

Course Learning Outcomes for Unit V

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

6. Diagnose an organization that uses dysfunctional thought-behavior patterns within its group dynamics.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 14:

How Leaders Embed and Transmit Culture

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.

Ciby, M., Raya, R. P. (2014). Exploring victims' experiences of workplace bullying: A grounded theory approach. *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers*, 39(2), 69-81.

Kish-Gephart, J., Detert, J., Treviño, L. K., & Edmondson, A. (2011). Silenced by Fear. *Rotman Management*, 28-33.

Seddon, J. (2005). Freedom from command and control. *Management Services*, 49(2), 22-24.

In order to access the resource below, you must first log into the myWaldorf Student Portal and access the Films on Demand database within the Waldorf Online Library.

- Choose ONE of the videos from the list provided in the discussion board section of this unit. In your discussion board post, you will apply the video you choose.

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

Unit Lesson

Welcome

Welcome to Unit V! In the last unit, we discussed the values of a typical organization as well as the American macroculture. We discussed how the values people espouse—or claim to have—are values reflecting the culture's ideals. Their real values—the values that are reflected by their behaviors—though, focus on self-oriented desires and goals. Essentially, while people espouse idealistic values, beneath the surface, their values are primarily focused on the self.

In this unit, we will compare and contrast two cultural systems: Model I and Model II. To continue our discussion from the last unit, we will discuss the full thought-behavior system of Model I: the American microculture along with typical organizations that are nested within the American macroculture. Beyond this unit, we will focus on Model II: the culture of learning organizations. Both Model I and Model II consist of a cycle of values, behaviors, and outcomes (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015). Before we dive further into this discussion, you may wish to pull out the handout from the last unit: the socio-cognitive systems learning model. If you would like another copy, feel free to print one from the link provided in this unit's list of readings.

Model I Behaviors: Typical Behaviors in the American Culture

While the American macroculture, as well as typical organizations, may espouse cultural ideals, their behaviors reflect more self-centered values. Let's talk about those behaviors (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; Schein, 2010). Chances are, through the unit lesson and assignments, you will begin to recognize examples of this Model I system in your own life.

Model I behaviors are centered on vying for control, protecting oneself through defensiveness, and protecting deep, underlying assumptions from being discussed (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015). Let's take a look at each of these three areas.

Unilateral control: How many examples of power struggles can you think of in the American culture? Turn on the evening news, and describe the news stories that are featured. Chances are, the newscast will focus on power struggles between nations or between politicians in our nation's capital. The newscast may also report controversy about a corporation, a leader, a celebrity, or even citizens who had been relatively unknown until this point. Examples of the Model I system are all around us (Friesenborg, 2015).

Seeking unilateral control is a major characteristic of the Model I system. *Unilateral* control means that the control is one-sided. For me to win control, others must lose it. To gain unilateral control, people seek to gain recognition or influence (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015). People also seek unilateral control by strategies to build social capital. *Social capital* means that you have influence because you are affiliated with other people who have power and influence through, for example, wealth or popularity (Bandura, 2002; Friesenborg, 2015). Beyond social capital, people may also seek unilateral control by threatening or punishing people, using either aggressive or passive-aggressive tactics (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

To understand these strategies for gaining unilateral control, let's use an exaggerated example. Think of a cutthroat reality TV show in which people compete for a large cash prize, and each week, someone is sent packing. While the Model I system is just as much a part of the typical American culture, we will focus on the example of the reality show because the behaviors are more obvious on the TV show (Friesenborg, 2015). In contrast, in the real world, people will often approach these Model I behaviors with a more subtle—less obvious—approach.

In the cutthroat reality TV show, what are some examples of how people compete for recognition or influence? How do individuals try to build social capital in order to gain more power? What are some examples of the ways that individuals on these cutthroat reality TV shows try to threaten or punish other people using aggression or a passive-aggressive approach?

We will come back to this example of the cutthroat reality TV show later in our discussion. First, let's discuss another hallmark of the Model I cultural system: defensive behaviors. In a Model I culture, as individuals seek unilateral control, some will win and others will lose. As individuals strive to win—and avoid losing—in this power struggle, they use defensive behaviors. These defensive behaviors are designed to protect oneself from others' aggressive or passive-aggressive behaviors that threaten or punish. Beyond protecting oneself, these defensive behaviors are also designed to protect one's espoused values, such as religious faith, or political ideals (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Defensiveness: Blame is a key defensive behavior. When a problem occurs in your organization, are people quick to pin blame on others? This is a key indicator that the organization exhibits dysfunctional Model I patterns (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Fancy footwork is another defensive behavior. Fancy footwork includes tactics to prove that you are not accountable for a problem (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015). Basically, fancy footwork is based on an underlying motive to prove that "it's not my fault." Sometimes it takes the form of telling white lies in order to deflect truths that reflect poorly on oneself. Fancy footwork is often accompanied by trying to deflect the accountability from oneself and projecting it onto other people or circumstances (Friesenborg, 2015).

