

# Innovative Skills Development as Core Challenge and Task for the Societal Dimension of Doctoral Education

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# Aim and Structure of the Presentation

- Do our social and societal skills develop compared to the challenges and threats – or are they underdeveloped?
- Is there a special responsibility for doctoral education and supervision?
- Which urgent needed extraordinary skills could be developed and acquired during doctoral education and supervision?
- Can we create win-win-constellations between the quality and performance of doctoral education and societal improvements and responsibilities?

## Structure of presentation

- The skills challenge in higher education and society
- A core example for extraordinary skills development:  
*Defensive routines and productive learning*

## Situation and Constellation

- Our societies and our planet are undergoing deep changes that cause challenges and threats humans had never been confronted with:
  - ⇒ global warming, conditions for economic and financial crisis, worldwide migration streams, loss of social coherence, fake news, growing populism, the fusion of microelectronic, microbiology and microrobotic
- Doctoral education and supervision became a *core interface* of endowing and training the next generation of humans with the analytical and practical skills that are urgently needed to identify and to overcome the challenges and threats of current developments.

## Notions and Needs

- But, do we really and sufficiently endow our doctoral candidates and supervisors with these urgently needed *novel outstanding social and societal skills* – or is our awareness and practice still highly reduced to instrumental and technical transferable skills development?
- Do we have a clear notion what these skills are, what *productive learning systems* and a *'learning university'* require, and how they could and should be taught and trained in universities - especially in doctoral education and supervisor training?

# Examples of Urgently Needed Novel Extraordinary Skills, Competences, Capabilities and Procedures

- high cultural awareness and competences
- interdisciplinary openness, curiosity and close cooperation
- conflict resolution, mediation and dialogue
- coaching and intervention techniques
- communicational and *relational skills* that strengthen trust and confidence between people and societies, that enable us to identify and to minimise defensive routines and systematically limited learning systems

# Challenge and Problem

- such outstanding skills are already existing - **but** very often hidden in niches
- they are mainly not known, not introduced, not trained and not used
- a secret knowledge of a very small part of the population
- rarely taught in families and schools - very often also not in universities
- technically and economically highly developed societies are in a very dangerous way *totally undeveloped*
- societies are full of *skilled unskilledness*,  
of systematic but unconscious ignorance of urgently needed *high level individual and social skills*

# Responsibilities and Tasks for the Societal Dimension of Doctoral Education and Supervision

These extraordinary skills could be well understood, taught and trained explicitly during a PhD trajectory

- through workshops provided by highly experienced trainers
- but also taught and envisioned by the good practice example of supervisors

Supervisors and doctoral candidates can jointly develop, explore and adapt them during professional supervisory collaboration

- in establishing and maintaining very good supervisory relation
- in well reflected co- and team supervision
- by really clarifying mutual expectations
- in productively dealing with tensions and conflicts
- in paying attention to early warning signs
- in establishing a productive and supportive supervisory culture

# The High Art of Outstanding Individual and Organisational Learning

Do we sometimes have the feeling that we are not able to learn and to improve really well?

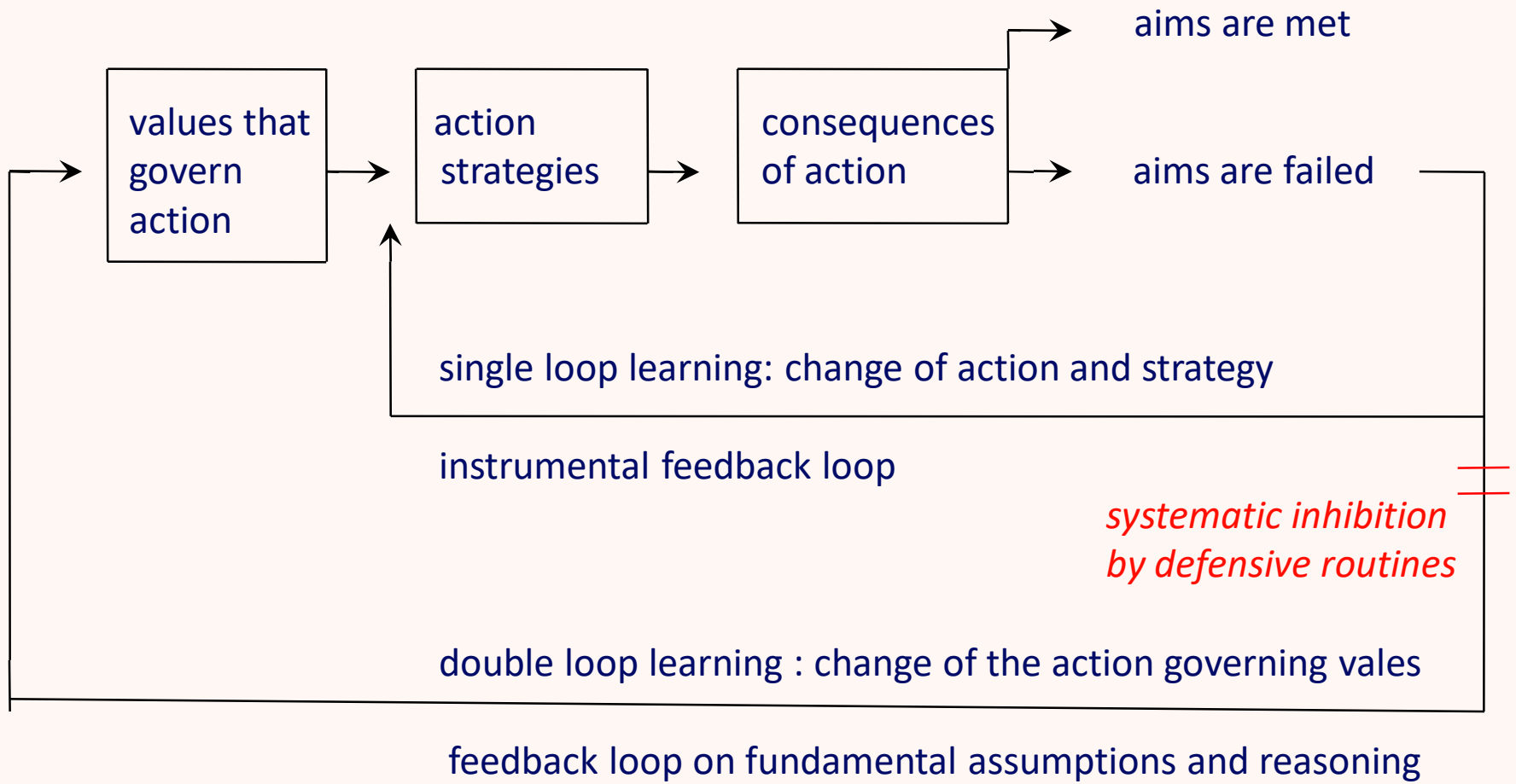
Why is that? Are there systematic reasons? The task is two fold:

