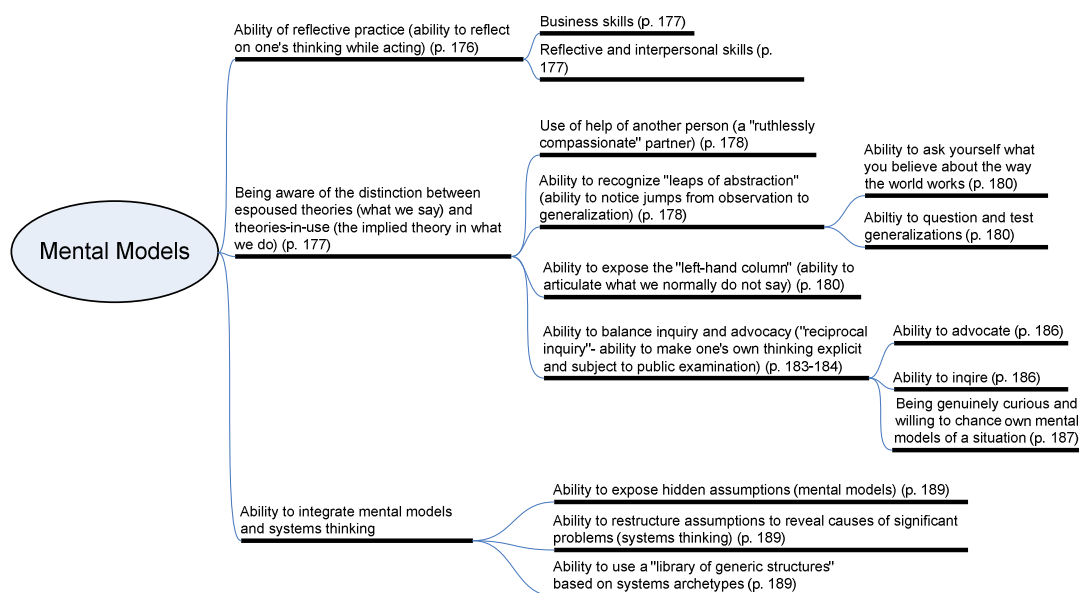

Figure 2: Competences of managing mental models described by Senge (2006)

Shared Vision. "A shared vision is the answer to the question "What do we want to create?". Just as personal visions are pictures or images people carry in their heads and hearts, so too are shared visions pictures that people throughout an organization carry. They create a sense of commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities […]

When people truly share a vision they are connected, bound together by a common aspiration. Personal visions derive their power from an individual's deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring" (Senge, 2006, p. 192). A shared vision is a vision that furthers engagement and participation of the organizations' members. It relates to the ability to expose shared images of the future among all individuals of an organization. "Shared vision is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning. While adaptive learning is possible without a vision, generative learning occurs only when people are striving to accomplish something that matters deeply to them. In fact, the whole idea of generative learning – expanding your ability to create – will seem abstract and meaningless *until* people become excited about a vision they truly want to accomplish" (Senge, 2006, p. 192). Genuine caring about a shared vision is rooted in personal visions – thus personal mastery (including commitment to the truth and creative tension) is the foundation for the development of a shared vision (Senge, 2006, p. 197). There are seven attitudes of a person towards a vision described by Senge (2006, p. 203-204):

(1) commitment (the person feels fully responsible for making the vision happen and he/she does whatever it takes to make the vision real – he/she creates structures that are needed. The vision is pulling the person to action , there is a unique energy that a committed person brings toward creating a vision),

(2) enrollment (the person wants it and will do whatever can be done within the structures),

(3) genuine compliance (the person sees the benefits of the vision and does everything expected and more),

(4) formal compliance (the person sees the benefit of the vision and does what is expected and no more),

(5) grudging compliance (the person does not see the benefits of the vision but does not want to lose the job. Thus he or she does enough what is expected because he/she has to but communicates that he/she does not share the vision),

(6) noncompliance (the person does not see the benefit of the vision and will not do what is expected), and

(7) apathy (the person is neither for nor against the vision and has no interest and energy to share the vision).

"A group of people truly committed to a common vision is an awesome force" (Senge, 2006, p. 205) but even if there are some guidelines proposed by Senge he emphasized that "there is really nothing you can do to get another person to enroll or commit. Enrollment and commitment require freedom of choice" (Senge, 2006, p. 207). Competences of a committed person to a shared vision are illustrated in Figure 3.
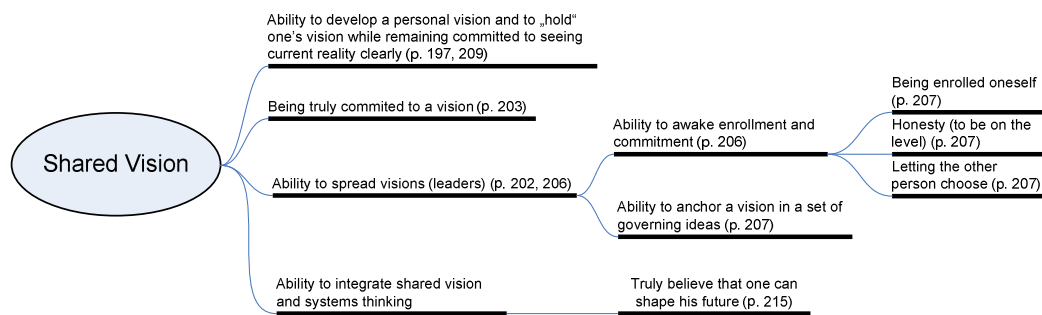
Figure 3: Competences of shared visioning described by Senge (2006)

