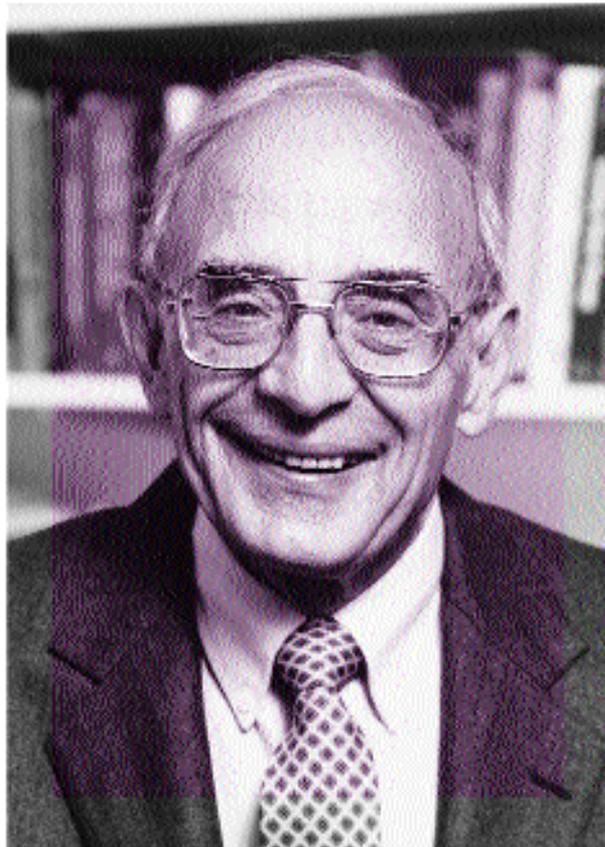


AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS ARGYRIS

BY
JOEL
KURTZMAN



THERE HAS BEEN a lot of debate recently about the factors that make companies competitive. Some management thinkers have suggested that competitiveness rests in the way companies organize themselves around their core capabilities and competencies. Others have said that it

has to do with the way a company innovates, focuses its strategy, manages within its business ecosystem, orients itself to its customers or simply handles costs. The debate is ongoing, with no end in sight.

Chris Argyris, the James Bryant Conant Professor Emeritus of Education and Organi-

zational Behavior at Harvard University, would not necessarily dispute the importance of any of these notions. He might, however, add that a good deal of the debate is taking place on the wrong level. Companies fail, he would say, because they have created cultures that inhibit their ability to learn.

In Professor Argyris's view, as articulated in "Knowledge for Action" (Jossey-Bass, 1993), one of his many books, there are two types of organizations, which he calls Model I and Model II. Though they may look the same from the outside, these two types differ significantly in the way they learn and, as a result, in their ability to perform over time and compete.

Model I organizations have institutionalized a form of self-censorship that is defensive and limits real communication. Instead of telling the truth, people in Model I organizations, which Professor Argyris believes make up the majority of businesses, express only those views that the institutional culture deems appropriate. If individuals working in Model I companies believe they will be penalized for conveying bad news at a department meeting, for example, they will refrain from doing so.

As a result, the organization will receive what Professor Argyris calls "invalid" knowledge about its condition. When that happens, companies find themselves drifting further and further from reality. And when they get into trouble, they often do not understand why. Because self-censorship does not go away when a company is in distress, the ability of the business to repair itself is impeded by the same



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forces that got it into trouble in the first place.

Model II companies, on the other hand, manage their conversations better. Rather than censor knowledge, they have found a way to promote it and get it heard. Model II companies — of which there are very few, in Professor Argyris's view — differ from Model I organizations because they deal in valid knowledge. As a result, they are able to assess reality more correctly and solve problems as they occur.

All of this explains why Model I and Model II companies differ markedly in the way they learn. Since Model I companies are not dealing with knowledge as effectively as Model II companies are, they are less likely to understand true cause and true effect.

At the heart of the learning gap is the difference between what Professor Argyris calls "theories espoused" and "theories in use."

