

Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VIII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

9. Create an action research plan for transforming a dysfunctional organization into a learning organization.

Reading Assignment

In order to access the resource below, you must first log into the myWaldorf Student Portal and access the Business Source Complete database within the Waldorf Online Library.

Edmondson, A. C., & Smith, D. M. (2008, Fall). Too hot to handle? How to manage relationship conflict. *Rotman Magazine*, 26-31.

Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., & D'Amelio, A. (2008). Resistance to change: The rest of the story. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(2), 362-377.

Garvin, D. A., Edmondson, A. C., & Gino, F. (2008). Is yours a learning organization? *Harvard Business Review*, 86(3), 109-116.

Kimball, L. (2013). Changing the organization one conversation at a time. *OD Practitioner*, 45(2), 31-36.

Marshak, R. J., & Grant, D. (2011). Creating change by changing the conversation. *OD Practitioner*, 43(3), 2-7.

Wittig, C. (2012). Employees' reactions to organizational change. *OD Practitioner*, 44(2), 23-28.

[Click here](#) to download the Socio-Cognitive Systems Learning Model.

Unit Lesson

Welcome

Welcome to Unit VIII, the final unit of this course! For this unit, you will want to pull out the socio-cognitive systems learning model. If you need another copy, a link is provided in this unit's readings section. Let's get started!

Transformative Change

In this unit, we will discuss one of the most important topics of this course (and one of the most important topics of the Organizational Leadership program): the process of transformative change. Transformative change involves a transition from Model I to Model II patterns. This is powerful learning for you, as a leader, for two reasons.

First, this learning is essential for you to transform your own thought-behavior patterns to Model II. Through your *own* transformative change, you will optimize your "use of self" as an instrument for change (Jamieson, Auron, & Shechtman, 2010). That is, you will develop yourself in order to experience productive learning and change in your own personal and professional life. This is an essential skill for a leader.

Second, by applying the use of self, you will be equipped to lead others toward productive learning and change. This is also an essential leadership skill, particularly as you help lead people to productively address

conflict (Jamieson, Auron, & Shechtman, 2010). Ultimately, you will also be able to help people undergo their own transformative change from Model I to Model II (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; Mezirow, 2003).

Lifestyle change: The change from Model I to Model II patterns of values, behaviors, and outcomes is transformative because it signifies a change in an individual's mental model or thought-behavior patterns. This is not a one-time event. Instead, it is a lifestyle change (Friesenborg, 2015). Think of shifting from Model I to Model II like the analogy of transitioning from a poor lifestyle of unhealthy eating and lack of exercise to a new lifestyle that includes a nutritious diet and regular exercise. Model I is like a lifestyle of junk food and no exercise. Both appeal to real Model I values that revolve around unhealthy, self-centered desires and goals. In contrast, Model II is like a lifestyle of nutritious eating and regular exercise. Both are grounded in Model II values that involve understanding one's true self, which includes foregoing immediate gratification and caring for the body as the vessel for human life.

The change from Model I to Model II is also a lifestyle change because it is an ongoing cycle that requires continual focus on the new values that triggered the change: Model II values. Adopting the pattern of Model II values, behaviors, and outcomes requires continual commitment and persistence to maintain the Model II lifestyle. The beauty of Model II is that it includes a built-in mechanism for continued commitment and maintenance of this lifestyle. This mechanism is the process of double-loop learning. As we discussed in the last unit, each loop of the double-loop learning process serves as a checkpoint. With the first loop, behaviors are compared to the individual's Model II values to check for alignment. Similarly, with the second loop, the outcomes of the interaction are compared to the Model II values to ensure that they align (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

The Model II process, with its integration of double-loop learning, serves as a form of action research (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). Let's explore what this means. In this unit, we will focus on how to guide an organization with dysfunctional Model I patterns toward transformation. That transformation occurs as we help organizations recognize the dysfunctions within their culture and replace those dysfunctions with a healthy Model II culture. Take a look at the socio-cognitive systems learning model. Within the Model II process, do you see how the arrows show the relationship between values, behaviors, and outcomes within the Model II system? Specifically, do you see the arrow that circles back from the behaviors to the values, as well as the arrow that circles back from the outcomes to the values? These two loops lead to the name double-loop learning. These two loops serve as checkpoints for reflection, specifically asking these questions: (a) *Did my behaviors reflect my Model II values?* (b) *Did the outcomes of this interaction reflect my Model II values?* If the answer to either of those questions is *no*, this is an early warning sign that our behaviors and the outcomes of our social interaction have veered off-course from Model II and have reverted to the dysfunctional patterns of Model I. That realization is important, as it prompts us to make changes. On an organizational level, it prompts us to help the organization, which may require an intervention in order to change.