Team Learning. Working in teams is common in present organizations. Teams are key learning units in organizations and thus the need of mastering team learning has never been greater before than today. "Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 2006, p. 218). It is a collective discipline which includes abilities to exchange in dialogues and discussions, to gain awareness of mental models and hold them flexibly, as well as to think together. Competences of team members who learn together are illustrated in Figure 4.
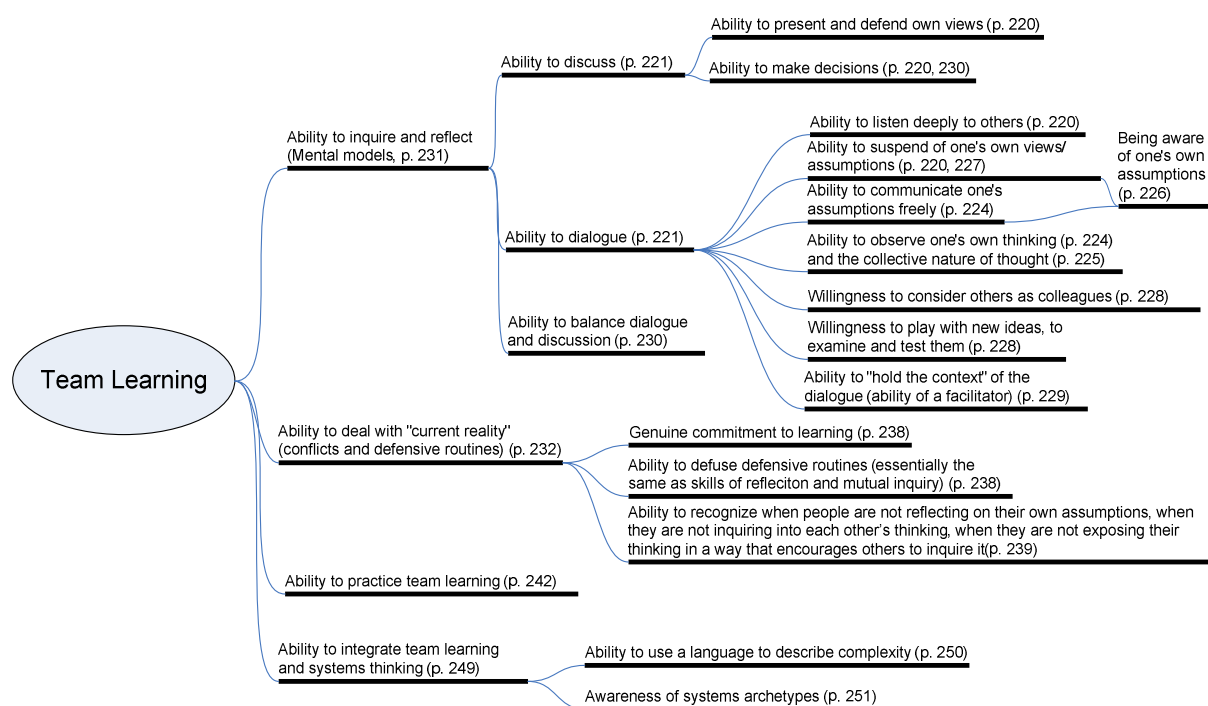

Figure 4: Competences of team learning described by Senge (2006)

Systems Thinking. The fifth discipline, systems thinking, connects and furthers all other disciplines. This discipline refers to the awareness that the world is a construct of relationships rather than an accumulation of separate things. "Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing the "structures" that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from low leverage change" (Senge, 2006, p. 69). Competences of a systems thinking person are illustrated in Figure 5.
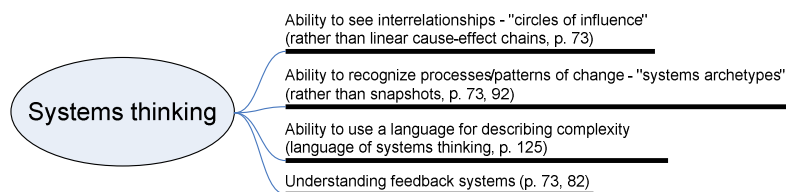
Ability to see interrelationships - "circles of influence"
(rather than linear cause-effect chains, p. 73)

Ability to recognize processes/patterns of change - "systems archetypes"
(rather than snapshots, p. 73, 92)

Ability to use a language for describing complexity
(language of systems thinking, p. 125)

Understanding feedback systems (p. 73, 82)

Systems thinking

Figure 5: Competence of systems thinking described by Senge (2006)

3   Selected Constructs of the Person-Centered Approach

The Person-Centered Approach was developed by Carl Rogers (USA, 1902-1987) in the primary context of counseling and psychotherapy and since then spread to several areas in which interpersonal relationships are in the foreground, such as is in education, management, social work, health care, etc. In the following we summarize those aspects of person-centered theorizing and insight (see Figure 6) that we found most relevant in the scope of the five disciplines of the learning organization.

