Integrales Lernen in und von Organisationen
Integral Learning in and of Organizations

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English Summary

Organizational learning has become increasingly vital in today's complex, uncertain, and dynamic business environments. As organizational contexts are increasingly fragmented, equivocal, and constantly changing, learning is seen as a medium for more effective and flexible action. Accordingly, organizational learning has gained academic and practice-oriented currency over the last twenty years as a preferred model for development and management of change.

The current growth of research goes along with a feeling of a lack of clarity, consensus (e.g., Kim, 1993; Crossan et al., 1999) and even growing confusion (Tsang, 1997; Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998). Comprehensive review articles (e.g., Dodgson, 1993; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991; Levitt & March, 1988; Cohen & Sproul, 1996; Robey et al., 2000) have discussed different aspects of organizational learning and its reinterpretation (Stewart, 2001), being an affirming oxymoron (Weick & Westley 1996) and its various ambivalences (Fenwick, 1995; Coopey, 1995; Steiner, 1998; Küpers 2005).

The purpose of this article is not to provide another comprehensive review of the subject, but to suggest a more integral understanding of the learning process. Often, the complexities of the inter-relational learning processes are ignored, oversimplified or touted as panaceas to be used. It seems that researchers and practitioners do not actually know what a ´Learning Organisation´ "is" or what 'organizational learning' essentially implies (Abernathy, 1999. p. 40). What becomes evident is that the learning organisation will only be a learning one—conceptually as well as practically—when it is not stuck with discussing reifying definitions or mechanistic, systemic or organic modeling of what a learning organisation "is" as an "entity," but to take learning in and of organisations as an relational event and integrative process.

Understanding and enacting learning in organisations demands a comprehensive and integrative framework that is suited to investigating complex, inter-related processes of learning in the context of organisations. For developing such integral understanding of learning within and of organisations, the following article explores how integrative dimensions constitute and influence the learning processes in organizational settings.

Integral theory—as outlined by Ken Wilber—provides an appropriate over-arching approach for such an undertaking. With its perspectives of individual and collective orientations, both in terms of internal and external views, it provides an encompassing meta-theory for approaching the learning process in organisations. Particularly, the four quadrants representing the spheres of an interior-agency or self and consciousness (I), an exterior agency or behaviour as enactment (Me; It), an interior-communal or cultural (We) and an exterior-communal or system (Its) can be applied to such learning. This becomes particular relevant because in many conventional approaches to learning in organisations the exterior and objective perspectives on individual and collective behavior (It, Its) have become the prevailing canon in dominant functionalist approaches.

INTEGRAL REVIEW 2, 2006

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However, to understand learning as a "four-quadrant affair" requires us to also embrace the left interior dimensions i.e., inner meaning. Conversely, also the inner lives of leaders and the collective spheres of learning need to be seen as co-determined by the behavioral and exterior dimensions. To see the domains only as parallel or to privilege one quadrant over another, is to disturb the delicate integration, co-evolutionary relationality, and interconnectedness of an effective learning practice.

Furthermore, each of the quadrants is marked by a series of different developmental levels or stages and lines of development, which are relevant for understanding learning processes. Again, this dynamic integral embrace corresponds to many reductionistic approaches of organizational learning that often follow only cognitive lines, which explains the prevailing difficulties in integrating embodied tacit knowledge and emotional dimensions and wisdom (Küpers, 2005). Unpacking the significance of "levels and lines" means that a learner can be at a fairly high level of development in some lines (i.e., cognitive), at a medium level of development in other lines (i.e., interpersonal), and at a fairly low level in yet others (i.e., emotional or moral).

With all this, for developing an integral understanding and practice of learning, what is needed is an approach that considers "All Quadrant, All Level, All Lines" (AQAL). This is because it is in all these four domains, level and lines and their interrelations that learning in and of organisations takes place.

Furthermore, quadrants, levels and lines are energized by the dynamics of growth and integration and by what can be called the *"Integral Cycle"* (Edwards, 2005; Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005a,b). This energizing integral cycle is a coherent and dynamic system that co-ordinates the interaction between the four quadrants and the holonic developmental levels and lines. It offers an inclusive model of holarchic involutionary and evolutionary development in particular. With its capacity to analyze, categorize and synthesize the concept of an integral cycle of learning, it is a way of representing the mutual interpenetration of the quadrants, levels and lines and their constituent structures, growth and the dynamic relationships in-between.

The article is organized as follows. After describing the relevance and basic understanding of learning in the context of organisations, a holonic understanding of reality and a brief critique of various reductionisms of learning, different integral dimensions of learning will be outlined. In particular, learning in the spheres of the individual in inner-subjective and exterior-objective learning, a communal learning, and learning within a system on the collective level will be examined. For each of these spheres, features, criteria, problems and their interrelations are outlined.

The relationship between individual and collective learning in and of organisations and different forms and processes of learning will also be discussed. One focus is given to the relation between double loop-learning as a kind of meta-learning and vision-logic cognition as described by Wilber. Afterwards, various practical implications and specific measurements for enhancing integral learning in the different spheres will be discussed. Finally, difficulties and problems will be addressed and in conclusion some perspectives and their implications presented.

As a reminder of our life-world's multifaceted wholeness and multi-dimensionality, an integrative methodology and orientation related to learning is likely to serve as a helpful antidote to partial views, one-sided approaches and reductionistic "flatland ontologies" (Wilber 2000).

As organizations make the transition to meet today's challenges, they must consider which aspects of the learners' consciousness, behaviour and competent action, as well as cultural and system-related issues of learning are being impacted in order to set priorities and enact practices.

With this, an integral approach is an essential presupposition for effective learning process. I hope that this paper presents some ideas for such a comprehensive and integral understanding and practice for learning in and of organisations.

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