

Where did I go wrong?

After my resolution in my week five journal to read deeper into the meanings of the weekly readings, I found once again that what I got out of the readings this week was nothing short of valuable. This week's readings focused on the problem of single loop learning and the solution of double loop learning. Although I did not realise it at the time, prior to taking this course I was quite heavily engaged in single loop learning. In many of my courses I was looking more to get a good grade than to actually learn the content of the course.

When things went wrong I would often (not always) act defensively and blame anyone or anything but myself. "The question was too ambiguous", "we didn't learn this in class", "it was a trick question", "This paper doesn't make any sense". These are just some of the excuses which I have previously used to account for lower than expected grades or difficulty with courses/assignments. Although these excuses may be valid, there is also an alternate side to each of them where the responsibility is my own. Perhaps if I had studied more throughout the semester, the ambiguous question wouldn't be so ambiguous, or I would not have fallen for the trick question, or I would have known that what we didn't learn in class is in the readings, etc etc. The weekly reading reflections for this course begin to change this single loop style of learning into the double loop. My interpretation of double loop learning (based on the Synnott, M. (2013) reading) is when the cause of a problem is focused on during problem solving rather than the symptoms. This is where the weekly reflections begin to demonstrate the double loop. In our reflections we are expected to analyse our problems, and really try to figure out how we can fix the cause of them, instead of simply describing their negative effects.

Argyris's (1991) example of the manager asking his subordinates to give feedback on potential improvements for an already satisfied customer really struck a chord with me and I feel as if it will help not only my future journals but also my future university courses. This example made me realise that even when things are going well, there is nearly always something that could have been done to make it even better. Using Mikes Bikes as an example, our team could have definitely performed better this week, but my estimations for how much money we had to spend were off. It didn't hurt our placing too badly, but if I had put even more effort into providing the most accurate estimates as possible, I could have figured out that we needed to spend less. In this situation I could blame the simulation and say it's impossible to know how demand will change, or that I couldn't possibly know the effects of the other teams' strategies, but at the end of the day the responsibility still lies partly with me. Argyris described the scenario of the ideal performance review scenario where one of the professionals claimed that the client had doubts about their age. After the manager prompted them another professional was able to pinpoint that the real problem was that they were worried about whether or not the younger professionals could still produce the required results. I particularly enjoyed this example and felt that it summed up double loop learning quite well. Although problems are likely to present themselves while we are working, it is up to us to "make it work" or "just do it". We must be able to do everything we can to make these problems not be problems.

One criticism I do have of the reading is the way that it ignores the realities of working in today's business environment. We are frequently told in our courses, how competitive the business environment is, and how simply having good grades won't be enough to get a job. The example that Argyris (1991) uses of subordinates looking to other reasons for problems, suggests that if our superiors ask us what we could have done better, we are supposed to honestly tell them that we didn't do everything properly and that we made mistakes, in the name of learning. If I am competing with my colleagues for a raise/bonus /promotion, why would I purposely say something that would hurt my chances of getting it? The example also fails in the sense that it is based on a manager that wanted to use the feedback process for a positive purpose. I feel that in many organisations, managers would not be so understanding or empathetic when their workers tell them they didn't do as good a job as they could have. What happens after a week of saying you could have done better, or a month, or a year? Perhaps Argyris should have asked himself why the employees felt they had to act defensively instead of saying how to deal with it, which (ironically) is an example of single loop learning.

The key idea of double loop learning is being able to admit how you could have done something better. Argyris (1991) used the example of the manager asking his subordinates to say where they could improve is the type of single loop learning that I was frequently engaged in before I took this course. Doing the weekly reflections each week teaches us to get better at examining where we went astray and what we could do better, effectively teaching us double loop learning. Although I have previously tried to focus my reflections on my own problems anyway, I feel that this reading has taught me how to be more creative when coming up with my solutions to my problems (not only for my journals but just in my life in general). The challenge for the future is to come up with these creative new solutions as the problems arise.

Sources

Argyris, C. (1991). *Teaching smart people how to learn. Reflections, 4(2)*, 4--15