"*Theories-in-use are Means*…"

Concepts and Ideas from Donald Schön and Chris Argyris

Schema of Theory of Action

- A theory of action is a set of interconnected propositions that have the same referent (the subject of the theory)

- In situation S, if you want to achieve consequence C, under assumptions a_1, a_2, a_3, … a_n; do action A

- Theories are vehicles for explanation, prediction or control.

Theory-in-use

- "*… existing theories people have that already determine practice. We called these operational theories of action* theories-in-use *to distinguish them from the* espoused *theories that are used to describe and justify behavior.*"

- "*Their theories-in-use help them remain blind to the actual degree of their ineffectiveness.*"

Theory-in-use, Assumptions and Everyday Life

- "… *the full set of assumptions about human behavior that function in the theories-in-use constitutes a psychology of everyday life.*"

- "*The psychology, physics, or sociology of everyday life may differ from contemporary formal psychology, physics, or sociology.* "

- "*The sciences of everyday life may have more in common with the formal psychology of a generation ago…*"

Theory-in-use in Professional Life

- *"There is a theory-in-use of building design (for architects),*

- *a theory-in-use for diagnosis and treatment of disease (for physicians), and*

- *a theory-in-use of the planning of cities (for urban planners)."*

- *"Theories-in-use are means for getting what we want."*

How to Make Theories-in-use Visible

- "*We must construct someone's theory-in-use from observations of his behavior.*"

- "*… general characteristics,*
  - *the governing variables,*
  - *the action strategies, and*
  - *the principal assumptions*…"

Clues for Discovering the Theories-in-use

1. Reconstruct the Espoused Theory and/or the Action Strategy

2. Look for the assumptions through the "Chain of Whys"

3. Look for the relations among the assumptions.

4. Discover the governing variables of the Espoused Theory and/or the action.

5. Construct the Theory-in-use based on these elements.

Requirements for discovering the Theories-in-use

- Internal commitment with discovery

- Public testing of theory, assumptions and data

- Clear distinction between the self and the assumptions (non-defensiveness)

- Look for valid information

- Aptitude for reframing