

'Action Philosophy': Philosophical Inquiry, Professional Development and Organizational Change

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Abstract

In the present paper, I will explore whether and in what sense philosophical inquiry can be deployed in organizations as a pedagogical vehicle to promote reflective professionalism and a learning-oriented approach to organizational practices. This investigation will unfold in two steps: first, it will be argued that the contemporary “practical turn” in philosophy has enabled us to rediscover its intimate relationship with education and, thereby, has turned it into a possible pivot for the reconstruction of organizational practices; and, secondly, rather than reading “philosophy in organizations” from the perspective of philosophical counselling I will propose a pedagogical hypothesis that dovetails – under the aegis of the thought of John Dewey – Donald Schön and Chris Argyris’s theory of action with Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp’s approach of the community of philosophical inquiry. I will maintain that the latter may represent a major resource to promote a transformation of the meaning perspectives of organizations and of practitioners therein working along the lines indicated by Schön and Argyris.

1. Introduction

One of the first signs of the emergence of a philosophy of/for management can be traced back to the 1980s when a special issue on the topic appeared in the journal *Human System Management* (Cecchinato, 2004: 22). Over the ensuing decades the notion of a philosophy of/for management has lost its trait of being a simple academic conjecture and has become a reality in many contexts according to different approaches (Vitullo, 2007; Vegleris, 2008; Rovatti, 2009: 55-95), although doubts continue to obtain both on the part of business organizations and of many experts in philosophy.

Without exploring further these controversies, the aim of the present contribution is that of addressing two intimately interlaced themes: first, I endeavour to indicate how deploying philosophy within organizations requires a rethinking of philosophy itself, which should be reinterpreted as a *practice of thinking* rather than as a simple theoretical undertaking and this reconsideration of its status goes hand in hand – and, indeed, is co-extensive – with a rediscovery of the close tie between philosophy and education; and, secondly, by drawing upon the affinities between Schön’s (1983, 1987) model of reflective rationality (and the related theory of action elaborated by Argyris [1993]) and the notion of complex thinking developed by Matthew Lipman (2003), I plan to suggest that the community of philosophical inquiry (henceforth CPI) approach can be marshalled in order to promote reflective professionalism and to operate that shift from Model I to Model II which Argyris and Schön [1978] have

pointed to as pivotal to reduce inefficacy in organizations. In this sense, I will speak of a sort of 'action philosophy' (with a nod to Argyris, Putnam and Smith [1985]) which aims at contributing to the overcoming of the barriers to organizational change and, thereby, to the boosting of professional efficacy.

2. Philosophical practice and the pedagogy of organizations

Reflecting on "Philosophy, Science and Managerialism," Gianluca Bocchi (2005) has situated the practical turn in philosophy at the crossroads of two historical processes. First, there is the tendential danger of a loss of meaning of philosophy: after being for centuries the crowning summit of science and/or the super-discipline, whose task was that of synthesizing and bringing to unity the different domains of knowledge, increasingly diverging in hyper-specialization, it has been experiencing an erosion of its prestige precisely on account of this specialization, insofar as the individual disciplines have appropriated the different fields once belonging to philosophy and the latter has been reduced to a specialized subject matter among others. Without yearning for its old-fashioned primacy, Bocchi insinuates that philosophy can still have a role in connecting different domains of knowledge and in analyzing the practices of knowing: "[T]he epistemological reflection typical of philosophy may turn out to be an indispensable partner for a variety of practices – professional and proper to knowing – insofar as, being situated at a different level of generality and operating as an interface, it enables worlds and languages, which are different from each other, to interact with each other" (Bocchi, 2005: XIII).

The second process is the "misalignment of the specialization of knowledge and the complexification of human systems" (Ibid.: XIII) that nurtures "an extreme need for frameworks, interconnections which support also educational choices" (Ibid.: XV). Indeed, the fragmentation of knowledge and the obtaining, within educational practices, of a self-referential and mono-disciplinary rationality (Morin, 2000, 2001) prevent individuals from understanding and 'managing' complexity and they foster, in contrast, epistemological attitudes marked by reductionism, which are inadequate for existential constellations characterized by the widening of networks and the multiplication of interdependencies. In the light of this scenario, Bocchi's (2005: XV) ingenious conclusion is that "the encounter of philosophy with professional and educational practices [is] very fruitful precisely because it faces two different but equally important crises: the crisis of education in the age of globalization and technology and the crisis of philosophy itself in an era of deep secularization and transformation of knowledge and practices."