Actualizing tendency

Formative tendency

Three Roger's variables

Congruence

Acceptance

Empathic understanding

Significant learning

Theory of Personality and Behavior (19 propositions)

Theory of Therapy, Personality and Interpersonal Relationship

Fully functioning person

Encounter groups
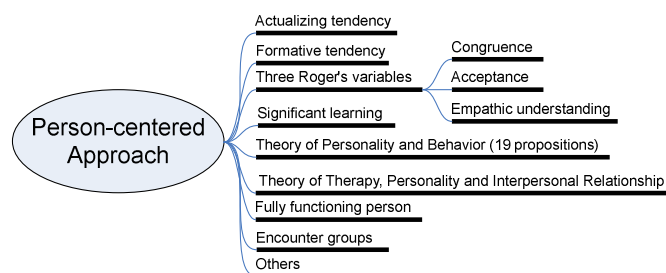
Others

Person-centered Approach

Figure 6: Particular aspects of the Person-Centered Approach

Since the word "learning" is included in the term "learning organization" and thus appears to be central to it, let us start with a person-centered statement on learning. Carl Rogers (1983, p. 20) defines *significant learning* as combining "[…] the logical and the intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and the experience, the idea and the meaning. When we learn in that way, we are whole." This clearly underlines a holistic perception of learning, very much in line of the generative learning, calling for rapport between cognitions and feelings in Senge's terminology (2006). Another statement by Rogers this time on the qualities of a facilitator of learning, illustrates the congenial direction of thought (1983, p. 271): „Perhaps the most basic of these essential attitudes is realness, or genuineness**.** When the facilitator is a real person, being what he or she is, entering into relationships with the learners without presenting a front or a facade, the facilitator is much more likely to be effective. This means, that the feelings the facilitator is experiencing are available to his or her awareness, that he or she is able to live these feelings, to be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate."

A fundamental basis of Rogers's theory, so to speak the basis of the capability of self-organization, is the hypothesized "actualizing tendency". It is described in the 4th of the 19 propositions of Rogers's Theory of Personality and Behavior (1951): "The organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain and expand the experiencing organism." The term that has most often been used for this directional tendency toward wholeness is the "*actualizing tendency*". It is the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to *maintain* or *enhance* the organism. It involves development towards

the differentiation of organs and functions, expansion in terms of growth, expansion of effectiveness through the use of tools, expansion and enhancement through reproduction. It is development toward autonomy and at the same time it appears to head in the direction of socialization, as humans have a need for positive regard. It should be noted that this basic actualizing tendency is *the only motive* which is postulated in this theoretical system and that it is the *organism as a whole* which exhibits this tendency.

The key of psychological growth is to bring a person in contact with his actualizing tendency and a person that wants to help need to keep the relationship free of evaluation and judgment. This permits the other person to recognize his locus of evaluation, the center of responsibility, within himself. The internal locus of evaluation – a construct of valuing within the individual himself – "means that [a person] is the center of the valuing process, the evidence being supplied by his own senses. When the locus of evaluation resides in others, their judgment as to the value of an object or experience becomes the criterion of value for the individual" (Rogers 1959, p. 210).

Rogers was convinced that an implication of the view he has been presenting was "that the *basic nature of the human being*, when functioning freely, is constructive and trustworthy. For me this is an inescapable conclusion from a quarter-century of experience in psychotherapy. When we are able to free the individual from defensiveness, so that he is open to the wide range of his own needs, as well as the wide range of environmental and social demands, his reactions may be trusted to be positive, forward-moving, constructive. We do not need to ask who will socialize him, for one of his own deepest needs is for affiliation and communication with others. As he becomes more fully himself, he will become more realistically socialized" (Rogers, 1961, p. 194).

Rogers and his colleagues found from thousands of interviews and solid research studies that the actualizing tendency can unfold itself best, or in other words, students learn most significantly, in an atmosphere or climate in which the facilitator (manager, instructor, teacher, etc.) holds three core attitudes such that the other persons perceive them, at least to some degree (Rogers, 1961). These attitudes are:

- *Congruence*, with synonyms such as, realness, transparency, genuineness, authenticity; it also includes a lived, moment to moment openness to experience;

- *Acceptance*, else referred to as respect, unconditional positive regard, caring attitude, concern for the individual; it implies a non-judgmental attitude;

- *Empathic understanding*, a deep form of understanding of the meanings as well as feelings of the other person from his or her point of view.

Rogers has observed a puzzling paradox around the attitude of *acceptance* in combination with openness. He writes: "The more I am open to the realities in me and in the other person, the less do I find myself wishing to rush in to 'fix things'. As I try to listen to myself and the experiencing going on in me, and the more I try to extend the same listening attitude to another person, the more respect I feel for the complex processes of life. [...] Yet the paradoxical aspect of my experience is that the more I am simply willing to be myself, in all this complexity of life, and the more I am willing to understand and accept the realities in myself and in the other person, the more change seems to bestirred up. It is a very paradoxical thing – that to the degree that each one of us is willing to be himself, then he finds not only himself changing, but he finds that other people to whom he relates are also changing" (Rogers, 1961, p. 21).

Due to the immense importance of congruence in everyday life let us elaborate the respective theory in some more detail. *Congruence* is a basic concept of the Person-Centered Approach (Rogers 1969, p. 106) and simply means being real. Being real (integrated, whole, or genuine) refers to the match of one's experiences, awareness and communication (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 197). Rogers (1959) describes the concept of congruence as being formed by the five constructs (illustrated in Figure 7): Congruence of self and experience, openness to experience, psychological adjustment, extensionality, and maturity. Rogers (1959, p. 207) understands congruence as "[…] the term which defines the state. Openness to experience is the way as internally congruent individual meets new experience. Psychological adjustment is congruence viewed from a social point of view. Extensional is the term which describes the specific types of behavior of a congruent individual. Maturity is a broader term describing the personality characteristics and behavior of a person who is, in general congruent".
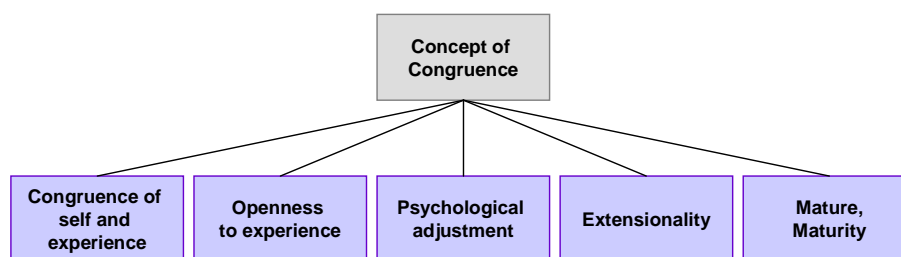