Think back to when you were a child, when you did something bad and your parents confronted you. For example, did you ever break anything, only to have your parents discover the broken item and confront you about it? As your parents confronted you, what were some of the first words out of your mouth? Did you say:

“It’s not my fault...,” “I didn’t know...,” or “I didn’t do it...”? Perhaps you paired the strategies of fancy footwork and blame by saying, “It’s not my fault! Johnny told me to do it...and I didn’t know this rock would actually break through the window!”

Protect assumptions from being discussed: In the last unit, we discussed how espoused values—the values that people claim to have—reflect cultural ideals. In contrast, the individuals’ real values—those reflected by their behaviors—are centered on the egocentric desires and goals of the self. Despite the contradiction between espoused and real values, people are often blind to this contradiction in their own lives. To be clear, people recognize the contradiction when *other people* say one thing yet behave in ways that contradict what they say. However, individuals tend to be blind to the contradiction between *their own* words and actions (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

How do people live with such a contradiction? In the American culture, as well as most microcultures within the American culture, people—perhaps subconsciously—avoid discussion that would reveal the contradiction between real and espoused values. In this way, people shield their deep, underlying assumptions from being tested. They protect their deep, underlying assumptions about oneself, other people, and the environment. These assumptions are shielded from discussion, in order to avoid one’s deep, underlying assumptions from being challenged (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; Schein, 2010).

For example, have you ever experienced someone around whom people had to “walk on eggshells?” This often happens in a bullying situation. Let’s consider the example of an extended family that includes an uncle who exhibits bullying behaviors. Whenever the family has a holiday gathering, the first thing they wonder is, “Will Uncle Jim be coming?” If Jim does not come, they can relax and behave according to the norms that are in place within their own families and their own daily lives. If Jim does come, though, they will “walk on eggshells” around him, being careful not to say anything that will set him off. They will also turn the other cheek—yet cringe on the inside—while Uncle Jim degrades and mocks his wife, Mary, who just cannot seem to do anything right in his eyes. If anyone says anything that Jim construes as a slight or an insult to him, he will respond with fuming anger and will spew a long, punishing monologue at that person. Despite Jim’s behavior, the extended family is polite to everyone—and extra polite to Jim. In front of Jim, they act as if this family dynamic is normal, as if nothing is wrong.

So what deep, underlying assumptions are driving the behavior in the above scenario? Let’s consider both Jim’s deep assumptions and those of the extended family. First, Jim’s behaviors are clues to his deep assumptions, as follows:

- “I am deserving of respect.”
- “Mary is undeserving of respect.”
- “My behavior is acceptable.”
- “I may treat people anyway I please, but they must treat me well.”

Jim may espouse values that reflect cultural ideals, maybe saying that he values his family, but what do his real values reveal?

The extended family’s behaviors are clues to the following deep, underlying assumptions:

- “Jim will punish me if I set him off. That would not be good for me. I must avoid setting him off.”
- “I must not disagree with Jim.”
- “I am powerless to stand up for Mary.”
- “Jim will never change.”

The family members may espouse fairness, equality, and family-oriented values, but what do their real values reveal?

None of these deep, underlying assumptions is ever discussed. In fact, the family dynamic has shielded these deep assumptions as *undiscussable*. Does this seem like rational behavior? No. Yet, subconsciously, individuals will make these topics undiscussable and will suppress their negative feelings around Jim. Everyone will continue to act as if Jim’s, Mary’s, and the behavior of everyone else—including themselves—is rational (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Model I Outcomes: Typical Outcomes in the American Culture

If you have ever been in a bullying scenario, similar to the one described above with Jim, what kinds of outcomes were a product of that group dynamic? Whether you were the target or a bystander of the bullying experience, how did it make you feel? Was it a painful experience? Were you frustrated? Chances are, the experience led to mistrust. If you were the bully's target, the experience may have diminished your trust, not only for the bully, but also for other people who were bystanders but did nothing to stand up for you.

