
UNIT-11: SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH:

VIEWS OF CHRIS ARGYRIS

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11.0 Learning Outcome

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Know Argyris' views on human personality and its impact on the working of organisation.
- Understand the impact of formal organisation on the individual.
- Identify significance of interpersonal competence in organisations.

- Know the importance of T-Group Training for employees to learn the nature of effective group functioning.

11.1 Introduction

Argyris is best known as a great psychologist and an organisational theorist. He is a leading management thinker who studied organisation from the standpoint of psychology. He focuses upon the individuals relationship to the organisation. He has treated extensively the conflict between the individual's social and psychological needs and the exigencies of the organisation. In developing his conceptualisation on organisational behaviour, Argyris has extensively applied research findings in the fields of psychology, social psychology and human relations. Argyris' influence on the disciplines of management and public administration is widespread.

Argyris has an excellent academic record with a background of economics and psychology. After taking his first degree in psychology he served as Professor of Industrial Administration at Yale University for many years. In 1971 he was appointed James Bryant Conant Professor of Education and Organisation Behaviour at Harvard University. Argyris' major works are:

- Personality and Organisation (1957);
- Understanding Organisational Behaviour (1960);
- Interpersonal Competence and Organisational Effectiveness (1964);
- Integrating the Individual and the Organisation (1965);
- Organisation and Innovation (1965);

- Intervention Theory and Method (1970);
- Management and Organisational Development (1971);
- The Applicability of Organisational Sociology (1972);
- Increasing Leadership Effectiveness (1976);
- Reasoning, Learning, Action (1982);
- Overcoming Organisational Defence (1990).

Besides, he has published a number of articles in journals of international repute.

Argyris has attempted to develop a theory of human behaviour based on the characteristics of the individual, the work group and the formal organisation. Viewing an organisation as an open system, he has analysed the interactions between the organisation and the environment as also between the individual and the organisation. His first mission was to discover the unintended counter-productive consequences of the classical management techniques employed to design and implement the formal, pyramid like organisational structure, production technology, control system and human control system, such as pay and other benefits. The later researches of Argyris focus on reasoning at both the individual and the organisational level. His writings suggest that the personal development of the individual is affected by the organisational situation. Argyris' research attempts to show as to how the personal development of the individual is affected by the kind of situation in which he works. As a consultant and pioneer in the application of the T-Group technique his influence on reforms of

organisational structures and managerial practices is striking. A brief reference to Argyris' views on various dimensions of organisational analysis is attempted below.

11.2 Human Personality

Argyris feels that personality of the individuals working in an organisation has a considerable impact on the working of the organisation as a whole. He holds that greater importance should be given to the development of psychological energy, which essentially forms the basis of human behaviour. Each individual has a set of needs, and these needs release energy in order to get satisfaction. The deeper the need, the greater will be the amount of energy. An individual is likely to put all his energies into meeting a challenge in case he feels assured of the potential satisfaction that he would probably obtain once the challenge is successfully met. According to him effective management systems must aim at a fuller development of individual potentialities and facilitating open interpersonal relationship. Only through the enhancement of psychological energy by the individuals and through a better coordination among different functionaries in an organisation can a more effective organisational performance be achieved.

Argyris' personality model is regarded as a major contribution to the behavioural school of thought. According to him, the organisation should provide an environment in which an individual is able to develop his personality from a state of infancy to a state of personal or psychological maturity. Argyris contends that this progression from infancy towards maturity consists of seven developments:

1. From infant passivity towards adult activity.
2. From dependence towards relative independence.
3. From limited behaviours to many different behaviours.

4. From erratic, shallow and brief interests to more stable and deeper interests.
5. From short-time perspective to longer-time perspective.
6. From a subordinate social position to an equal or super-ordinate social position.
7. From lack of self-awareness to self-awareness and self-control.

Like a child who is dependent and unaware of how his demands affect others, an immature individual person's activities are largely controlled by others. A mature person is active, independent and is self-controlled. According to Argyris personal or psychological maturity is achieved when the individual has acquired the ability to foresee consequences, to pursue interests consistently, and to own responsibilities equal to superior or what others accept. With such development, the individual having potential will put all his energies into meeting the organisational challenges. Effective management must aim at the development of individual towards personal or psychological maturity.