As we help guide organizations in this transformation, we focus on the double-loop learning process of the Model II system. The double-loop learning process shows not only the steps within Model II, but it also shows Model II in action. Double-loop learning shows how the Model II system works, by following the arrows within the diagram.

So, what is so special about double-loop learning? Why does it work? Double-loop learning is one form of action research. It involves making a commitment to Model II values, implementing those values through our behaviors, and evaluating the outcomes of those behaviors. Along the way, there are also two checkpoints circling back from the behaviors and outcomes to be sure that they reflect the Model II values.

In this unit, we will focus on how to help lead an organization from Model I to Model II. This change transforms the organization culture. To lead that transformative change, you will help the organization implement a culture that uses double-loop learning. This is a form of action research. Let's learn more about what action research is.

Action Research

Action research is a hands-on, practical type of research that may be used to set, work toward, and evaluate goals. It may be used for either personal or professional goals. Action research includes some variation of the following elements, as described by McNiff and Whitehead (2000):

1. “We review our current practice,
2. Identify an aspect we want to improve,
3. Imagine a way forward,
4. Try it out, and
5. Take stock of what happens” (p. 204).

Through action research, the leader seeks to answer the central question, “How do I improve my work?” (Whitehead, 1989, as cited by McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 202). While traditional scholarly research may be conducted by people other than the leader, action research is conducted both *by* the leader and *for* the leader and his or her team or organization.

The ultimate purpose of action research is for the leader to create a guide for action to improve his or her own work or the work of the team or organization. Using action research, a plan is created to outline the goals for development or improvement. This plan document is an artifact that serves as a living document. It is intended to be modified over time, as needed. These modifications will be made throughout the action research’s ongoing cycle of identifying needs, planning to take action, taking action, evaluating the outcomes, and adapting plans for future action based on what happened this time. Through this cycle of action research, the leader can decide whether to continue the same behavioral patterns based on whether the same outcomes are desired and whether the goals were met. If the goals were not met and different outcomes were desired, the leader will plan a new course of action as a means to achieve different outcomes (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000; Mezirow, 2003; Palmer, 2004, 2011).

Let’s take a look at the Model II system of values, behaviors, and outcomes as a form of action research. Do you notice, in the table below, how the Model II elements correspond with McNiff and Whitehead’s (2000) action research steps? Both Model II and action research are cyclical processes, and the elements of each cycle directly overlap (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000).

How Model II Uses the Action Research Cycle

Model II Process ¹	Action Research Step ²	Key Question ^{1,2}
Model II values	Identify an aspect we want to improve.	What do I want to improve, in order to better understand my true self and other people?
Model II behaviors	Imagine a way forward.	Which behaviors will help me to better understand myself and other people?
Double-loop learning: First loop	Try it out.	Did I improve? Did my behaviors help me to better understand my true self and other people?
Model II outcomes	Take stock of what happens.	What were the outcomes of our interaction?
Double-loop learning: Second loop	Review our current practice.	Did the outcomes of our interaction align with my values to better understand my true self and other people?

¹ (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015)

² (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 204)

Creating an Intervention Plan for Transformative Change

People who are currently entrenched in the dysfunctional Model I patterns of values, behaviors, and outcomes would benefit by changing from Model I to Model II patterns. This is referred to as transformative change (Friesenborg, 2015; Mezirow, 2003).

Both the Model I and Model II systems are cyclical processes. While Model I is a vicious cycle of dysfunction, Model II is a cycle of productive learning and change, wholeness, and relational health. Both Model I and Model II are complex systems. Without Model II's integration of double-loop learning, it would be easy to regress from Model II to Model I, because Model I values (or "traps") have a tendency to creep in. In contrast, significant conscientious work is needed to change from Model I patterns to Model II patterns (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015). An intervention may be needed to trigger such a significant lifestyle change: a transformative change (Friesenborg, 2015; Mezirow, 2003; Palmer, 2004, 2011).

