

## **Double Loop Learning (C. Argyris)**

### **Overview:**

Argyris (1976) proposes double loop learning theory which pertains to learning to change underlying values and assumptions. The focus of the theory is on solving problems that are complex and ill-structured and which change as problem-solving advances.

Double loop theory is based upon a "theory of action" perspective outlined by Argyris & Schon (1974). This perspective examines reality from the point of view of human beings as actors. Changes in values, behavior, leadership, and helping others, are all part of, and informed by, the actors' theory of action. An important aspect of the theory is the distinction between an individual's espoused theory and their "theory-in-use" (what they actually do); bringing these two into congruence is a primary concern of double loop learning. Typically, interaction with others is necessary to identify the conflict.

There are four basic steps in the action theory learning process: (1) discovery of espoused and theory-in-use, (2) invention of new meanings, (3) production of new actions, and (4) generalization of results. Double loop learning involves applying each of these steps to itself. In double loop learning, assumptions underlying current views are questioned and hypotheses about behavior tested publically. The end result of double loop learning should be increased effectiveness in decision-making and better acceptance of failures and mistakes.

In recent years, Argyris has focused on a methodology for implementing action theory on a broad scale called "action science" (see Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985) and the role of learning at the organizational level (e.g., Argyris, 1993; Schon & Argyris, 1996).

### **Scope/Application:**

Double loop learning is a theory of personal change that is oriented towards professional education, especially leadership in organizations. It has been applied in the context of [management development](#).

### **Example:**

Here are two examples from Argyris (1976, p16). A teacher who believes that she has a class of "stupid" students will communicate expectations such that the children behave stupidly. She confirms her theory by asking them questions and eliciting stupid answers or puts them in situations where they behave stupidly. The theory-in-use is self-fulfilling. Similarly, a manager who believes his subordinates are passive, dependent and require authoritarian guidance rewards dependent and submissive behavior. He tests his theory by posing challenges for employees and

eliciting dependent outcomes. In order to break this congruency, the teacher or manager would need to engage in open loop learning in which they deliberately disconfirm their theory-in-use.

**Principles:**

1. Effective problem-solving about interpersonal or technical issues requires frequent public testing of theories-in-use.
2. Double loop learning requires learning situations in which participants can examine and experiment with their theories of action.

**Related web sites:**

While not directly about Argyris or his theory, there are many web sites that focus on management development and organization learning which are related to his work. Relevant resources are the [Society for Organizational Learning](#) or the web pages of [Yogesh Malhotra](#).

**References:**

- Argyris, C. (1976). *Increasing Leadership Effectiveness*. New York: Wiley.
- Argyris, C. (1993). *On Organizational Learning*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1974). *Theory in Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Argyris, C. (1982). *Reasoning, Learning and Action. Individual and Organizational*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Argyris, C. (1993). *Knowledge for Action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Argyris, C., Putnam, R. & Smith, D. (1985). *Action Science*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- A bibliography of Argyris' work can be found at <http://www.actionscience.com/argbib.htm>

ที่มา : <http://www.suphet.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=412505&Ntype=2>