Figure 7: Five constructs of congruence (Rogers 1959, p. 207)

Congruence of self and experience is a state which can be achieved when accurately symbolized self-experiences are included in the (revised) self-concept. An individual is a "*fully functioning person*", if there is congruence of self and all self-experiences (Rogers 1959, p. 235). To be open to experience means that a person feels in no way forewarned or threatened of experiences. Rogers (1961) characterizes *openness to experience* in the following way: "This is the opposite of psychological defensiveness, when to protect the organization of the self, certain experiences are prevented from coming into awareness except in distorted fashion. In a person who is open to experience, each stimulus is freely relayed through the nervous system, without being distorted by any process of defensiveness. Whether the stimulus originates in the environment, in the impact of forms, color, or sound on the sensory nerves, or whether it originates in the viscera, or as a memory trace in the central nervous system, it is available to awareness. … It means lack of rigidity and permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses. It means a tolerance of ambiguity where ambiguity exists. It means the ability to receive much conflicting information without forcing closure upon the situation" (Rogers, 1961, p. 353). One personal learning by Rogers (1961) is - in our view - strongly in line with openness to experience: "The facts are friendly." Another consequence of openness is communicated in the following citation: "In the hypothetical person who is completely open to his experience, his concept of self would be a symbolization in awareness which would be completely congruent with his experience. There would, therefore, be no possibility of threat" (Rogers 1959, p. 206). Psychological adjustment is identical with the complete congruence of self and experience or openness to experience. It means that "[…] the concept of the self is such that all experiences are or may be assimilated on a symbolic level into the gestalt of the self-structure" (Rogers 1959, p. 206). Another construct of congruence is maturity. Rogers explains that the "individual exhibits mature behavior when he perceives realistically and in an extensional manner, is not defensive, accepts the responsibility of being different from others, accepts

responsibility for his own behavior, evaluates experience in terms of the evidence coming from his own senses, changes his evaluation of experience only on the basis of new evidence, accepts others as unique individuals different from himself, prizes himself, and prizes others" (Rogers 1959, p. 207). Finally, Rogers (1959) defines extensionality as one of the five constructs of congruence. In contrast to an intentional individual who "overgeneralizes" and confuses facts and evaluation, a person acting in an extensional manner experiences an actual thing as it is. The person sees and is aware of his experiences (or factual, low-inference reality), he lives in a "specific existential instance not in generalities" (Cornelius-White 2007, p. 198-199). Rogers defines a person's extensional behavior in terms of "[…] to see experience in limited, differentiated terms, to be aware of the space-time anchorage of facts, to be dominated by facts, not by concepts, to evaluate in multiple ways, to be aware of different levels of abstraction, to test his inferences and abstractions against reality" (Rogers 1959, p. 206-207).

Research in the Person-Centered Approach showed a developmental direction of persons in a person-centered atmosphere: If the facilitator communicates the three core conditions such that the other person can perceive them, at least to some degree, "the other individual in the relationship:

- will experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he has repressed;
- will find himself becoming better integrated, more able to function effectively;
- will become more similar to the person he would like to be;
- will be more self-directing and self-confident;
- will become more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive;
- will be more understanding, more acceptant of others;
- will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably" (Rogers 1961, p. 37-38).

Within his well-known theory of psychotherapy, personality and interpersonal relationships Rogers (1959, p. 234-235) specified his view of optimal development in terms of the properties of a "fully functioning person."

The Theory of the Fully Functioning Person (Rogers, 1959)

A. The individual has an inherent tendency toward *actualizing* his organism.

B. The individual has the capacity and tendency to *symbolize experiences* accurately in *awareness*.

   1. A corollary statement is that he has the capacity and tendency to keep his *self-concept* congruent with his *experience*.

C. The individual has a *need for positive regard*.

D. The individual has a *need for positive self-regard*.

E. Tendencies *A* and *B* are most fully realized when needs *C* and *D* are met. More specifically, tendencies *A* and *B* tend to be most fully realized when

   1. The individual *experiences unconditional positive regard* from significant others.

   2. The pervasiveness of this *unconditional positive regard* is made evident through relationships marked by a complete and communicated empathic understanding of the individual's *frame of reference*.

F. If the conditions under *E* are met to a maximum degree, the individual who experiences these conditions will be a fully functioning person.

The fully functioning person will have at least these characteristics:

1. He will be open to his experience.
    a. The corollary statement is that he will exhibit no *defensiveness*.
2. Hence all experiences will be available to awareness.
3. All *symbolizations* will be as accurate as the experiential data will permit.
4. His *self-structure* will be congruent with his *experience*.
5. His *self-structure* will be a fluid gestalt, changing flexibly in the process of assimilation of new *experience*.
6. He will *experience* himself as the locus of evaluation.
    a. The *valuing process* will be a continuing organismic one.
7. He will have no *conditions of worth*.
    a. The corollary statement is that he will *experience unconditional self-regard*.
8. He will meet each situation with behavior which is a unique and creative adaption to the newness of that moment.
9. He will find his *organismic valuing* a trustworthy guide to the most satisfying behaviors, because
    a. All available experiential data will be available to *awareness* and used.
    b. No datum of experience will be *distorted* in, or *denied* to, *awareness*.
    c. The outcomes of behavior in *experience* will be available to *awareness*.
    d. Hence any failure to achieve the maximum possible satisfaction, because of lack of data, will be corrected by this effective reality testing.
10. He will live with others of in the maximum possible harmony, because of the rewarding character of reciprocal positive regard [...].