If you observe that Model I patterns are creeping into your own interactions with others, an intervention may be helpful for you to get back on course with the Model II system. Also, as a leader, you will likely encounter people who need your help to navigate and overcome conflict. For people in conflict—either on an individual, team, or organizational level—an intervention may help (Friesenborg, 2015).

Goals for the intervention: An intervention plan should have clear goals, detailing the goals of the transformative change from Model I to Model II. The goals are established, with your help, by the individuals in conflict. The goals should reflect the change you are expecting: the transition from old Model I patterns to new patterns of Model II values, behaviors, and outcomes. The goals should be specific and as measurable as possible. Also, discuss how the individuals will benefit from your intervention approach.

The problem—The reason for intervention: In the intervention plan, explain the problem. What prompted the intervention? For example, if it was a conflict situation, describe the situation. What happened leading up to this conflict situation? What happened as the conflict occurred? Describe, in detail, the words that were exchanged, the nonverbal communication, and any other actions related to this conflict.

Analyze the behaviors that were demonstrated in the conflict scenario and the outcomes to which those behaviors led. Also, discuss the clues you observed that might indicate the values and deep, underlying assumptions of the people involved. Analyze how these values and deep assumptions may be related to the behaviors you observed. Use the socio-cognitive systems learning model to guide your analysis. Problem scenarios likely point to Model I patterns of values, behaviors, and outcomes (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Action research as intervention: The cyclical Model II process serves as a form of action research, as shown in the table above. The bulk of the intervention plan should be devoted to the action research process of intervention, using the framework described below. In this section of the intervention plan, you will outline the steps for transformative change to Model II; they correspond with the action research steps, as described below. Each of these steps should be detailed in the intervention plan.

Changing from Model I to Model II values: Model II values align with the action research step to "identify an aspect we want to improve" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 204). An overarching question for this step of the action research process is, *What do I want to improve, in order to better understand my true self and other people?*

First, this involves analyzing one's current (Model I) behaviors and outcomes and comparing them to the values that the individual espouses. As the leader, you can help in this intervention by guiding the individual to see the divide between his espoused values and his behaviors and outcomes. You can help guide him in uncovering his real, underlying values.

Second, through the intervention, you can introduce the individual to the alternative Model II values, as depicted in the socio-cognitive systems learning model. The intervention plan should outline how you will help lead the individuals to test their deep, underlying assumptions.

Again, the key question is, *What do I want to improve, in order to better understand my true self and other people?* To guide this intervention, you should develop probing questions that target this key question. One important theme for probing questions is helping the individual to realize the contradiction between his

espoused values and his behaviors and outcomes, as well as to uncover his real values. Another important theme for probing questions is helping the individual to discern if he is interested in transformative change toward Model II. In the intervention plan, you would brainstorm probing questions that would seek to address the key questions.

The purpose for developing probing questions is to target the overarching, key question in different ways, so you can truly understand the situation and help the individuals to work toward productive learning and change. The probing questions may also be customized to include details that are specific to the situation.

Changing from Model I to Model II behaviors: Model II behaviors align with the action research step to “imagine a way forward” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 204). A key question for this step of the action research process is, *Which behaviors will help me to better understand myself and other people?* As you create this step of the intervention plan, brainstorm probing questions that are aimed at addressing this key question. Use the Model II behaviors component of the socio-cognitive systems learning model to guide the behaviors you will target as you brainstorm probing questions for the intervention plan.

Again, the purpose for developing probing questions is to target the overarching, key question in different ways, so you can truly understand the situation and help the individuals to work toward productive learning and change. The probing questions may also be customized to include details that are specific to the situation.

Double-loop learning, first loop: Model II’s first loop in the double-loop learning process aligns with the action research step to “try it out” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 204). A key line of questioning for this step of the action research process is, *Did I improve? Did my behaviors help me to better understand my true self and other people? Essentially, did the behaviors align with and support the Model II values?* As you create this step of the intervention plan, brainstorm probing questions that are aimed at addressing this key question. In the intervention plan, refer to the socio-cognitive systems learning model to explain role of the first loop in the process of double-loop learning.