Consider what happens when a group sits around a table to discuss a business issue in a Model I company. The group members may even say, "Let's be as open and honest about this one as we can be," which is the theory that is espoused. However, since the real culture of the organization makes certain statements dangerous, leading to self-censorship, the theory espoused is at variance with the theory in use. As a result, group members often say one thing while believing another.

A graphic example of this type of behavior are the discussions that took place within the central planning units in the old Soviet Union. Not only did leaders there fail to admit that they had economic problems, they even produced data supporting the view that everything was fine. The Soviet Union fell, in large measure, because its organizational culture

forced it to deal almost exclusively with invalid knowledge.

Real learning takes place, Professor Argyris says, not simply when an organization refines its processes, which he calls "single-loop learning," but when it refines its theories and assumptions about the way the world works, engaging in "double-loop learning." Breakthroughs occur when theories are overturned, updated or replaced. But if companies are locked into situations in which their theories in use differ from their theories espoused, nothing gets overturned and no conceptual breakthroughs can occur. Real learning — the kind that charts new paths and strategies — is blocked.

Creating Model II companies takes work and discipline. People must feel secure about offering information, meaning that organizations must be transformed into places where it is safe to tell the truth. When that happens, managers can go about their real business, which is managing a company's knowledge, through its people.

What follows are excerpts from a conversation with Professor Argyris that took place recently at his office near Harvard in Cambridge, Mass.

S&B: *I would like to explore three major areas: organizational learning; organizational knowledge, and how you structure, manage and deal with it; and, finally, leadership. In the context of knowledge and organization, how do you lead? And is this leadership in the classical sense?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Let me start with a very quick overview. Increasingly, the

art of management is managing knowledge. That means we do not manage people per se, but rather the knowledge that they carry. And leadership means creating the conditions that enable people to produce valid knowledge and to do so in ways that encourage personal responsibility.

Let me also say at the outset that I'm interested in action, and not simply knowledge for the purpose of understanding and explaining. I'd love that, but it has to be knowledge for understanding, explaining, in order to act.

The irony is that human beings can do both. They systematically do the first with what I call the espouse theory — they espouse certain theories to explain what the world is about. But what really influences their actions are their "theories in use." These are designs that tell people how to behave. In an organizational context, they belong to one of two models.

S&B: *As I understand your thinking on this, what you call Model I is an approach that is geared more to reaching agreement than it is to validating the truth of something at issue. As such, it encourages people to say what they think others want to hear. Since agreement is more important than truth, this model can put an individual, group or organization out of touch with reality. By contrast, under a Model II approach, the parties work hard to have honest communication and to become aligned with reality. Model II rewards tough reasoning that is productive.*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: That's right. Now, I find that most people, so far, are programmed with the Model I theory in

use, and one of the features of such a theory is to drum out productive, rigorous reasoning and to hold up and reinforce defensive reasoning. That is especially the case when the issues in question are embarrassing, threatening or difficult — in other words, just when you most need to use productive reasoning. Instead of addressing the issues head on, Model I reinforces a defensive approach that avoids confrontation. In fact, it says, that's the way you can show that you are caring and thoughtful.

Let's say a manager is unhappy with something an employee is doing. But the manager worries that this guy may get upset if he is too direct with his criticism. So the manager's strategy is to say to himself, "I'll go around China first so that I don't make him too defensive." The other person senses that the boss is not being forthright with him, but like the boss, he keeps that to himself. So he doesn't confront the situation either. Instead, he figures out how he's going to play with it so that he doesn't get himself harmed. So then the boss says to himself, "You see, I was right to be cautious — the guy was defensive."

S&B: *And what is the result of Model I behavior?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: The result is that people do not detect and correct errors. Or they don't get at the important problems that they have in their heads. And if everybody does this, you eventually begin to say, "But that's life, that's the nature of the beast, that's the nature of human beings."

You know, we're learning from re-

search that all behavior that is action is programmed in the human mind. That means the Model I designs are programmed, too. They tell a person that the way to be effective is to be in control, to strive to win. If you advocate something or make evaluations about people, or make judgments about what they are really doing, do it in such a way that you remain in control and you win.

