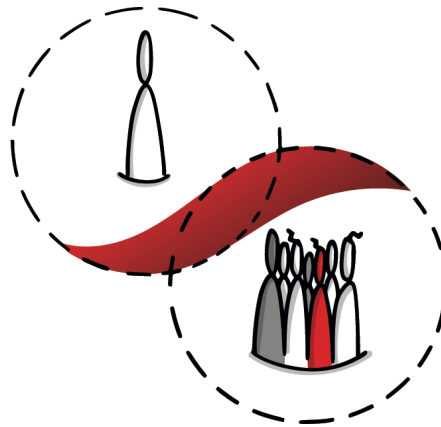# The double loop of the learning enterprise: a driver of new forms of organization

20.10.2023, David Fiorucci

As we have seen in a number of earlier articles, businesses have the potential for being consistent and putting in place systems that allow for real autonomy and real change. For this to happen, individuals within an organization need to be able to learn (1st loop) and both share their learning with others (2nd loop) and be enabled to question certain structures or ways of doing things (also 2nd loop). Thus, we refer to a "learning organization".

Learning enterprise

A learning enterprise is one that encourages ongoing learning, and the adapting and improvement of its processes, practices and performance. It promotes a culture of learning at all levels, from front-line employees to senior management, and regards learning as a key element in its global strategy.

Here are the stages you need to follow to make your business a learning enterprise:

- Create a **learning culture**: develop a culture that encourages employees to actively seek out new knowledge, ask questions, experiment and share their ideas. This can be done by encouraging curiosity, recognizing efforts to learn and providing appropriate support for training and professional development.
- Encourage **knowledge-sharing**: introduce mechanisms that enable employees to share their knowledge and experience. This can be done by holding regular meetings, brainstorming sessions and online forums, or establishing platforms for sharing knowledge in house.
- Foster **experimentation**: encourage employees to try out new approaches, take calculated risks and draw conclusions from their successes and failures. This will require tolerance of failure and an environment in which errors are seen as opportunities for learning rather than as a reason for blame.
- Invest in **skills development**: offer training programmes and opportunities for professional development suited to employees' needs. This may include seminars, workshops, online courses, mentoring and the possibility of moving from position to position.
- Use **data and analysis**: collect and analyse relevant data in order to identify areas for improvement, trends and opportunities. Use this information for enlightened decision-making and to guide learning initiatives and continuing improvement. **Artificial intelligence (AI)** is ideal for implementing this.

- Foster **cooperation**: encourage cooperation between teams and departments so as to promote knowledge-sharing and collective learning. Efforts to promote learning and improvement should be cross-cutting and inclusive.
- Develop **leadership**: senior managers should play a key role as facilitators of learning and growth. They should encourage innovation, creativity and questioning of the status quo, and should of course set a good example. This is something that cannot be delegated!
- **Evaluate and repeat**: regularly evaluate the learning initiatives put in place and modify them in response to the results obtained. Continuous learning implies a repetitive process whereby the lessons learned are used to improve an enterprise's practices and performance.

Making an enterprise a learning organization is an ongoing process requiring long-term commitment. This demands time, resources and determination on the part of all members of the organization.

Double-loop learning
Double-loop learning is a theory developed by the organizational psychologist and theoretician Chris Argyris (1923-2013). As he sees it, there are two kinds of learning: single-loop and double-loop.
Single-loop learning is a process of adjustment and improvement in response to past actions and the observed results. This occurs when individuals or organizations make changes to their present behaviour or strategies in order to solve problems or achieve desired objectives.
Double-loop learning, on the other hand, implies deeper reflection and questioning of the fundamental assumptions, values and beliefs that underlie actions and strategies. It is a process of critical self-examination intended to challenge and modify the mental models and underlying systems of thought which influence actions and behaviour.

Double-loop learning goes beyond the simple correction of visible problems to identify the deeper causes of these problems and question the patterns of thought and organizational structures that contribute to them. This allows for a re-evaluation and deeper adaptation of behaviours, beliefs and values.
To sum up, double-loop learning is a process of critical self-examination and questioning of fundamental assumptions that aims to bring about deeper and more lasting changes to individual and organizational actions and behaviour. It encourages in-depth reflection on mental models and systems of thought and makes for more holistic and transformational change.

The double-loop principle and its connection with holacracy and tension management
In a holacratic regime, tension is the feeling you get when there is a gap between present reality and what is hoped for or needed. It may be perceived as a problem or an opportunity for improvement. Tensions can be seen as important signals, indicating the need for adjustments or changes in an organization's structure, roles or processes.

Managing tensions in a holacratic regime follows a specific process, known as "tension processing". These are the key stages in managing tensions under a holacratic regime:
- **Identifying the tension**: any member of an organization can identify a tension and give a name to it. It is important to recognize that every individual is responsible for managing tensions and anyone can contribute to the continuous improvement of the organization.
- **Drawing up a proposal**: when a tension has been identified, the person concerned draws up a proposal for processing it. The proposal must be specific, clear and action-orientated. It must explain the tension and why it is matters, and suggest a solution or practical change for dealing with it.

- **Presenting the proposal**: the proposal is presented during a governance meeting. The team members listen to the proposal and request clarification if necessary. The purpose of the presentation is to share information concerning the tension and the related proposal so that an informed decision can be taken.
- **Taking a decision**: following the presentation, there is a discussion to weigh up the proposal. The team members may ask questions, express concerns and objections, and suggest changes to the proposal. The final decision is taken by mutual consent. In other words, if there are no major objections, the proposal is seen as likely to improve the situation.
- **Attributing responsibility**: once a decision has been adopted, the roles and responsibilities for implementing it have to be made clear. If the proposal requires changes in existing roles, or the creation of new roles, these changes are also effected.
- **Monitoring and evaluation**: after the proposal has been put into effect, it is important to monitor the results and gauge whether the tension has been resolved or whether further adjustments are necessary. If the proposal has not produced the hoped-for results, a new tension may be identified and the process repeated.

These two learning loops can be used at organizational/enterprise level. The first loop is worked out **within** the system, at the level of the team, micro-enterprise or group, while the second loop is worked out **on** the system, calling into question particular functions and forms of organization. This makes it possible to develop a system that is agile and above all efficient.

In concrete terms, these loops are applied through structured meetings (double loop 1 and double loop 2), at which the tensions concerned are also taken into account.

I hope your efforts at working both within and on your system will be rewarding and productive.