It is crucial to situate Bocchi's remarks in a perspective which does not defuse their potential: laying an emphasis upon the task of philosophy as the linking agent of knowledge does not mean assigning it a hierarchical role as if we were pursuing an updated version of the idea of absolute knowledge. We need rather to read this task through the memorable lens granted by John Dewey in *Experience and Nature*:

Over-specialization and division of interests, occupations and goods create the need for a generalized medium of intercommunication, of mutual criticism through all-around translation from one separated region of experience into another. Thus philosophy as a critical organ becomes in effect a messenger, a liaison officer, making reciprocally

intelligible voices speaking provincial tongues, and thereby enlarging as well as rectifying the meanings with which they are charged (Dewey, 1981: 306).

Philosophy is not, therefore, superior but transversal in relation to the other disciplines: as a form of radical questioning of the assumptions of knowledge, it goes through the other subject matters and makes their mutual ‘translatability’ possible. Philosophy is criticism in the Deweyan acceptance of the word, viz. an examination of beliefs (Dewey, 1984a: 164): it does not produce the content of knowledge which it addresses insofar as “[t]he beliefs themselves are social products, social facts and social forces” (*Ibidem*; see also Oliverio, 2012, 2018).

This has one more implication: philosophical inquiry so understood is not performed in a sort of speculative-theoreticist aseity but it is immersed in social settings and linked with experience. Thus, philosophy acts as a specific *practice of inquiry* in order to improve, fine-tune and modify habits of behaviour through the examination, clarification and evaluation of beliefs, which – according to the pragmatist view – are not merely mental contents but what structures and orients our dealings with the world.

In this sense, *philosophy is constitutively a formative-educational practice*. This idea is recognised also by the most perceptive epistemology of philosophical practices, even if it sometimes acquires a peculiar spin that needs to be highlighted and objected to:

In the 20th century, philosophy saw science as its exclusive rival, of which it had to be wary and with which it had to undertake a trench warfare [...] This close relationship was built upon a presupposition, not always made explicit and rarely justified, viz. the idea that philosophy, like science, has as its exclusive aim the production of true discourses about the nature of reality [...] *philosophy seems to have ignored that which, from a different viewpoint, seems to be its most ancient and direct rival, namely the sciences of education*. The ideal of philosophy as *paideia* has, in reality, continued to be practised until our times, albeit in minor and less visible forms [...] In this capacity, philosophy recognizes its nature as transformative knowing, which aims at making a real process of self-transformation of individuals possible (Contesini et al., 2005: 66-67. Emphasis added).

This a significant passage which deserves comment: first, a Deweyan outlook is apparent in it when understanding philosophy not as knowledge production but transformative knowing. Thus, philosophy does not operate at the same level as the sciences not because it is superior to them but rather because it has a different intentionality, namely transforming individuals and their dealings with reality through altering their system of beliefs thanks to their critical examination. Moreover, the identification of a long history linking together philosophy and education is well detected. And yet, the general perspective (and some terminological choices) of the aforementioned passage show some limitations of its views: by adopting the vocabulary of rivalry the author sets up an antagonism between philosophy as practice and education, which is supposed to be parallel to that between philosophy and science, whereas – sticking to the Deweyan understanding, still the most promising – we should rather speak of a circuit. Indeed, on the one hand, philosophy is

the general theory of education; the theory of which education is the corresponding art or practice. Three interlinked considerations support this statement: (i) Men’s interests manifest their dispositions; (ii) these dispositions are formed by education; (iii) there must

be a general idea of the value and relations of these interests if there is to be any guidance of the process of forming the dispositions that lie back of the realization of the interests (Dewey, 1979: 303).

We should not see, therefore, in education a rival but rather an activity by courtesy of which philosophy is redeemed from its remoteness from life and its connivance with what Dewey used to call *epistemological industry*. The structural coupling of philosophy and education is confirmed, according to Dewey, also by a historical consideration:

After a period in Greece in which inquiry was devoted to inquiry into nature, with man subordinated, philosophy turned in Athens to the study of Man. Socrates, as the saying goes, brought philosophy down from the heavens to earth. It is often forgotten that this change coincided with an interest in education; it was indeed an outgrowth of interest in the possibilities of education in its large sense (Dewey, 1984b: 289).