What that does is, it doesn't encourage people to test their evaluations, test the validity of them. In effect, they try to get people to think the way they think.

The problem is that if people learn that that's what you want, they will think the way you think. And then I hear a C.E.O. complain to me, "Why do people think only the way I think? Why don't they get out of the box?"

S&B: *This is reminding me of Samuel Goldwyn, who would say that he wanted his people to tell him the truth even if it cost them their jobs. So the subordinate realizes that if he contradicts his boss, his future's in jeopardy.*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: *Could be in jeopardy. But he doesn't test the notion, out of fear. So you ask him, "What's the data that you should be fearful?" The response often is, "Well, you know, the boss got upset over such-and-such." Then you ask, "What would have happened if you had confronted him on that?" And the answer is, "Are you kidding? That's the cure that makes the illness worse." Which leaves you where you started: "Well, how do you know?"*

This is what I call self-referential logic. These people make a claim about

what is true: namely, the boss won't listen, or the boss may fire me. Then, when you ask them did they test it, they usually say yes, but they do it privately. Then when you ask them how do they know that they are not wrong, they say, "Trust me, I know this guy."

Self-referential logic is using logic to create a claim, and then using logic to test that claim, but it's the same logic you used in the beginning.

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S&B: *In that example, the subordinate says, "If I speak my mind and disagree with the boss, I'll get fired." What's the boss thinking?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Most of the bosses I meet do not think that way, although they may act that way after a while. Quite the contrary. Life has changed in the organization in dramatic ways, thanks especially to information technology. Behavior is increasingly transparent — you cannot hide things, as you used to do. Which means you now are getting C.E.O.'s who aren't interested in hiding, because they know people can have access to information that 30 years ago they could keep quiet.

So, we are seeing more and more

C.E.O.'s who are interested in the management of knowledge. And they know that you can't get flexible organizations that really correct themselves without human beings doing it in dialogue.

Such a boss may now say, "Look, Joe, if you don't agree with me, say so." If Joe does that and the boss then gets angry, Joe will not be candid again. But if Joe says, "Of course, I will, sir," and still keeps his real answer private, the boss will not learn this until later on and will suffer for it.

S&B: *Does this mean that if the communication loop is malfunctioning, then the business is acting on incorrect knowledge or not enough knowledge?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Yes, and it's also acting on the Model I agreement: that such a problem is not discussable. Something that is not discussable, by definition, makes even the undiscussability undiscussable. So then you have C.E.O.'s asking themselves, "I wonder what the hell they really mean?" And you have subordinates asking, "I wonder what the C.E.O. really means?"

So a lot of energy and transaction costs are increasing, unnecessarily. And if the transaction costs increase, things become less flexible.

I often hear the following: "Dog-gone it, we had a reorganization, we defined new policy, we got everyone involved, we got a commitment to change and yes, there was some progress, but nowhere near the progress everybody said there would be."

So the consultant gets called back in and asks, "What's going on?" And they will say, "The leadership is

unclear," or "The roles weren't defined clearly," or "The processes that we set up weren't the best ones." Privately, the C.E.O.'s ask, "What prevents us from correcting this?"

Publicly, what I hear them say, out of some sense of legitimate frustration, is, "I want you to go back, lock them up in a room and define these things clearly, and so on." One C.E.O., in fact, said, "After they do it, I want them to sign what they do. Then let's move on." A fundamental strategy,

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then, is basically to say, "If the things we have done are wrong, then correct them, and I want commitment on the correction and specification on the correction."

Now, what's the trouble with that? The trouble is that it overprotects the incompetent. What do I mean? The C.E.O. could have said, "Just a moment, folks. You participated in this. When did you begin to realize that these strategies, these policies, were not working?" "Oh, within a

couple of weeks." "Well, it's now six months. What led you not to raise this issue? Have I done something that prevents you from raising it? Has somebody else done something?"

So out come all these defensive routines such as, "Yeah, it was partly you, but it was partly marketing, or partly this or that" — all the things that C.E.O.'s have heard before.