Using the example above, the family dynamic with Jim results in pain, frustration, and mistrust, among both Mary and other family members who privately recognize Jim's behavior as not right. In one word, the cultural system of this family is dysfunctional. They are operating according to dysfunctional, Model I patterns. As Jim continues to get away with his bullying behavior, the problem escalates. His jeers at Mary become bolder and bolder.

Deep beneath the surface is a resistance to learning and change, not only for Jim but among everyone else who was a bystander during Jim's behavior. Socially, we learn by talking with and observing other people. Because the family allowed Jim's behavior to remain undiscussable, and everyone carried on as if everything was normal, productive learning and change was avoided (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

While people recognized that Jim's behavior was not right, what they did not recognize was their own contribution to the problem. The entire family served as a bystander to Jim's bullying—his verbal and emotional abuse toward Mary—yet they did nothing. The entire family is just as accountable for the family dynamic as Jim is. The family members do not own up to the fact that they, either individually or as a collective, have a voice and have the power to call out Jim's behavior as unacceptable and to change the behavioral norms within the family. Yet, while family members are quick to believe Jim is the problem, they are skillfully unaware of their own accountability and of their own contribution to the problem. They are enabling Jim to behave this way (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Single-Loop Learning

Because discussion is avoided, productive learning and change are avoided. The values—and the deep, underlying assumptions intertwined with those values—remain shielded. The pain, frustration, and mistrust are not discussed. The family members' deep, underlying assumptions are not tested, and the contradiction between their real and espoused values is not discussed (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

As a result, the outcomes of the family dynamic will fuel more of the same behaviors. Jim learns that others will permit to him to belittle and bully Mary, which fuels his repeated behaviors for gaining unilateral control, being defensive and blaming Mary, and making all this irrational behavior undiscussable (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Similarly, the outcomes of the family dynamic also fuel more of the same behaviors among the family members. They will continue to engage in Model I behaviors, though not in the same aggressive way that Jim does. To grasp some control of the situation, they try to build social capital with Jim, and they perform fancy footwork to deflect any blame that might come their way for their role in enabling Jim. They continue to keep things undiscussable, and they act as if their behavior is rational (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

The result is a vicious cycle of dysfunctional outcomes fueling further Model I behaviors. Meanwhile, their values and intertwining deep assumptions remain unchecked, even though these values and deep assumptions provide the basis for the entire dysfunctional culture of this family (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Conclusion

The American macroculture, as well as most microcultures that are nested within the American culture, operate according to Model I. While the example used in this unit lesson centered on the culture of a family, Model I also applies to other microcultures, including organizations (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015; Schein, 2010). The example focused on bullying, and bullying also occurs within the workplace.

A Model I culture also manifests in ways other than bullying. As another example, Model I patterns may lead people to focus on politicking and building alliances with important people while ignoring people who lack power. People may become so obsessed with self-advancement that they become desensitized to the dire needs of people who are powerless, people who are oppressed (Friesenborg, 2015; Palmer, 2004).

The Model I patterns of a culture ebb and flow, meaning that Model I patterns may lighten or even lay dormant until someone in the Model I culture experiences either embarrassment or a threat. Embarrassment or being on the receiving end of threatening behavior tends to create a flare-up, escalating the Model I patterns of the culture (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996).

What is important is that you are developing an awareness of the Model I cultures in which you participate. Now, this is the challenge to you: Now that you are aware of this process, keep your antennae attuned to the Model I patterns that operate around you, as well as the cultures where you—yourself—become sucked into the Model I patterns. Challenge yourself to change. No longer allow yourself to enable Model I patterns to operate within your organization, family, church, volunteer organizations, and other cultures in which you participate. There is an alternative to the Model I culture; it is the Model II culture, a culture of learning and change (Argyris, 2000, 2004, 2010; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Friesenborg, 2015).

Stay tuned until the next unit, when you will begin to learn about Model II. Ultimately, through the remainder of the course, you will learn how to lead Model I cultures toward transformative change, toward the Model II culture.

References

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- 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.
- Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 51(2), 269-290.
- Friesenborg, L. (2015). *The culture of learning organizations: Understanding Argyris' theory through a socio-cognitive systems learning model*. Forest City, IA: Brennan-Mitchell.
- Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Suggested Reading

Friesenborg, L. (2015). *The culture of learning organizations: Understanding Argyris' theory through a socio-cognitive systems learning model*. Forest City, IA: Brennan-Mitchell.

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Detert, J. R., & Edmondson, A. C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(3), 461-488.

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

Thye, S. R., & Lawler, E. J. (2006). *Social psychology of the workplace*. San Diego, CA: Elsevier.