On the other hand, if philosophy (and, thus, education as its *corresponding practice*) must not be reduced to the sciences, it is not allowed, however, to recoil from a constant dialogue with the most advanced scientific knowledge (see Oliverio, 2012). In the meritorious effort to grant epistemological substance to philosophical practices (see also Volpone, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006), the author of the aforementioned passage, while making many Deweyan moves, seems to want to disentangle his Deweyan positions from any connection with an educational-pedagogical horizon strictly understood, whereas in the perspective here endorsed it is precisely in that connection that there lie the roots of Dewey's innovations also at the level of the 'purely' logical-epistemological reflection. To put it bluntly, only within a dialogue with education (and educational theory) can philosophy gain a clear view of its status as *that practice of inquiry which aims at the transformation of dispositions and behavioural habits, thereby fostering more meaningful transactions with the world*. If it is separated from educational theory – through an interpretive move which is fundamentally anti-Deweyan – we risk re-consigning it to the theoreticist retreat from which we wanted to rescue it. The connection with educational theory is not any *deminutio capitis* of philosophy but rather the springboard to its reviviscence as a transformative practice and to the recovery of the tradition which connected it with *paideia*. It is important to highlight, moreover, that the dialogue should take place with educational theory. It is significant that the author of the passage speaks of "sciences of education." It is not merely a terminological slip: to put it better, even if this is the case – which is the likeliest conjecture as far as the *intentio auctoris* is concerned – it spotlights a most relevant issue: if there is no clear awareness of the specific characteristics of educational theory (as distinct from – even if connected with – the sciences of education) as a discipline which has in formative education as *Bildung* its specific subject matter, it is impossible to make full sense of the value of philosophy as a vector of transformation of individuals and contexts.

In other words and as a recapitulation of the unfolding of the argumentation thus far: in order for philosophy to recover its role of coordination and mutual translation of social discourses and knowing practices, it needs to abandon its academic retreat (academic being understood in an etymological meaning: see Cosentino & Oliverio, 2011; Cosentino, 2008) and to rethink of itself as a practice of critical inquiry into social beliefs and of transformation of individual and collective worlds. However, this task cannot be undertaken unless within the horizon of

a dialogue with educational theory as the domain of investigation of and reflection on the process of formative education (*Bildung*).

For fundamental reasons – linked with the deep changes occurring in our times – business organizations constitute an elective site where this dialogue can take place. Indeed, therein the individual experiences a privileged realm of action (Contesini et al., 2005: 50) in the Arendtian (1958) sense of that sphere of existence wherein the human being manifests her/his capability of taking initiative and bringing new beginnings into the world (see also Biesta, 2006). In this reading, organizations are – or, to put it more accurately, can be – a space where not only *homo laborans* or *homo faber* but also *homo agens* flourish and, thereby, a site of integral personal realization. In order for this to happen, however, we need organizations which valorize all the possibilities involved in the ongoing processes of change in the workplace and establish a new regime of relationships between work, knowledge production, learning and training, as suggested by an Italian educationalist:

The recognition that, in the modern economy, work is mainly cognitive rather than energetic, intellectual and symbolic rather than physical and manual, the awareness that knowledge is the primary factor of production and the conviction that the economic development depends on the way in which knowledge is generated, accumulated and disseminated and that the very equipment of any organization lies in the treasured and available knowledge [should] stimulate those who have managerial responsibilities [...] to foster the transition from the accumulation of knowledge to its production/acquisition/reproduction/dissemination/fruition on the part of the organizational actors. In this sense, learning [...] is marked as the fundamental experience for any policy which aims at organizational change and growth [...]. Through knowledge and education, the actors can see their energies mobilized in view of the acquisition and development of their professionalism and, thereby, they can make themselves the protagonists of an effective participation in and a creative contribution to the change and innovation of the contexts within which they operate (Rossi, 2008: 197-199).

In this area of convergence of philosophy as a practice and “pedagogy of organizations” it is possible, therefore, to find the domain wherein philosophy can recover its role and significance and professional training can be redeemed from the technical and depersonalizing drifts which often plague it.