11.3 Interpersonal Competence

Argyris feels concerned to find the lack of interpersonal competence everywhere in organisations. That is, people do not trust each other; they find excuses for their acts; they stick to their old ways and never try new ones, they feel reluctant in being honest about their own feelings; they confine themselves to their limited routine tasks. Frank openness of manner and commitment to the job are lacking. With a view to increasing interpersonal competence, Argyris has specified four specific types of behaviour:

- (i) accepting responsibility for one's ideas and feelings;
- (ii) showing openness to ideas and feelings of those above and below one's self;

- (iii) experimenting with new ideas and feelings; and
- (iv) helping others to accept, show and experiment with their ideas and feelings.

In the context of interpersonal competence, Argyris says that top managers must not be reluctant in telling honestly about their feelings or those of the other persons. They must refuse to become defensive about what other people tell. This approach, according to Argyris, is helpful in reducing tension and conflicts in the organisation.

11.4 A Critique of Formal Organisation

Argyris criticises the 'classic' theory of organisation for creating incongruencies (inconsistencies) between the requirements of organisation and the personal development of the individual. He observes that the formal organisational principles make demands on relatively healthy individuals that are incongruent with their needs. Frustration, conflict, failure, and short-time perspective are predicted as resultant of this basic incongruency. To him formal organisation tends to reduce tasks to minimal specialised routines. There is an emphasis on directing and controlling the individual doing such tasks through a series of supervisors. Consequently, the specialists and subunits in the formal organisation follow their own goals irrespective of interests of the organisation and its members. In such formal organisations the individual is (i) not a forward looking; (ii) he is passive, not creative; and (iii) his concerns are restricted to his own work difficulties.

In such situations, executives are liable to become yet more autocratic and directive. Their excessive control deprives employees of any opportunity of participating in the decisions, which affect their working life, giving rise to feelings of mutual distrust. Employees and even lower managers tend to perceive management

controls as instruments of punishment. Thus the principles of formal organisation coupled with management controls, lack of employees' participation in important decisions, and use of control systems (such as work study and cost accounting) restricts the initiative and creativity of the individuals.

Argyris formulates certain propositions about the impact of formal organisation on the individual. Major hypotheses in this regard are as follows:

- There is lack of disagreement between the needs of individual and the initial demands of the formal organisation. This leads to a conflicting situation because the individual feels that he cannot fulfil his personal needs and at the same time meet the demands of the organisation. This leads to various types of reactions on the part of the individual. He starts thinking in terms of leaving the job, taking leave without informing, ignoring the requirements of the organisation, showing indifference and lack of interest in the organisation and ultimately remaining in a state of conflict and tension which in turn may lead to some major organisational problems.
- Another impact of the rigidities of formal organisation could be the development of frustration among the participants in the organisation. Their desire for a healthy existence and self-actualisation may not be satisfied. The resultant frustration on the part of the participants is likely to lead to a less mature behaviour, aggression and hostility.
- Certain management reactions may produce a sense of psychological failure, the result of which may be loss of interest in work, loss of self-confidence,

tendency of blaming others, lower work standards, giving up easily, and lastly a fear of still more failure.

The consequences of the aforesaid situations could be that either the worker consciously or unconsciously decides to substitute for his own needs avoidance of work or he may demand more money to compensate the situation.

Argyris asserts that the needs of individuals tend to be incongruent with the maximum expression of the demand of the formal organisation. The informal organisation is thus born to weaken conflict between the two and the resultant frustration. The informal organisation serves several purposes. Briefly, it reduces the individual employee's feelings of dependence, submissiveness, subordination and passivity towards management. Secondly, the informal organisation enables him to express his pent-up feelings ranging from outright aggression and hostility to passive internalisation of tensions that are caused by the formal organisation, directive leadership, management controls and pseudo-human relations programmes. Thirdly, being self-feeding, the informal organisation helps the individual employee create his own informal world with its own culture and values in which he finds psychological shelter and a firm anchor to maintain stability while in the process of adjusting and adapting to the formal organisation. Argyris says: "By creating the informal world he can also take an active role in influencing the formal organisation." Argyris further observes that if the informal organisation did not exist, the employee would find himself full of pent-up tension. Here, Argyris makes one point worth noting. The informal organisation is not simply a defensive device to save the individual employee from the formal organisation; it may also be a source of tension and thus have a negative effect on his mental health.

