



Organizational Traps: Leadership, Culture, Organizational Design

By Chris Argyris

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Anyone who has spent time in an organization knows that dysfunctional behavior abounds. Conflict is frequently avoided or pushed underground rather than dealt with openly. At the same time, the same arguments often burst out again and again, almost verbatim. Turf battles continue for extended periods without resolution. People nod their heads in agreement in meetings, and then rush out of the room to voice complaints to sympathetic ears in private. Worst of all, when people are asked if things will ever change, they throw up their hands in despair. They feel like victims trapped in an asylum.

And people often are trapped. But they are not trapped by some oppressive regime or organizational structure that has been imposed on them. They are not victims. In fact, people themselves are responsible for making the status quo so resistant to change. We are trapped by our own behavior.

Researchers and practitioners have often reflected on these things, but there is a puzzle. On the one hand, there is substantial agreement that these traps are counterproductive to effective performance. On the other hand, there is almost no focus on how organizational traps can be prevented or reduced.

This book argues that whatever theory is used to describe and understand such organizational traps should be used to design and implement interventions that reduce and prevent them. Argyris is one of the world's leading management scholars whose work has consistently shed light on organizational problems. This book is essential reading for MBAs, managers, and consultants.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Argyris has once again challenged my thinking, theories and advice. Despite an explosion of books and articles about how to lead, improve organizational effectiveness, and change culture, we continue to see well intentioned and competent leaders embroiled in personal and organizational failures. Using decades of research, Argyris shows us the problem: our theories and advice ignore or bypass the hard truth; people avoid conversations that will help them learn about gaps between their intention to change and reality. Argyris argues that this well documented truth must be incorporated in our theories if they are to be robust and make a sustained difference. And leaders must insist we do if they are to avoid spending millions on flawed advice."--Michael Beer, Chairman, *TruePoint*, and Professor Emeritus, Harvard Business School

"It is rare for a serious management book to be a real page-turner, but this one is. Drawing on fascinating cases from a lifetime of research on group and organizational dynamics, Chris Argyris shows how our own reasoning processes entrap us in patterns of behavior that we detest but cannot change. He explains how these traps become self-sealing and why even our best efforts to escape them merely tighten their bonds. The provocative strategy he offers for breaking out of our self-created traps merits close attention by anyone who seeks to improve life and work in organizations."--J. Richard Hackman, Edgar Pierce Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology, Harvard University

"For over half a century, Chris Argyris has been helping those who are willing to reflect on their own behavior to become more effective. This latest work is his clearest elucidation yet of why we fall into the traps that stymie us and how we can author our own escapes. And while he is at it, he provides wise counsel on how to audit the logic of those who purport to tell us the secrets of leadership."--Roger Martin, Dean, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

"Chris Argyris is a master of revealing the universal dysfunctionalities of organizations and the challenges of dealing with them. Here he picks up the theme of Organizational Traps and successfully links them to issues of leadership, culture, and organizational design. Once again Argyris offers us insights in how to understand and tackle them."--Andrew M Pettigrew OBE, FBA, Professor of Strategy and Organization, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

About the Author

Chris Argyris is the James Conant Professor of Education and Organizational Behavior Emeritus at Harvard University. He has consulted to numerous private and governmental organizations. He has received many awards including thirteen honorary degrees and Lifetime's Contributions Awards from the Academy of

Management, American Psychological Association, and American Society of Training Directors. His most recent books are, *Flawed Advice and the Management Trap* (OUP, 1999), and *Reasons and Rationalizations* (OUP, 2004). A chair professorship was established in 1994 at Yale University. He is a Director Emeritus of Monitor Group.

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