Note that although the theory of the Fully Functioning Person describes the characteristics of an individual, the development towards this "end" is made possible by a significant other, i.e. within an interpersonal relationship with particular properties. The importance of relationship and *interaction* also becomes evident from proposition IX of Rogers's Theory of Personality and Behavior (1951): "As a result of the interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of self is formed – an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the "I" or the "me," together with the values attached to these concepts."

The importance of *reciprocity* in the relationship is explicitly expressed in the reciprocity of the need for positive regard (Rogers, 1959, p. 224) and can be implied from the characterization of realness or congruence. Rogers writes: "It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him" (Rogers, 1961, p. 33). Elaborated further in the context of communication in interpersonal relationships, Rogers took the feature of reciprocity as an essential asset of his "*tentative law of interpersonal relationship*". "Assuming (a) a minimal willingness on the part of two people to be in contact; (b) an ability and minimal willingness on the part of each to receive

communication from the other; and (c) assuming the contact to continue over a period of time; then the following relationship is hypothesized to hold true: The greater the congruence of experience, awareness and communication on the part of one individual, the more the ensuing relationship will involve a tendency toward reciprocal communication with a quality of increasing congruence; a tendency toward more mutually accurate understanding of the communications; improved psychological adjustment and functioning in both parties; mutual satisfaction in the relationship." (Rogers, 1961)

The experience of perceiving and practicing reciprocal communication in a group setting pervaded by a climate of congruence, acceptance, and empathic understanding can be gained by participating in person-centered encounter groups (Rogers, 1979; Lago and McMillan, 1999; Motschnig-Pitrik, 2008). The basic encounter group – a setting for self-experience and problem solving – if well facilitated, has been regarded as one of the most potent social inventions of the 20th century. The group as a whole and its participants as members move through a group process that is characterized by smalltalk, superficial conversation and a resistance against expressing own feelings in its beginning and moving towards trust, deep understanding and helpful relationships inside and outside the group setting as the group process continues.

Primarily through his extensive experience with encounter groups, Rogers (1980) extended his view of the actualizing tendency inherent in living organisms to encompass a broader view, the *formative tendency*. He wrote[1]:

- "There appears to be a *formative tendency* art work in the universe, which can be observed at any level." (Rogers, 1980, p. 124)
- "It seems that the human organism has been moving toward the more complete development of awareness. It is at this level that new forms are invented, perhaps even new directions for the human species. It is here that the *reciprocal relationship between cause and effect* is most demonstrably evident. It is here that choices are maid, spontaneous forms created. [.] Consciousness is participating in this larger, creative, *formative tendency*." (Rogers, 1980, p. 127)
- When I am at my best, [...] then simply my presence is releasing and helpful to the other. [...] Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a *part of something larger*. Profound growth and healing and energy are present. (Rogers, 1980, p. 127)

Interesting follow-up work in the context of the actualizing and formative tendency has been published, for example, in (Barrett-Lennard, 1998, 2005; Cornelius-White and Kriz, 2008; Kriz, 2007)

4 Relating the Five Disciplines to Person-Centered Theory and Development (the Person-Centered Approach)

In the following we share some general observations resulting from the juxtaposition of the Person-Centered Approach and the five disciplines and proceed by a more detailed analysis of commonalities and differences.

Learning. Interestingly, the five disciplines of the "learning organization" have only very little in common with the prevalent meaning of learning as practiced, for example, in schools

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[1] Italics added for emphasis.

or academia. There, learning essentially means externally determined, receptive learning, gathering of knowledge about something. While such learning is not completely absent in the five disciplines – systems thinking, for example, requires the knowledge of basic archetypes – it has by far less weight than – or is rather integrated into – generative, experiential, significant learning. This way of learning addresses attitudes, skills, feelings and meanings and leads to some kind of holistic competence of a person in relationship to his or her environment/context/organization. Thus, the first strong commonality of Rogers's Person-Centered Approach and Senge's learning organization is the way the two scientists conceive of the concept and qualities of learning. Also, note the deviation of this conception from current academic and educational practice that is only slowly realizing that a stronger orientation towards competences in the sense of attitudes, abilities, and knowledge for responsible action is called for (Metzger, 2005, Knight et al, 2004).

Personal Mastery. As one could expect, personal mastery is the discipline with the most evident matches between its features and person-centered principles. In particular, Rogers's theory of the fully functioning person, the (theoretical) endpoint or target of the development in a person-centered climate, in our view, shares several features with Senge's development towards a high degree of personal mastery. In order to allow for a detailed feature by feature comparison, the reader is invited to inspect Table 1 and check whether he or she shares our alignment of individual features.

Besides this match, two features stand out to be brought together: Senge's postulate or desirable attitude of "seeing current reality as an ally" appears to strongly correspond to Rogers's insight to accept the reality as it is. In Rogers's words (1961, p. 25): "The facts are friendly." Also, Senge notes that a person exhibiting a high degree of personal mastery "feels as if he/she is part of a larger creative process, which the person can influence but not unilaterally control." This appears highly consistent with Rogers's view of the formative tendency: "There appears to be a formative tendency at work in the universe […]. Consciousness is participating in this larger, creative, formative tendency." (Rogers, 1980, p. 124 and p. 127).