Argyris suggests certain solutions through which disagreement between the formal organisation and the individual could be removed or lessened. A reference to these suggested solutions is being made below:

- The first suggestion given by Argyris is to enlarge the jobs instead of cutting them. Jobs should be enlarged in content and increased in variety. This will create an interest in the employees as also generate a feeling of responsibility, thereby removing the conditions which create conflict, frustration and feelings of failure.
- Another means of reducing disagreement between the management and the individual is to encourage participative management and leadership. For this, Argyris suggests that only mature individuals should be selected for managerial and leadership positions. Where individuals and groups are not mature, they may be unable to face the challenge involved.
- Lastly, Argyris favours the development of ‘reality’ leadership where the leader needs a great deal of understanding rather than just depending upon hunches of guess work for decision-making. Top managers must not be afraid to show their real feelings to those above and below them. They must try to speak constructively about one another in a way, which is honest and helpful.

Chris Argyris is the foremost management thinker to attempt an integration of the individual and the organisation. Argyris’ view of “Integrating the Individual and the Organisation” seeks to provide an alternative organisational framework, which fully takes into, account the energies and competencies inherent in human beings. The

organisation, which integrates the individual and the organisation would not be exactly pyramidal; it would behave like a flat organisation. Besides, the management in the organisation would be more deeply sensitivised to its basic values. These values would be expanded to include the development of a viable internal system capable of adapting to the external environment.

11.5 Organising Future Structures

Looking to the future, Argyris has suggested different organisations for different purposes. According to him organisations of the future will have mixes of characteristics of both the traditional and modern forms. He suggests different mixes of organisation with different pay offs.

(i) *A Pyramidal Structure*

The pyramidal type of organisation is expected to perform limited routine tasks. It may be effective for non-innovative activity that requires little internal commitment.

(ii) *An Adapted Formal Organisational Structure*

A modified formal organisational structure is akin to Rensis Likert's participative structure. This type of structure is more effective because it offers much scope for subordinate participation with the option for the superior to take his own decisions.

(iii) *Defined but Participative Structure*

Under this structure each employee has equal opportunity and can have more control over what is done in his own sphere of activities. This is used in situations

involving group incentives, new product development, inter-departmental operations, etc.

(iv) *Matrix Organisation*

In this form of the organisation each employee has defined power and responsibility. He can have more control within his sphere of activities and greater participation in decisions about them. In a matrix organisation, superior-subordinate relationships are eliminated and substituted by self-disciplined individuals. Each individual has the power to influence the nature of the activity. Under this system project teams represent and perform all the relevant managerial functions, such as manufacturing, marketing, finance, etc. All members function as a cohesive team. The team gets dissolved on the completion of its function. The leadership of the project team is required to be consistent with the management approach. The leader must be able to manage inter group conflicts apart from helping the employees to understand the internal environment.

The organisation of the future will be the classical organisation, but the style of its management will be matrix. Authority would be based less on power and more on the possession of expertise and information.

11.6 T-Group or Sensitivity Training

Effective management must aim at the full development of individual potentialities. Greater attention to training of employees leads to more effective performance. Argyris believes that training enables employees to understand themselves and their situation at work better. He lays emphasis on the T-group method (T-for training) or sensitive training.

T-group technique is a sort of laboratory programme designed to provide opportunities for employees to learn the nature of effective group functioning. The technique is also designed to provide experiences in order to increase psychological success, self-esteem and interpersonal competence. Argyris says that sensitive training is not education for authoritarian leadership. Its objective is to develop effective, reality-centred leaders. The most sensitivity training can do is to help the individual to see certain unintended consequences and costs of his leadership and to develop other leadership styles if he wishes. In contrast to the conventional training programmes, the focus of T-group sessions is to create an atmosphere in which participants forget hierarchical identities and develop distributive leadership for decision-making.