Now, what the C.E.O. should do is to say, "Look, I'm going to tell you something. I will not only evaluate you as to whether you produce what you promised, but also how effective you are in monitoring, and surfacing, where you're not producing what you promised."

S&B: *But why is all this so difficult? How do you answer the C.E.O. who says, "We've changed everything in this company. We don't have a command-and-control system anymore. We have even gotten rid of walls between offices, so that everyone sits together. And yet something is still blocking our progress."*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Opening up offices can encourage people to talk. The problem is, when they start talking, they use Model I and they get into all the old problems. Changing structures and taking down the walls and having a policy of openness are all enabling things. We hope they become symbols and give a cue. But they are highly limited when the issues are embarrassing, threatening, difficult.

What you need then is people having the skill to deal with these issues openly with each other. And that's Model II, which rewards open-

ness, trust and truth-seeking. And most people don't have Model II. They doubt Model II. And they are unaware of that. They are unaware of the degree to which they are not trusting and open, of the extent to which they are not what they espouse.

Let me give you a concrete example. In a very large organization, the C.E.O. decided that things were just too rigid and had to change. And he was hearing that same thing from others, especially from the highfliers, the younger people who weren't yet immediately reporting to him but were telling him about their frustrations.

So he hired a consulting firm and they developed a diagnosis of the culture. They interviewed 200 of the highfliers throughout the world. The highfliers said, "This is not a company that rewards risk-taking — this is a company that rewards cover-ups of interpersonal difficulties," not cover-ups of business numbers, and so on, but of the kinds of things that we are talking about. And they said, "We ought to stop that."

So there's a meeting of a number of these highfliers with the C.E.O. of the largest group within this company. The highfliers were promoted, as a result of this study, to report directly to this C.E.O., a man who has learned Model II, behaves it and really needs it to be practiced by his people. At one point in the meeting, the C.E.O. said to me, "Chris, what do you think about the presentation I made?" And I said, "I must tell you that I don't find it particularly compelling." And I gave him my reasons and we had a dialogue.

When we had a break, one of the

highfliers, who was among the most adamant about being open and risk-taking, said to me, "You know, Chris, I don't think that was a humane thing to do, to say to him what you did. That man's under great pressures and great stresses. We've got to support him." I said, "Let me ask you something. Is there anything that I said that would have prevented you from saying that in the meeting? What if you had turned to me and said, 'Wait a minute, Chris, I don't think that's being very helpful'?"

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Wouldn't that be supportive of him, publicly?" He agreed. "So what prevented you from doing that?" He said, "Well, that's our culture, that's the way we've always done things."

The point I'm making is, this executive is at the lead of changing the culture. But in a moment when he's acting genuinely, spontaneously, he goes back to doing exactly what he condemns and he's unaware of that. He couches it in the name of anything ranging from concern to courtesy.

How else could that meeting have gone? The highflier could have said, "I'd like to raise a question — in front of the group — about the appropriateness of what Chris said. My view is that the boss is under a hell of a lot of stress," and so on. The boss would have said, "I value what you're trying to do, your concern for me, but I can tell you, I don't find that helpful, because if indeed my logic is not very good, I don't know about it, and I'd rather learn it in this group than in some other group. Secondly, if you feel you've got to protect me, then I'm going to feel I've got to protect you. And if I'm going to feel that I've got to protect you, then I'm rewarding the very processes that we're trying to change."

And so there would have been dialogue.

S&B: *Is it the culture of the company or the psychology of the individual that blocks such dialogues?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: It's both. The psychology of the individual is to blame the culture but the cultural context reinforces that behavior.

Put another way, organizations are full of Model I people. They therefore hide, engage in cover-ups and all those sorts of things. If everybody is that way, then the culture is created to reinforce that. So then the culture makes this thinking automatic, spontaneous. You don't even think of it — you take it for granted.

Then you have a consulting firm ask, "Do you like this?" And this young highflier, and others, say no. But when they get into an actual meeting, they automatically go the other way.

