

## Organizational Learning Styles: Single Loop Learning

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After we talked in the previous article about the topic of organizational learning levels, we will continue talking in the following two articles about organizational learning patterns/styles (single-loop and double-loop), and we will start talking in this article about the single-loop organizational learning style/models.

Researchers have differed in their opinions regarding organizational learning models, but this did not prevent them from agreeing on the existence of two basic patterns (models/styles/types) of organizational learning. Researchers indicate that the organizational learning pattern is the critical distinguishing characteristic between organizations. There are many names that indicate organizational learning patterns. Argyris and Schon referred to single-loop learning and double-loop learning. These two types were then referred to as maintenance learning and innovative learning, then lower-level learning and higher-level learning, then operational learning and conceptual learning. Then the names adaptive learning and generative learning appeared at the hands of Peter Senge [2].

In the first part of this article, we will learn about single-loop learning, and in the second part of the article, we will talk about double-loop learning.

### Single Loop Learning

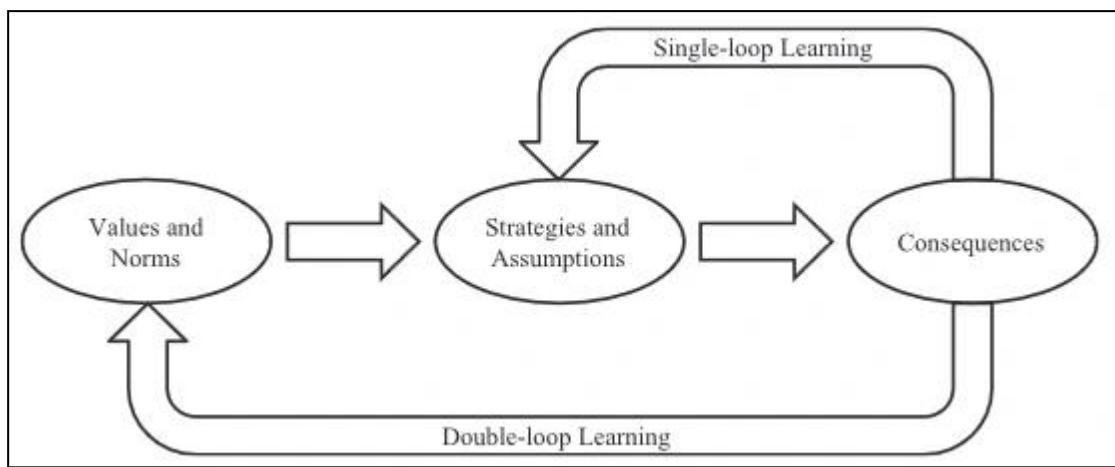
One of the difficulties in organizations is that human nature may be hardwired to accept an atmosphere of deception. For example, A may not tell B that he or she is going to act in a harmful way toward him, C may not tell D that he or she is going to give him distorted information, and E may not tell F that she is just being nice to him. Yet all of the above people know that they and others are behaving in these ways, and that it is acceptable behavior for them to act as if they had no knowledge of such

negative activities (which may be acceptable and comfortable for some within the single-loop model). Such experiences help us understand why it is so difficult for people who are used to the single-loop model to make any change [3].

Here Argyris referred to what he called “human games”; One well-known way to reduce the tension resulting from conflicting aims or orientations is to believe that concealing errors, deception, and games are normal in the organization. The moment people reach this state, they may lose their ability to even see the errors. This is one reason why some employees are upset and surprised when they are accused of acting indifferently by parties (often from outside the group or organization) who have discovered the long practice of concealing errors. What happens is that people provide each other with incomplete and distorted information, and each of them knows this, and each of them knows that the others know this, and each of them knows that this game is usually not up for discussion. Therefore, these games are played by individuals in order not to upset each other. Over time, these games can become complex and spread quickly throughout the organization, making them a major factor in hindering organizational learning. For example, when research and development employees cannot meet their assigned timetables, they try to convince senior management that they have at least made progress in the work. There is also the game of evading failure and pinning it on others. There is also the game of Starting a crisis to get attention, then trying to get more resources and so on [4].

Therefore, the single-loop pattern is active learning that changes business strategies or the assumptions on which the strategies are based without changing the values behind the assumptions or strategies (Figure 1) [5]. An example is the identification and subsequent correction of a production defect. Engineers modify the respective product specification to avoid the defect in the future (i.e., the result of a single feedback loop). Single-loop learning compares existing problems and organizational values and norms to develop an adequate solution [6]. In this pattern, individuals behave with a high degree of individuality of opinion and a high degree of trying to dominate others in order to win; as any inquiry made by the individual is viewed as weakness, and militant minorities often appear that follow a win-lose tactic [7]. Accordingly, the researchers indicated that there will be no changes or improvements to the processes; rather, over time, this pattern may negatively affect the employees’ learning process because the activities are routine and repetitive and without any creativity or innovation [8].

In other words, this type of learning leads to the development of some initial associations between behavior and results, but they are usually short-term and affect only a specific part of the organization's activity. This learning results from repetition and routine and focuses on the immediate impact on a specific activity or a specific part of the organization. Here, we note the need to avoid confusing this type with the low organizational level (lower management); all levels of the organization participate in this learning, and to a greater extent the lower and middle management levels [9].



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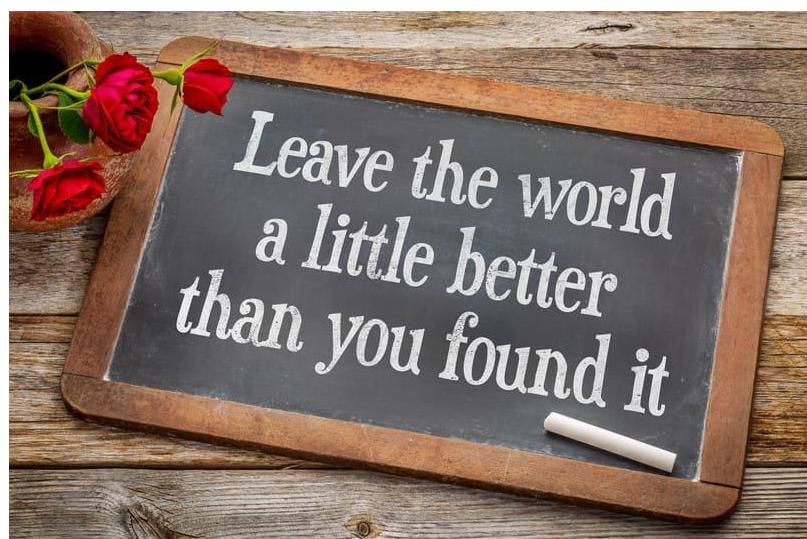
Argyris and Schon, 1996

## References

The primary source of the article is: Al-Farhan, Mohannad. (2022). The role of continuous improvement technique on organizational learning process: An applied study on the electrical appliances manufacturing sector. Master's thesis, Faculty of Commerce - Menoufia University. / The thesis can be obtained by [clicking here](#).

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