11.7 Criticism of Simon and Socio-Psycho Approaches

Argyris criticises the approaches and work of both industrial psychologists and organisational sociologists for having ignored much of the research on personality, and interpersonal relationships which, according to him, are critical parts of the organisation. According to Argyris, Individual behaviour, small group behaviour and inter-group behaviour represent important parts that help to create the whole. Argyris is also critical of Herbert Simon's rational man organisation theory. According to him, Simon's theory excludes variables of interpersonal relations, the need for self-actualisation, etc, which are central to organisation behaviour. Further, he criticises Simon's reliance on the descriptive-empirical approach, mechanisms of organisational influence and his concept of satisfying man, being contradictory. Argyris accuses Simon and other traditional administrative thinkers for supporting authoritarian structures, for paying little attention to anger, conflict and emotional feelings of the employee towards the organisation and its goals.

11.8 A Critical Evaluation

Chris Argyris and his ideas have been criticised on several grounds. First Argyris' concept of self-actualisation is being regarded as utopia and without any precise operational indicators. Simon treats self-actualisation as synonymous with anarchy. He has not empirically supported Argyris' contention that people in organisations are opposed to authority. On the other hand, it is maintained that people in the organisation accept its authority and its goals because such acceptance is consistent with their values. Argyris' proposition that the pursuit of the goal of self-actualisation is a universalistic goal has also been questioned. Many may not like to self-actualise themselves and may feel satisfied under situations of directive leadership.

Chris Argyris has advocated for job enlargement and T-group sessions for increasing interpersonal competence. This remedial approach seems myopic in nature and cannot get to the root of the problem so long as the basic conflict of interests between the employers and employees exists. Rather these techniques cannot serve better than maintaining the status quo.

Argyris holds that management philosophy has moved from the initially developed emphasis on scientific management to an emphasis on people and human relations. In fact, an effective management requires the right combination of both the approaches. Only then a judicious blend between the structural and the human dimensions of organisation can be brought about. He predicts that the policies that require people to be friendly will turn into policies that permit freedom for people to dislike as well as to be friendly. He further observes that the belief that superiors can

develop subordinates to be more skilful in interpersonal competence will no more be true since none can develop anyone else except himself. The responsibility of management is not to develop people. It is to develop the climate and opportunities for self-development.

Thus, according to Argyris, what is needed is a philosophy of management that views individual and the organisation not only as interrelated but actually as interpenetrating phenomena. He advocates a philosophy of management where the individuals and the organisation have a right to lead a healthy life.

11.9 Conclusion

Argyris suggests an intervention strategy for organisation development in four core areas. Firstly, the organisation should provide an environment for the development of the individual towards personal or psychological maturity. Secondly, a programme for organisation change should aim at improving the interpersonal competence of the employees. Thirdly, changes must be introduced to transform the traditional pyramidal form of organisation. Fourthly, techniques for programmed learning aimed at individual change should be introduced.

According to Argyris, the present organisational strategies developed and used by administrators lead to authoritarianism, dehumanisation and organisational decay. His objective has been to increase organisational health and improve interpersonal competence. He advocates a basic change in organisations to provide an appropriate environment for self-realisation. Gordon Lippitt observes that the greatest contribution of Argyris lies in his idea that 'formal organisations are basically anti-maturing and therefore, act against employees achieving a sense of self-actualisation.

11.10 Key Concepts

Inter-Organisational Network: Patterns of relationships within and among various groups and organisation working in a single policy area.

Norms: The socially enforced requirements and expectations about basic responsibilities, behaviour, and thought patterns of members in their organisational roles.

Supporting System: Network of people with whom one can talk about problems.

Two Factors Theory: Model of motivation involving two variables: Job Satisfaction and Job Dissatisfaction.

11.11 References and Further Reading

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11.12 Activities

Q.1 Explain the Chris Argyris propositions about the impact of formal organisation on the individuals.

Q.2 Critically evaluate Chris Argyris views on human personality and its impact on the working of organisation.