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S&B: *How do you change that behavior?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Well, you start by recognizing that highfliers are all Model I, in this and any other company. It is a false notion to think that what they are doing is suppressing Model II skills that could make things better. They espouse Model II, but they do not have those skills, unless they have had the training.

The question is, what can we do to help them learn a different approach, give them an additional theory in use? My claim is that we can teach people to do this relatively easily. We can specify how to do it — it doesn't require any mass cultural change or psychoanalytic change.

S&B: *But doesn't this require an enormous amount of self-monitoring within a meeting and within an organization?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: The amount of self-monitoring that this requires is no more than the self-monitoring that goes on now, only now it sounds like this: "I wonder what he really means — I better be careful I don't get in trouble."

Secondly, the new kind of self-monitoring becomes public and people learn, and therefore they don't have to keep repeating this because it's now discussable.

So private self-monitoring goes down, public monitoring goes up and the necessity for spending time on monitoring goes down, because people learn from these things.

S&B: *From what you have been saying, it sounds almost as if the art of management is the art of managing the con-*

versation. But as you noted at the beginning, it really is the art of managing knowledge.

CHRIS ARGYRIS: That's right. And when you manage knowledge, you have three requirements: 1) to work hard to produce valid or validatable knowledge; 2) to work hard to produce informed choices about the ways to use that knowledge; 3) to monitor how well you're doing on the first two.

The sacred set of values, therefore, in an organization are these: valid knowledge, informed choice and personal responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the effort. It is not happiness, satisfaction, morale and so on. Now, I'm not against those, but when there are trade-offs to be made, the leaders of the future are going to have to help organizations come down on the side of the first three values that I listed. Surely, if they do it in a way that is unilateral and defeating, then they will be harming the production of knowledge. But too often, what we have right now is the opposite, that in the name of morale, and so on, a lot of stuff is bypassed lest things get into trouble.

Let me give an example. An organization does a morale survey. The survey finds that nearly 80 percent of the employees value being members of this organization. But 70 percent also say that their superiors, and their superiors' superiors, are fundamentally weak and they don't take action. What does it mean that you like being in an organization in which most of the people who are leaders are weak? We never get asked that question, yet putting those two results together is important.

Now, let's get back to the proposition that we do not manage people, we manage knowledge. People carry that knowledge. In order to define what is effective leadership, we have to ask, how do we produce effective knowledge? The knowledge we are talking about is everything that is related to the business, whatever is needed to get things done.

What is the difference between

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managing people and managing knowledge? If I were managing people, meaning satisfaction and so on, and a subordinate is distressed because his boss has questioned the reasoning behind a statement of his, and he thinks that his boss doesn't trust him, I could say, "Don't get upset, you know, he was trying to be helpful," and so on. And so then the subordinate feels good — he feels that I really understood him.

But in managing knowledge, I would say the following to him: "I don't understand how the boss can make a judgment of how valid your

statement is if he doesn't get at the reasoning. And indeed, I don't understand how you could ever decide how valid his statement is if you don't get at his reasoning."

So power is not an issue here. What is an issue is, how do you test whether knowledge is valid? And the ability to question reasoning is a skill that both sides must have, both superior and subordinate, and the culture must reward it.

S&B: *But don't people say, "Hey, this is not rocket science. We're frying hamburgers here or we're producing potato chips. What do we have to get so complicated for?"*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Let me role-play that answer. "I thought the problem we started with was that we had complicated this issue. Indeed, we are just making potato chips. But look at all the departmental rivalries, and so on, that we have produced while making chips. So, we don't have a rocket science for potato chips, but we do have a science that we're not good at, in communicating with each other on these difficult, threatening problems."

S&B: *Can you in any way measure progress in trying to do better at that science?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: That's easy. I can teach people to do this with a pad and pencil, but it's so simple that eventually they can do it without those things.

There are three kinds of actions that we are looking for: 1) Do people advocate? What I'm doing right now is advocating. 2) Do they offer evaluations? "Joe's behavior is poor" or "The

marketing department isn't doing well." 3) Do they make attributions? These are statements about causality, assertions that you make about what is motivating somebody else: "I know why they're doing this."