Changing from Model I to Model II outcomes: Model II outcomes align with the action research step to “take stock of what happens” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 204). A key question for this step of the action research process is, *What were the outcomes of the interaction?* As you create this step of the intervention plan, brainstorm probing questions that are aimed at addressing this key question. Use the Model II outcomes component of the socio-cognitive systems learning model as a guide as you brainstorm probing questions for the intervention plan.

Double-loop learning, second loop: Model II’s second loop in the double-loop learning process aligns with the action research step to “review our current practice” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p. 204). A key line of questioning for this step of the action research process is, *Did the outcomes of our interaction align with my values, to better understand my true self and other people?* Essentially, did the outcomes of the interaction align with and support the Model II values? As you create this step of the intervention plan, brainstorm probing questions that are aimed at addressing this key question. In the intervention plan, refer to the socio-cognitive systems learning model to explain role of the second loop in the process of double-loop learning.

Conclusion section of the intervention plan: The intervention plan should summarize the purpose for transformative learning—specifically for this intervention. Also, summarize the process and benefits of your intervention plan.

Conclusion

Action research is used as the basis of interventions for organization change. For organization change involving human dynamics and relationships, Argyris’ (2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996) process of double-loop learning is arguably the most relevant form of action research for changing organization culture and creating the culture of a learning organization. As an organization development consultant, Argyris partnered with company presidents and CEOs to help guide their organizations toward culture change. Argyris designed the double-loop learning process as a form of action research.

Similarly, Edmondson (2012) described how action research is used in leading organization change, providing several examples. As one example, Simmons Bedding Company wanted the company to remain ahead of the competition in order to remain relevant for the future. The problem was that “financial performance was

anemic, morale was poor, and product and service quality were uninspiring” (p. 259). A new CEO was hired to turn Simmons around, to lift the company out of its slump. The new CEO knew that he needed to change the organization culture in order to improve employee morale, enhance product and service quality, and, ultimately, increase the company’s bottom line. He described his vision to Simmons employees: “I want us, together, to create the kind of company where all of us want to get up and come to work in the morning...And the kind of company that others want to do business with” (p. 259). The new CEO focused on organization learning as a function of changing the dynamics of human relationships within teams in the organization. He used action research, focusing on a process of planning, implementation, and evaluation in order to change the organization’s values, behaviors, and outcomes.

In this unit’s assignment and discussion board, you will have the opportunity to apply this transformative change from Model I to Model II patterns of values, behaviors, and outcomes.

Hopefully you have found this course to be a life-changing experience. Continue to develop “the use of self” as an instrument of change as you seek to apply transformative change from Model I to Model II in both your personal and professional relationships. Ultimately, these skills will be instrumental as you lead the development of the culture of learning organizations, as well as learning cultures within other groups.

References

- Argyris, C. (2000). *Flawed advice and the management trap*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Argyris, C. (2004). *Reasons and rationalizations: The limits to organizational knowledge*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Argyris, C. (2010). *Organizational traps: Leadership, culture, organizational design*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Friesenborg, L. (2015). *The culture of learning organizations: Understanding Argyris’ theory through a socio-cognitive systems learning model*. Forest City, IA: Brennan-Mitchell.
- Jamieson, D. W., Auron, M., & Shechtman, D. (2010). Managing use of self for masterful professional practice. *OD Practitioner*, 42(3), 4-11.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2000). *Action research in organisations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58-63.
- Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. J. (2011). *Healing the heart of democracy: The courage to create a politics worthy of the human spirit*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Suggested Reading

- Schein, E. H. (2010). The learning culture and the learning leader. In *Organizational culture and leadership* (4th ed.) (pp.365-384). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Friesenborg, L. (2015). *The culture of learning organizations: Understanding Argyris’ theory through a socio-cognitive systems learning model*. Forest City, IA: Brennan-Mitchell.

In order to access the resources below, you must first log into the myWaldorf Student Portal and access the Business Source Complete database within the Waldorf Online Library.

Franz, T. M., & Mastrangelo, P. M. (2014). Using a peer-nominated team to drive change and improve trust: A case study. *OD Practitioner*, 46(2), 33-39.

Katz, J. H., & Miller, F. A. (2012). How human dynamics create winners and losers: Using inclusion as a HOW for mergers and acquisitions. *OD Practitioner*, 44(3), 63-67.

The following e-book is available through the Waldorf Online Library:

Pearson, C. (2012). *The transforming leader: New approaches to leadership for the Twenty-First Century*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.