While several of the features of a person who exhibits a high degree of personal mastery have their "counterparts" in the "fully functioning person" and, in particular, the concept of congruence, Senge identified and described more specific abilities in the context learning organizations. These abilities can be seen as springing from Rogers's theory, nevertheless, they are carried on to a particular context by Senge. In this way, their particular meaning and effect can be appreciated by considering particular expressions or areas of application, as shown in Figure 1. For example, the ability to develop a personal vision requires one to know one's direction and to be congruent with one's purpose, yet it makes the issue of formulating a personal vision more explicit. The ability to hold creative tension is nicely characterized by Rogers's insight to develop in a direction of not wishing to rush into 'fix things' and an attitude of perceiving the facts to be friendly. Senge's demand of the ability to cope with structural tensions and to use the subconscious is "prepared" by Rogers's congruence of experience, awareness and expression, as well as using one's organismic valuing process as a trustworthy guide and not to distort any of one's experiences but rather to perceive extensionally. If thought and feeling are consistent, our choices will tend to be clear. Interestingly, this same process of relying on reason *and* intuition/feeling is seen by Senge as a facet of systems thinking, as are the ability of perceiving the larger picture, being committed

to the whole and having compassion. The latter may be seen as effects of being empathic, a core attitude in Rogers's approach that – at least to some degree - comes in via "compassion" that is subsumed by the personal mastery's link to systems thinking.

Mental Models. In Senge's view, mental models, the "eyeglasses" through which we see the world, can become a problem, if they become implicit such that they exist below the level of a person's awareness. In Rogers's terminology such rigidly held beliefs would hinder a person to be open to his or her experience and, consequently, to perceive in an extensional mode. Rather, experiences would get distorted or ignored by the rigid constructs residing in the structure of self.

For Senge, mastering the pitfalls that reside in holding implicit mental models can best be accomplished by an ability of reflective practice, by being aware of the fact that what we say is not necessarily the same as what we do, by an ability and willingness of exposing and articulating one's assumptions and beliefs, and by an attitude of being genuinely curious and willing to change one's view. A "compassionate partner" is seen as a major supportive asset. Related, but nevertheless different means of resolving one's own rigid constructs and valuing conditions characterize person-centered thought. We see a difference of emphasis along the following lines. In the Person-Centered Approach, rigid constructs tend to be allocated more in the affective, emotional aspects of our personalities. Thus, active listening by an empathic, respectful partner who listens to feelings *and* meanings is essential. This non-judgmental, non-directive listening and accompanying process helps the "speaker" to become more aware of one's own feelings that are accepted unconditionally. By not being threatened by them, the "speaker" gradually can admit more and more experiences to his or her awareness, thus becoming more aware of any hidden beliefs and, in other words, more open to all of their experience. The Person-Centered Approach emphasizes that the more the "speaker" experiences the listener's acceptance and empathic understanding, the more open to his or her full experience he or she will become, in other words, the better aware of one's mental models.

We observe that Senge more strongly explicates the abilities for interpersonal dialogue like exposing one's thought process and inquiring into the other person's perspective for managing mental models. Rogers, on the other hand, emphasizes the inner – combined feeling and meaning – conditions of an individual to grow in his or her ability to feel or access their experiencing as a precondition of gaining more insight into oneself. Furthermore, Rogers clearly describes the three core conditions under which a person can best more towards these "ends". As with personal mastery, Senge's characterization more closely adheres to the context of (dialogue in) organizations and reflection of action. Hence, we see it as more explicitly carrying personality features into work life in organizations. Nevertheless, the congenial lines of thought can be appreciated by the correspondences traced in Table 2 and by reading the following two quotes by Senge and Rogers, respectively: Senge (2006, p. 187) writes: "Practicing inquiry and advocacy means being willing to expose the limitations in your own thinking – the willingness to be wrong. Nothing less will make is safe for the others to do likewise." Rogers's tentative law in interpersonal relationship (1961) says: "The greater the congruence of experience, awareness and communication on the part of one individual, the more the ensuing relationship will involve a tendency toward reciprocal communication with a quality of increasing congruence; a tendency toward more mutually accurate

understanding of the communications; improved psychological adjustment and functioning in both parties; mutual satisfaction in the relationship."

Shared Vision. Senge describes key abilities that allow people to develop and hold their vision, spread it, and integrate their vision into something larger. Rogers, however, concentrates on tapping the interpersonal attitudes that allow a person to sense their inner purposes and to listen to those of others in a facilitative way. As a consequence, the other person will become more understanding of oneself and on this basis also more acceptant and understanding of others such that mutual respect and understanding is nurtured. To us, this appears to be an important interpersonal foundation for personal visions to be truly shared and developing incrementally towards increased common ground. A good example of this movement is the group process in person-centered encounter groups in which a strong feeling of community and mutual understanding tends to develop. Thus, Senge's and Rogers's approaches can be seen as complementing each other in characterizing attitudes and abilities, respectively, of developing a shared vision as well as a shared sense of community, as emphasized by Rogers and others in the context of encounter groups (compare, e.g. Barrett-Lennard, 1998, 2005, Lago and McMillan, 1999, Rogers, 1970). For further explicit correspondences between the discipline of developing a shared vision and the Person-Centered Approach see Table 3.

Team Learning. This discipline focuses of the ability to deal with current reality in relationship with others and the ability to engage in dialogue and discussion. Regarding the ability to deal with current reality, Senge's postulated commitment to learning, in particular learning in teams appears to be well matched by Rogers's construct of openness to experience and the proposition that the self is formed through interaction with others and the environment. Senge describes a team as a group of persons who need one another to act and who – in the best case - function as a whole: there is a commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and understanding of how to complement one another's efforts (Senge, 2006, p. 217 and 242). Senge's team learning might be compared with Rogers's development in encounter groups (i.e. communities). Such groups are known to move towards mutual understanding, shared purpose, and a sense of community in a way comparable but not identical to dialogue groups (Motschnig and Nykl, 2009).