And there are three ways that you can do those things. In Model I, you leave your mark by not illustrating anything that you're saying, by not encouraging inquiry and by not encouraging testing. With Model II, you encourage illustration, you encourage inquiry, you encourage testing.

So we can go to a tape recorder and listen to a discussion involving two people, or 10, and score where these people are. What we find is that the scores are high here and they are in the zeros here. Over time, that begins to change, so that you can begin to measure progress. That's one measure. There are others.

S&B: *If we manage knowledge through people, what are the structures that we require within companies to make that work?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Well, there are in place, and increasingly so, structures that require valid knowledge. That's true for marketing, among other areas. And most of that change is coming through the sophistication of information technology. The fundamental notion of I.T. is that truth is a good idea. Otherwise, it is garbage in, garbage out.

But what I'm claiming is that human beings are given to saying that truth is a good idea even when it isn't present or, if it is, when it is covered up.

So now we have a world of I.T.

that, when it's used, is closer to the values of managing through knowledge. The problem is not that you can't put that in place. It is this other information technology that is in place, which is primarily a human technology, a technology of systematic cover-up, undiscussables and so on.

What kind of budgets would you need, then, to encourage trust? Well, the technical part is simple; the more difficult part is these programs that people have in their heads, when they start to use a better budget, and still say, "Oh, well, you can't trust this." Or they use the new budget in a way that doesn't actualize its potential.

So what has to be put in place? We have to have better and better information processes that get transparently at what's going on, and that's doable, increasingly. But we also have got to unfreeze and alter people so that their automatic reaction is also to be concerned about valid knowledge, choice and so on.

And I'm saying to you, people espouse that, but when you look at what they do, especially when they're dealing with difficult and embarrassing issues, they go against valid knowledge, they often cover up and they often create tests that are self-referential and weak.

Many of the efforts to deal with this gap are doomed to fail because what they offer can't be translated into action. I can show you illustration after illustration of advice that people get from successful executives about change and learning. Have a meeting and listen to the employees, they'll say, or confront them when they are not

doing something. But these are abstractions, not the kind of knowledge that is accessible to someone else, who wants to take action. What did the executives actually say in these gatherings? What words did they actually use? That's accessible knowledge.

The problem is that most of the advice that people get about learning, knowledge and leadership is not actionable if you are thinking in terms of changing the status quo.

S&B: *Suppose you were chosen by the board to be C.E.O. of a company. What would be the first thing you would do? How would you lead when the main task is managing knowledge through people?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Let me describe what someone else really did. The first thing he did was to get the message across to his top group that knowledge was ultimate, and human beings penultimate. In other words, Model II was going to have its day. Second, he said that he wanted to spread this message throughout the organization, but he realized that it wasn't going to spread and be believable unless they, at the top, behaved this way. Third, he said he found himself having difficulty behaving this way, never mind anybody else. Fourth, he predicted that not only would they all have difficulties, but they would be unaware that they would have difficulties.

So he wanted an opportunity to help himself and his top group to become more aware. And after awhile, I was invited in, and we developed a five-day program that was designed to cover what I'll call business issues, like

strategy, as well as these kinds of knowledge issues.

Each of the participants first talked about strategy and other business issues. And then the C.E.O. said to them, "O.K., now go write up a case on the following: think of the strategy that you have tentatively agreed upon, although we realize that you're going to say more about it in this five-day session. No. 1, is there something in

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there that you see that is going to be difficult to implement? No. 2, specify what you could do about it. Never mind whether anybody else wants you to do it, but rather, if you had your druthers, what would you do?" We didn't want to limit them — we didn't want to put in their minds that they had to do this politically, so to speak.

No. 3, we asked them to write a scenario. What if they said, "Well, my job is to help the C.E.O. see that he says one thing but he practices another"? So we wrote a scenario. Something like, "John, it's so good of you to

see me," and John says, "Always good to see you, Chris," and then Chris says, "Well, I really have some difficult issues that I'd like to discuss," and John says, "Well, those are the kinds of things we really have to talk about." Any thoughts or feelings are to be put on the left-hand side of the page. So we go through the scenario, and I say — and I write this on the left-hand side — "I don't think John is going to be anywhere near as open as he sounds, so I'd better be careful." And they do this for three pages — and the idea is to show them that there's enormous import and knowledge that is critical for making this kind of discussion more effective in terms of valid knowledge.