3. Reflective rationality, complex thinking and organizational learning

Thus far, the argumentation has unfolded at an epistemological level and has endeavoured to show how far the deployment of philosophy within organizations may not be a fashionable occurrence or a curiosity but it may represent the sign of a broader phenomenon which regards the very meaning of philosophy in contemporary scenarios. From this perspective what Dewey (1980) would call “the recovery of philosophy” takes place by virtue of a practical turn which redeems philosophical inquiry from its theoreticist isolation and makes it the pivot of the intelligent reconstruction of social practices. This re-thinking of the mission of philosophy has encountered a coeval change in organizations, which should be construed less through the mechanistic metaphor of the machine than as a realm of action, in the Arendtian acceptance introduced above. Accordingly, the encounter between philosophy and organizations does

not (or more cautiously should not) imply either the functionalization of philosophy or an alleged (chimeric if not ludicrous) ‘philosophication’ of management but it relies on the conviction that philosophical inquiry as the practice of an examination of beliefs can operate as an ally to the organizations once they need to become “learning organizations.” I take this idea from Donald Schön (1973) who spoke of a condition “beyond the stable state”:

The loss of the stable state means that our society and all of its institutions are in *continuing* processes of transformation. We cannot expect new stable states that will endure even for our own lifetimes. We must learn to understand, guide, influence and manage these transformations. We must make the capacity for undertaking them integral to ourselves and to our institutions. We must, in other words, become adept at learning. We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are ‘learning systems’, that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation (Schön, 1973: 30).

This means that the alliance between philosophy and organizations happens under the aegis of education (and educational theory): it is education which acts as an interface between philosophy, as the practice of inquiry into the systems of beliefs of individuals and collective groups, and organizations. For this reason, at the end of the previous section, I have spoken – via an Italian educationalist – of a “pedagogy of organizations.”

Leaving the plane of epistemological reflection (but maintaining it in the background of the following development of the argumentation), I will now advance the hypothesis of a specific pedagogical approach in which the aforementioned alliance can be embodied. In particular, I will explore the possibility of revisiting Donald Schön’s idea of reflective professionalism (and his and Chris Argyris’s ideas about organizational change) through the lens of the CPI methodology devised by Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp.

The comparison Schön-Lipman is interesting, first of all, from a historical-theoretical viewpoint: both were deeply immersed in a Deweyan paradigm and drew upon the latter’s model of inquiry as a source of inspiration (Schön, 1992; Lipman, 2003; see also Daniel, 1997). Moreover, in the same period (in the 1970s and 1980s) but apparently ignoring each other, both honed conceptual and methodological tools along parallel lines in order to cope with the demands of reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens and Lasch, 1994) in reference to domains very remote from each other (respectively, the education of professionals and that of children and adolescents). There is a sort of family resemblance in their conceptual devices – ultimately rooted in the common heritage of Dewey’s (1986) logic as a theory of inquiry – and this may act as a springboard to a hypothesis of “pedagogical contamination,” in which the Lipmanian methodology can be serviceable to pursue Schönian goals¹. Without being able to develop here a systematic analysis of the two conceptual devices, I will confine myself to portraying in broad strokes their salient features and their areas of convergence.

Donald Schön (1983, 1987) provided a specific interpretation of the crisis of the professions which started in the 1950s but fully exploded in the 1980s. This crisis regarded the social

¹ The contamination can be obviously undertaken the other way round and Schönian theories can be deployed in order to understand better the innovations in the pedagogical practice promoted by Lipman. This is, however, an argumentative trajectory that goes beyond the scope of the present paper.

legitimization of the professions and consisted in a sort of breaking of the deal between society and the professionals: the former used to grant to the latter a certain status because they were specialists whose expertise was deemed to be essential for the workings of the social machinery. However, in the second half of the last century, a mounting distrust of the professionals began to spread and this resulted in their decreasing self-reliance. Schön is not interested in a sociological but in an epistemological explanation of this phenomenon: what came into crisis was fundamentally a certain idea of professional knowledge. This idea is dubbed by Schön technical rationality and it is deemed to be inadequate to make sense of how the most effective professionals operate in the swamps of practice, to adopt Schön's famous metaphor. Indeed, technical rationality relies upon a tacit assumption, viz. that the issues in professional practice which will be encountered are already definite and clear in their problematic contours and that the work of the practitioner boils down to deploying her/his specialist knowledge – theories and techniques – to address them. In this sense, technical rationality assumes that the goals are already given and that what needs to be done is merely to identify the most effective means to achieve those ends. The activity of practitioners would be, thus, simple problem solving: problems are already 'there' but also the solutions are in principle already given (in the 'manuals' understood as the metaphor for the system of theories and techniques that are available in a professional domain). To adopt a phrase of Thomas Kuhn (1996), the practitioner of technical rationality is a puzzle solver, s/he works within a paradigm which s/he takes for granted and in which one may postulate that any problems which arise have in principle a solution.

