Double Loop Learning

After we talked in the previous article about single-loop learning, we will continue talking in this article about double-loop learning.

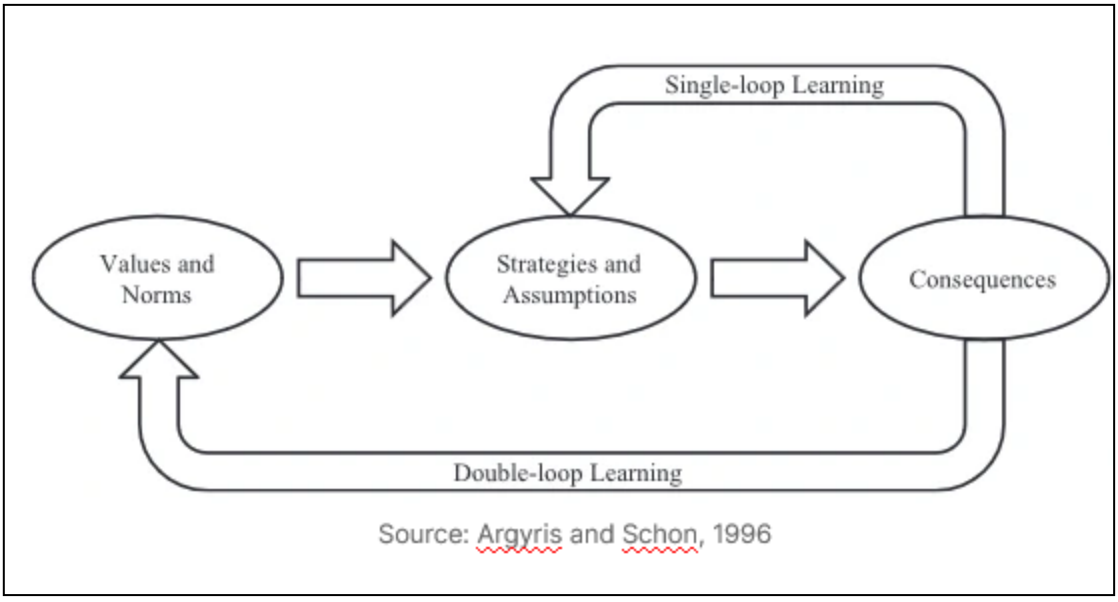
Organizational Learning Styles/Models

To complicate matters, when employees adhere to a norm that says “hide errors” they know they are violating another norm that says “reveal errors” Whichever norm they choose, they risk getting into trouble. If they hide the error, they can be punished by the top if the error is discovered. If they reveal the error, they run the risk of exposing a whole network of camouflage and deception. The employees are thus in a double bind, because whatever they do is necessary yet counterproductive to the organization, and their actions may even be personally abhorrent [1]. This brings us to the topic of organizational learning styles/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].

Double Loop Learning

Scholars seem to agree that learning related to sustainability requires a double-loop learning mode in order for organizational values and norms to adjust to new challenges [3]. Double-loop learning occurs in an organization when the process of discovering errors leads to the development and updating of organizational foundations, structures, policies, values, and goals [4]. research tends to suggest that change based on the double-loop model would require a shift in the behavior of individuals and in group, inter-group, and organizational processes [5], If defect correction requires adaptations of organizational values and norms, then double-loop learning is required. The double loop refers to two feed-back loops that connect observed effects with strategies and values served by those strategies. Potentially divergent organizational performance requirements could cause conflicts among individuals in the organization. Such conflicts could be solved by developing new performance strategies,examining trade-offs between divergent perspectives, or in the case of in commensurable requirements, analyzing the individual beliefs underlying these perspectives [6]. A feedback loop exists “which connects the detection of error not only to strategies and assumptions of effective performance but[also] to the values and norms that define effective performance” [7] as it showed in the following figure:



Source: Argyris and Schon, 1996

In the double-loop model, any action is evaluated according to the degree to which it helps individuals generate useful and valid information. This model also includes sharing power with anyone who has competence, and anyone who is involved in deciding or executing the activity, defining the task, or having an impact on the

environment. Here, the “face saving” approach, which is the process of covering up mistakes, is resisted; this approach is seen as a defensive activity that hinders learning. Here, any attempt to save face must be decided in agreement with all individuals involved in the activity, except for those who violate such shared and explicit solutions. Here, too, individuals will not tend to compete to make decisions on behalf of others or to exclude others to satisfy their own desires (selfishness); rather, they will try to find the most skilled individuals to make a particular decision, in addition to building valid decision-making networks in which the ultimate goal is to maximize the contribution of all individuals so that the greatest possible perspectives are taken into account in analyzing any process; here, any inquiry made by an individual is seen as a power [8]. In this type of learning, the organization's leadership, in cooperation with the organization's members, often follows a win-win tactic.

Here it can be said that it's not easy to create organizations capable of double loop learning, because the best way to generate double loop learning is for the top to do it [9]. The results of double-loop learning include reduced defensiveness among individuals, among themselves, and across groups, increased free-riding behaviors, increased sense of commitment, increased effectiveness in decision-making and policy-making, and increased frank discussion of flaws and problems [10]. It also results in reducing organizational games, reducing costs, and increasing the effectiveness of implementing procedures [11].

Double-loop learning aims to modify all rules and habits, leading to the emergence of associations that affect the entire organization in the long term. This learning involves more cognitive processes compared to low-level learning (single-loop), which is often the result of repetitive behavior [12]. It appears from the above that double-loop learning (high level) is better than single-loop learning (low level), but this does not mean that the organization should rely on only one of them; as researchers point out that in practice, the organization needs both types [13].

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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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