Systems thinking. The necessity of viewing wholes rather than dissecting them into a collection of parts clearly was present in Rogers's thinking. When characterizing the actualizing tendency, Rogers wrote: "It should be noted that this basic actualizing tendency is the only motive which is postulated in this theoretical system and that it is the *organism as a whole* which exhibits this tendency." Thus, Rogers recognized the self-organizing principle underlying each living organism, and later, extended his view towards the formative tendency that he hypothesized to be at work in the universe. Furthermore, Rogers identified patterns of change that individuals go through in therapy and patterns of change that characterize the processes of encounter groups as well as that of individuals participating in encounter groups. Senge's perception of systems thinking, although related in nature, takes on a different manifestation, as it emphasizes the dynamics of organizations and their processes and patterns of change. This leads to complementary patterns and insights. In particular, organizations influence each other on the market, and thus are not as independent as Rogers' encounter groups that were viewed as existing more or less independently of each other. Hence, we consider Senge's archetypes and the knowledge thereof as particular expressions of systems

thinking in an organizational context – features unique to learning organizations and capturing (essential aspects of) their dynamics.

PERSONAL MASTERY		
Competence	**Characteristics of a person with learning organization competence (Senge, 2006)**	**Theory of a fully functioning person**
Ability to develop a personal vision	The person has a special sense of purpose that lies behind his/her visions and goals. He/She knows its ultimate intrinsic desires (p. 132, 137).	2. Hence all experiences will be available to awareness. 6 (a) The valuing process will be a continuing organismic one.
Ability to hold creative tension	The person sees current reality as an ally (p. 132).	1. He will be open to his experience. 7. He will have no conditions of worth. As a consequence: 8. He will meet each situation with behavior which is a unique and creative adaption to the newness of that moment.
Ability to cope with structural conflicts	The person has learned how to perceive and work with forces of change (p. 132).	8. He will meet each situation with behavior which is a unique and creative adaption to the newness of that moment. 5. His self-structure will be a fluid gestalt, changing flexibly in the process of assimilation of new experience.
Commitment to the truth	The person lives in a continual learning mode (p. 132). He/She continually broaden his/her awareness/understanding of the structures underlying current events (p. 148). The person is acutely aware of his/her ignorance, their incompetence, his/her growth area (p. 133).	1. He will be open to his experience. Actualizing tendency – "The organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain and expand the experiencing organism." 6 (a) The valuing process will be a continuing organismic one.
Commitment to the truth	The person is deeply inquisitive, committed to continually seeing reality more and more accurately (p. 132), and is committed to the truth.	9. He will find his organismic valuing a trustworthy guide to the most satisfying behaviors, because (a) all available experiential data will be available to awareness and used. (b) No datum of experience will be distorted in, or denied to, awareness. (c) The outcomes of behavior in experience will be available to awareness. (d) Hence any failure to achieve the maximum possible satisfaction, because of lack of data, will be corrected by this effective reality testing. 5. His self-structure will be a fluid gestalt, changing flexibly in the process of assimilation of new experience.
Ability to use the subconscious	The person knows what it is that is most important to him/her (p. 155). The person focuses on the desired intrinsic result and makes clear choices (p. 154)	Congruence, ability to cope with problems of life more adequately and more comfortably.
Integration of systems thinking	The person integrates reason and intuition, continually sees more of his/her connectedness to the world, has compassion and is committed to the whole (p. 156).	Fully functioning person, formative tendency, significant learning.
Commitment to the whole	The person feels connected to others and to life itself – yet the person sacrifices none of his/her uniqueness (p. 132).	10. He will live with others of in the maximum possible harmony, because of the rewarding character of reciprocal

		positive regard.

Table 1: Characteristics of a person with personal mastery compared with characteristics of a fully functioning person

MENTAL MODELS		
Competence	**Characteristics of a person with learning organization competence (Senge, 2006)**	**Person-Centered Approach**
Being aware of the distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use	The person uses the help of another person – a "ruthlessly compassionate" partner (p. 178)	Active listening, importance of significant other who facilitates personal development
Being aware of the distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use	The person notices his/her jumps from observation to generalization (p. 176) and questions and tests generalizations (recognizes "leaps of abstraction") (p. 180).	Congruence, extensional behavior ("to see experience in limited, differentiated terms, to be aware of the space-time anchorage of facts, to be dominated by facts, not by concepts, to evaluate in multiple ways, to be aware of different levels of abstraction, to test his inferences and abstractions against reality" (Rogers 1959, p. 206-207).
Being aware of the distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use	The person articulates what he/she normally does not say (exposes the "left-hand column") (p. 176).	More expressiveness, law of interpersonal relationships
Being aware of the distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use	The person makes his or her thinking explicit and subject to public examination (p. 183)	(Self) exposure and expressiveness of feelings and meanings; more self-expressive
Ability to advocate	The person encourages others to explore his/her view and to provide different views (p. 186).	Curiosity as a consequence of the actualizing tendency and openness
Ability to inquire	The person actively inquires into others' views that differ from his/her own (p. 186). If the person makes assumptions about others' views, person state his/her assumptions clearly (p. 186). The person states the "data" upon which his/her assumptions are based (p. 186). The person does not ask questions, if he/she is not genuinely interested in the others' response.	Congruence, (self) exploration, extensional behavior tendency, authenticity
Ability to balance inquiry and advocacy	The person is genuinely curious and willing to change his/her mental model of a situation (p. 187).	Maturity

Table 2: Characteristics of a person managing mental models compared with aspects of Person-Centered Approach

SHARED VISION		
Competence	**Characteristics of a person with learning organization competence (Senge, 2006)**	**Person-Centered Approach**
Being truly committed to a vision	The person is truly committed to the vision, because it reflects his/her own personal vision (p. 192).	Actualizing tendency, Formative tendency
Attitude towards a vision (commitment)	The person is courageous – he/she is simply doing whatever is needed in pursuit of the vision (p. 194).	Actualizing tendency

