

mentoring human action



Leadership Through Learning Part 4F: Four Types of Learning — Learning To Become Yourself

by Tom Boydell, Marilyn
Herasymowych and Henry
Senko Leadership Through Learning

“Cultural stories can be useful in helping us to understand how the ideological stance is affecting people’s behaviour in an organizational context. Cultural stories often limit how people think and act, thus contributing to the repeating patterns of behaviours within cultural systems.”

— Tom Boydell, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, **Corporate Culture and Organizational Change: Strategic Practice Guide**, (2005)

Recall from previous newsletters that there are three cultural stances or levels that describe ways in which people learn, and that there are four types of learning that apply to each stance or level of learning:

- Learning about things
- Learning to do things
- Learning to become yourself
- Learning to achieve things with others

In the last newsletter, the first two

types of learning were described; in this newsletter, the third type of learning will be described. In the next newsletter, the fourth type of learning will be described. Although each of these four types of learning occurs at each of the three stances or levels of learning, each type of learning manifests itself differently, depending at which stance or level of learning it is found operating. For example, *learning to become yourself* occurs at Level 1 (con~forming stance), Level 2 (com~peting stance), and Level 3 (co~operating stance). But it manifests itself differently at each level.

Learning to become yourself is, broadly speaking, learning to be.

- **At Level 1 (con~forming stance): Implementing,** *learning to become yourself* is the ability to be the *correct* self that others want you to be, either because they believe it will be in your interest, or because it suits them, and matches their image of the *good employee*. Much of conventional parenting, teaching, and managing is, in fact, about trying to get someone else to be what we want them to be. It focuses on developing the ability to accept feedback from others. This, in turn, helps you to identify your strengths and underutilized opportunities — as perceived, for a variety of reasons, by others. At this level, learning to become yourself helps you to identify aspects that you need to strengthen and develop further — again according to

others who are deemed to know what is good for you.

- **At Level 2 (com~peting stance): Improving,** *learning to become yourself* is the ability to start to think *Who am I?* and *Who/what/how do I want myself to be?* This involves seeking feedback, actively and consciously, from others, as well as reflecting on your own behaviour — on your thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Gradually, this process increases your self-confidence and awareness, as well as a realistic appreciation of your own abilities. This enables you to re-examine critically your value system, and to draw conclusions for yourself. At this level, learning to become yourself helps you to learn to judge critically your own motivation, work habits, and ethical values. Thus, you are moving from a form of dependency at Level 1 to independence at Level 2. This is often associated with a certain arrogance, a feeling that your views are better than those of others.
- **At Level 3 (co~operating stance): Integrating,** *learning to become yourself* is a very different movement than from Level 1 and Level 2. The path from Level 1 (con~forming stance) to Level 2 (com~peting stance) is one of moving away from others, of becoming less dependent on them to tell you how you should be, and allowing yourself to determine how you want to be. At Level 3 (co~operating stance), in a certain sense, you now swing back

toward others, although in a different way. You realize that you can be *yourself* only in the context of relationships with others — who all have the right to be *themselves*.

According to Bill Drath, a researcher in creative leadership, the notion of *oneself* comes from our ways of being with others, from our participation in families, groups, communities, organizations, and jobs. We are ourselves when we create and share meaning, learning, and knowledge with others. Thus, we become aware of how our *self* varies according to the context; it is partly created by the situations we are in, the people we are with, and the roles we are playing.

Because we begin to see ourselves in relation to others, we start to understand how others make sense of the world, and therefore how we ourselves do. That is, we become aware of our basic perspectives, assumptions, and personal values in part by recognizing different ones held by others. These *mindsets* or *mental models* (i.e., stories told) are the hidden, unconscious foundations upon which we build our conscious thoughts, feelings, and intentions. At Level 3 (co~operating stance), we make the relational process much more conscious, because we are in a state of awareness of the rich interaction of mental models, in part embedded within us, but constantly moving and shaping in response to the contexts we are in, and the people we are with.

Thus, perhaps paradoxically, it is only by understanding others and how they make sense of things that we can gain insight into ourselves and our own world views. Similarly, we can start to notice how our *self* is different in different contexts. As we

become aware of perspectives and assumptions, and become able to bring them into our consciousness, we become better able to manage ourselves. Initially, we become able to *choose* thoughts, feelings, and intentions, rather than simply reacting. And we become aware of how the context — our cultural system — shapes our choices. We are aware of ourselves in relation to others; our ideas in relation to others' ideas; our feelings in relation to others' feelings; our intentions in relation to others' intentions.

Once we become conscious of our deep values, beliefs, and assumptions, and realize that we are living in a conscious relationship with the world and others in it, we may become aware of what we really want to achieve in life — our sense of purpose. As a result, we are able to choose to do something worthwhile, not only for ourselves, but also for our organization, profession, community, or society.

You may notice that there is a strong connection between this type of learning and reflexive practice that was described in previous newsletters (**InfoMine** Vol. 12, No. 1 to Vol. 14, No. 5). A key underlying aspect of reflexive practice is the ability to be mindful or critically conscious in real time, not just after the fact. We do this by understanding our ideology and the stories we tell that support our ideology. Even more important is that we remain open to possible complexity, rather than staying anchored in our ideology. Both reflexive practice and strategic practice require a deep understanding of ourselves.

When people or organizations focus on *learning to become yourself*, they focus on personal transformation and leadership. This is an important aspect of an organizational culture because

this type of learning makes sure that people practice two of Peter Senge's five disciplines of a learning organization: personal mastery and mental models. The strength in focusing on this type of learning is that it produces leaders who are ethical and connected with many aspects of the organization, including people, stakeholders, visions, mission, goals, and the wider environment in which the organization functions. The weakness in focusing only on this type of learning is that the focus can negate the need to achieve results, and the need to do so with others. The fourth type of learning to be considered, *learning to achieve things with others*, will be described in the next newsletter.

“If we continue to operate unconsciously, we continue to re-create the same patterns of behaviour in the future. Strategic practice requires us to recognize the cultural stories that are limiting efforts to change. This step allows us to exercise freedom of choice about which cultural stories we wish to tell and enact.”

— Tom Boydell, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, **Corporate Culture and Organizational Change: Strategic Practice Guide**, (2005)



Corporate Culture and Organizational Change: Strategic Practice Guide, see www.mhainstitute.ca for more information

MHA Institute Inc.
Suite 205
259 Midpark Way SE
Calgary, Alberta T2X 1M2 Canada

Phone: (403) 257-4597
Fax: (403) 257-4649
E-mail: info@mhainstitute.ca
Web: www.mhainstitute.ca