Eventually, the 10 of us sat down to talk about strategy. Strategy was one of the important concerns of the C.E.O., and he wrote a case on what he would have difficulties in implementing, because it included the potential firing of one of the people seated around that table.

So they discussed the case, acting as consultants for the C.E.O. How could they help him recraft this conversation so that it would be more effective in terms of valid knowledge and genuine choice?

We tape recorded the discussion. We find people using Model I tactics precisely when they're trying to recommend Model II; and they've learned Model II intellectually, they've read it and they've talked about it.

And so you have people say, "Gee, that was an opinionated and insensitive statement you made," and I might then say, "And that advice that you're giving him, could it not also be

evaluative, opinionated and insensitive?” So we begin to see that everybody who writes a case uses Model I, even though they espouse Model II, and that they are unaware of the discrepancy. And they begin to create problems right in that room.

Only this time, something else happens. The C.E.O. says: “You know, you’re right, it was opinionated and insensitive. Let me tell you the pressures that I have from you people. I feel, for example, that you’re good about telling me the problems that we have and not very good about helping me come up with solutions. Not that they have to be perfect, but at least explore them.

“I realize now what you’re telling me is some of you do have solutions, but you think I would condemn them, and you think I’d let you have it. Well, that’s not my intention. And I want to invite this group right now, if you ever see someone saying something that he deeply believes in and you see me getting upset and clobbering the guy, say something. Because that’s not my intention—I may do it, but it’s not the kind of behavior I want.”

So we start doing this, for two hours. Then the next two hours, another guy, and the next two hours, another, and so on. And we begin to see patterns that we can work with.

S&B: *Does that mean that leading a corporation is something like leading a seminar, except that rather than simply discovering things, your aim is to create and do effective things?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Not exactly. As I said at the beginning, leadership means

fostering an environment in which people can produce valid information and choices. But all people in an organization should learn to do this.

S&B: *Everyone? What do you do with the rest of the organization?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: It depends, in part, on the kind of company you are talking about. I know one thing, whatever the company is, I start at the top. It is especially critical at the beginning of the process for those at the top to set the

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SHOULD LEARN TO DO THIS.”

example. And No. 2, I wouldn’t go to any other layer until there’s data, and I use tape recordings as sort of the evidence, that those at the top actually are producing this new kind of behavior, especially under difficult conditions.

Now, how far down do you go? Well, in a professional organization, filled with smart people in a learning environment, I say you go through the entire place. You do it sequentially—you don’t have to do this all at once. And what happens is, it expands exponentially. Because if you’ve got the top people doing it, and then the next group

does it, there are a lot of people who begin to wonder, “What do you mean by an untested attribution?” So they’re beginning to learn. But you can then also provide them a two-day seminar.

If you had asked me, 10 years ago, how large a group we could do this with, I would have said 20. Now I’d say 100. We’re even beginning to learn how to teach these skills to groups of 200.

Looking down the road, someday we may be able to have a world in which we have real technology that enables Model II conditions. That will come to pass with a better I.T. infrastructure for communication.

But none of that will work if the people using it are Model I. They’ll gum it up, they’ll distort it, they will do everything they can think to do—and they’ll deny that they are doing it.

S&B: *Why is it so hard for smart people to learn how to change? Are the barriers to learning within organizations for smart people these built-in Model I behaviors?*

CHRIS ARGYRIS: Yes. And then, their sense of confidence in themselves comes from Model I. So there are automatic reactions against this. And if you start telling them, “Hey, change,” that’s a non-trivial change that you’re asking of them.

What the smart people eventually begin to learn is that we’re not saying to them, “Get rid of Model I.” Rather, we’re saying, “Learn the other, and you, too, will have a choice. You as a human being, and you as an organization, will finally have a choice.”

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