Being truly committed to a vision	The person is more likely to expose his/her way of thinking, gives up deeply held views, and recognizes personal and organisational shortcomings (p. 195). The person is open for risk taking and experimentation (p. 195).	Actualizing tendency and openness to experience, absence of threat
Ability to develop a personal vision	The person has a strong sense of personal direction and has developed his/her personal vision (p. 197).	Actualization tendency, becoming more similar to the person one would like to be (ideal self)
Ability to spread visions	The person is able to communicate his/her vision in such a way that others are encouraged to share their visions (leaders) (p. 198).	Authenticity, tentative law of interpersonal relationship
Ability to spread visions	The person feels free to express his/her dreams and listens to others' dreams (p. 202).	9. He will find his *organismic valuing* a trustworthy guide to the most satisfying behaviors. 10. He will live with others of in the maximum possible harmony, because of the rewarding character of reciprocal positive regard.
Attitude towards a vision (commitment)	The person feels fully responsible for making the vision happen (p. 203). The person brings an energy, passion and excitement that cannot be generated by someone who is only compliant (p. 205).	Actualization tendency, maturity, feeling part of larger whole, formative tendency
Ability to awake enrolment and commitment	The person is enrolled his-/herself (p. 207). The person is honest (p. 207). The person lets the other person choose (p. 207).	Authenticity, genuineness, non-directive attitude
Commitment to the truth	The person can "hold" his/her vision while remaining committed to seeing current reality clearly (p. 209).	Openness to experience, emphatic understanding of the whole situation
Ability to integrate shared vision and systems thinking	The person approaches visioning as a joint inquiry (p. 213).	Non-directive attitude, formative tendency, feeling connected and part of a large whole

Table 3: Characteristics of a person committed to a shared vision compared with the Person-Centered Approach

Summarizing, we observe that the Person-Centered Approach holds a vision of a person and his or her relationships to others that is absolutely consistent with the kind of person to populate and promote a learning organization. The five disciplines, however, focus on the abilities persons need to have or to develop to turn an organization to a learning organization. Consequently, we believe that the two theories or mindsets smoothly complement each other in that the Person-Centered Approach can serve as the interpersonal basis on top of which the "application" in a learning organization could take place. To illustrate this idea more clearly, Table 4 summarizes the main issues.

The Five Disciplines	The Person Centred Approach
View persons in the particular context of organizations.	Views persons in their process of becoming.
Focus on persons' *abilities*, while clearly acknowledging both the attitudes underlying the abilities and the knowledge required for making sense of actions and their dynamics.	Focuses in interpersonal *attitudes* of congruence, acceptance and empathic understanding in any situation.
Focus on a person's abilities to know his or her purpose or vision and the abilities to share and align these with others is a team or community.	Focus in interpersonal attitudes that facilitate personal growth, improved interpersonal relationships and better reciprocal communication (of feelings as well as meanings).
Call for abilities to engage in dialogue and discussion and abilities to switch between them.	Calls for attitudes and abilities of active listening and being a facilitative person to oneself and to others in a group or community.

Values reflection in and on action and feedback.	Values self-experience, self-exploration and exact experiencing in awareness in any situation as a basis for reflection and expression.
Dialogue-groups are purpose-driven.	Person-centered (encounter) groups tend to aim for personal development at least as much as aiming for problem solving.
Emphasize personal vision and shared vision.	Emphasizes congruence, acceptance and empathic understanding in interpersonal relationships.
Emphasize systems thinking.	Emphasize self-organization in the form of actualizing and formative tendency. Emphasize developmental processes in persons, relationships and communities.

Table 4: Main issues of the learning organization compared with the Person-Centered Approach

There seems to be seamless transition between openness and empathic understanding in the postulate to fully perceive current reality, which can be seen as including the reality in a person as well as in others and the environment. Expressed in other terms, empathic understanding takes into account the whole situation and allows a person to perceive his-/herself as part of and connected to the other and the environment.

5 Conclusion

Starting from a felt sense that the Person-Centered Approach and the five disciplines of a learning organization are related in many ways, in this paper we systematically aligned features of the five disciplines with those of the Person-Centered Approach. While we traced a congenial devotion to generative or significant, experiential learning as a kind of basic motor, intrinsic orientation, or source of wisdom in both fields, we also observed important differences in focus as well as scope. In a nutshell, the five disciplines are more explicit as to the specific abilities of persons in the context of an organization. They describe which abilities are required and they explain the knowledge needed, for example, for systems thinking. However, they expose only very little on how these abilities can be developed. The Person-Centered Approach, on the other hand, emphasizes persons' attitudes such as congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding and the prerequisites for developing them in relationship with other persons. Furthermore, it provides its underlying psychological theory and self-organization view, and to some degree, systems view via the actualizing tendency, the formative tendency. It exposes the explicit attention to interaction and reciprocity in communication and positive regard as the social dimension. These aspects have been taken up and carried further in several works of researchers such as Barrett-Lennard (e.g. 1998, 2003, 2005), Behr and Cornelius-White (2008), Cornelius-White (2006), Gordon (1995), Kriz (2008), Ryback (1998), and one of the author's work on constructive communication (Motschnig and Nykl, 2009), to name just a few.

Interestingly, development in the Person-Centered Approach and the learning organization has little to do with receptive learning that can be taught. On the contrary, their "motor" is generative, significant learning that integrates reason, intuition, feelings and meanings. This poses a challenging question in how far, say, academic education provides any preparation for the five disciplines. A follow up question is how educational strategies should change if they had the goal of "setting" students into a continuous learning mode in the spirit of the learning organization.

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