1. What are the reasons that we are systematically stuck in *limited learning systems* full of *defensive routines* that inhibit productive learning? We are highly skilled in doing so!
  - ⇒ If people are facing problematic situations their communication and behaviour is often full of defensive routines, of *untested insinuations and attributions* to others.
  - ⇒ If doctoral candidates and supervisors are confronted with challenging problems they may not talk trust- and truthfully in supervisory conversations but try to protect themselves unilateral by hiding or bypassing problems.
2. What are the conditions that people, organisations and societies may really learn and improve? It's not a question of good will alone but of *extraordinary novel skills and competences!*

How can we understand and improve these *conditions* for productive learning systems, for high level learning of individuals, organisations and universities?



# Single and Double Loop Learning



# Assumptions, Questions, Objectives

Approach based on Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön “Organizational Learning II” (1996)

## Limited learning systems

- deception strategies
- obstruction
- preventive reproaches
- cover up
- tabooing

often prevent the inquiry of reasons in organisations

## Postulate

of a **behavioural world of humans** that may inhibit valid organisational inquiry

## Core question

- ⇒ whether patterns of limited learning are a kind of a natural law, the unchangeable nature of humans, or **artifacts of a mindset** that is typical for practitioners?
- ⇒ Can these patterns change if practitioners get aware of them?

## Aim

ways to identify and overcome patterns of limited learning

# Innovations in the Theory of Action

## 1. Distinction into *two different theories of action*

- espoused theory

with which people explain and justify a given activity pattern when talking to others

- theory-in-use

the theory of action which in fact is used in the performance of an activity pattern. It tacitly governs people's actions and thoughts. It is implicit, not communicated, often unconscious and thus has to be reconstructed by observing actions and situations.

## 2. Differentiation of the theory-in-use into *two contrasting models*

- a **defensive and unilateral** oriented model-I that humans are using when confronted with **embarrassing and threatening situations** and

- a **multilateral** on good interpersonal relations oriented model-II which creates **productive learning** that can be used to decrease and minimise the inhibitions to double-loop learning embedded in model-I.

# Characteristics of Model-I and Model-II Learning Systems

## Organisational defensive routines

Actions and measures that are intended to protect individuals from experiencing embarrassment and threat, while at the same time preventing individuals, or the organisation as a whole, from identifying the causes of the embarrassment or threat in order to correct the relevant problems (p. 99)

## Reaction to defensive routines

- feelings of helplessness, growing cynicism
- individuals do not take responsibility for creating or maintaining defensive routines
- defensive reasoning is perceived as the correct reasoning that should be used

## Conditions and skills of model-II learning systems

mistaken assumptions can be reformulated, incongruities reconciled, incompatibilities resolved, vagueness specified, untestable notions made testable (p. 112)

## Action strategies and consequences of the behavioural world

- tasks are jointly controlled, bilateral protection of on self and others
- minimally defensive interpersonal relations and group dynamics
- frequent public testing of action theories
- a plan how to move from systematic limited to productive learning systems →

# Transition to Productive Learning

## *current situation*

single loop learning  
limited learning systems

behavioural world  
conditions for error  
and distrust

model of the unilateral  
rational acting individual  
as 'nature' of humans

defensive routines  
attributions and  
insinuations

vicious cycles  
the world of conflicts  
and power games



*transition to* .....

breaking the vicious cycle

*intervention methods*

awareness exercises on  
conversations with defensive  
behaviour and reasoning

improving conversation skills  
towards productive learning

## *orienting aim*

double loop learning  
productive learning systems

behavioural world:  
conditions for valid  
information and trust

model of multilateral  
sensible cooperation that  
jointly has to be created

multilateral protection  
of oneself and others

jointly testing and  
minimising problematic  
attributions and insinuations

# Left-hand right-hand column exercise for identifying and overcoming defensive routines in conversation and behaviour

## report of a conversation about an important problem

the *unsaid* thoughts and feelings  
when saying something and when  
listening to the other person

.....

.....

.....

.....

what *in fact had been said* by the  
case presenter and the other person  
during the conversation

me: .....

the other person: .....

me: .....

the other person: .....

# Screenplay for an Interactive Exercise

## Part 1

Exchanging and sharing  
experiences, expertise, concepts, implementation strategies,  
success stories, suggestions  
about innovative extraordinary (social) skill development  
in doctoral education and supervisor training.

Impulse working groups around flip charts.

Key words from actors and universities.

(15 min.)

## Part 2

reports and discussion

(15 min.)