It is this view of professionalism which comes into crisis, as Schön argues, for a fundamental reason: what practitioners encounter are not definite problematic situations (to which equally definite solutions would correspond) but indeterminate, unique and conflictual situations with the result that the practitioner is not, first of all, a problem solver but rather a problem setter: her/his first task is that of setting the problem. Accordingly, instead of referring to a technical-instrumental model of rationality, Schön invites us to draw upon the Deweyan view of inquiry. Immersed in the swamps of practice the professional is required not simply to apply knowledge (=theories and techniques) but to develop an inquiry, understood as "the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole" (Dewey, 1986: 108). This means taking leave of technical rationality and embracing reflective rationality (see also Striano, 2001; Striano, Melacarne and Oliverio, 2018). The question is, therefore, that of outlining and implementing educational devices which promote the development of habits of inquiry within professional contexts.

I would like to suggest that the Schönian demand for a shift to reflective rationality can fruitfully be construed in terms of Lipman's notion of complex and multidimensional thinking (with the three dimensions of critical, creative and caring thinking: see Lipman, 2003; Santi and Oliverio, 2012). At the very centre of Lipman's theory there is the notion of judgement. This is crucial: indeed, in order not to succumb to technical rationality, practitioners need to operate by exercising their judgement and must not confine themselves to the application of standard theories and techniques, insofar as exercising judgement means taking into account the context-sensitivity of the adopted criteria and rules and being ready for what Lipman (2003) would call self-correction (context-sensitivity and self-correction belonging to the dimension of critical thinking). Moreover, as practitioners encounter situations which are

unique and indeterminate, they need capacities of inventiveness, originality and innovation in order to cope with ever-changing constellations of practice. In this respect, they need abilities of creative thinking. Finally, as the practitioner cannot rely upon standardized techniques and just apply them but s/he has to evaluate how far the hypothesized solution may be adequate, s/he needs abilities of caring, viz. appreciative-active thinking (Lipman, 2003: 264 ff.).

Such a translation of the competences of a Schönian reflective practitioner in the Lipmanian vocabulary does not imply a perfect matching of the two perspectives but it indicates the possibility of their compatibility and, thereby, it strengthens the conjecture that we may deploy CPI in order to educate reflective practitioners (in organizations). In this sense, philosophy would go to the business organizations (to harp on the title of a volume of Lipman [1988]) not in the form of philosophical counselling or Socratic dialogue (Cecchinato, 2004) but in that of the practice of reflectivity which enables individuals to revise their meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). In this reading, philosophical inquiry would work as an agent of transformative learning and CPIs could be set side by side with Action Learning Conversations (Marsick and Davis-Manigaulte, 2011) as pedagogical vehicles in order to educate professionals for the radical questioning of their assumptions through which they make sense of their work experience within organizations.

This translation of reflective professionalism into the Lipmanian horizon could allow us to counter some misgivings that have been raised about the way in which the reflective paradigm has been actually realized in practice (Bradbury et al., 2010). It has been argued that the reflective turn has experienced a process of technicization which has given rise to practices marked by a view of learning which is individualistic, “idealist” (Frost, 2010) – to the extent that learning is taken as something occurring in the head of the practitioner –, “theoreticist” (Billett and Newton, 2010) – to the extent that the professional’s learning should take place outside the actual practice of work –, and “procedure-oriented” (Boud, 2010) – to the extent that many educators specialized in professional development tend to ‘proceduralize’ reflection through the use of checklists and other standardized ‘recipes’ (Zukas et al., 2010).

Against the backdrop of these concerns, designing sessions of CPI within organizations as a site where to investigate the assumptions that govern one’s own professional action, can contribute not only to developing reflective rationality but to doing it in such a way that the aforementioned drifts (individualist, idealist, theoreticist, and procedure-oriented) are defused. Indeed, thanks to its pragmatist matrix, CPI is a plural setting, in which inquiry is undertaken in a cooperative way and does not happen in the head of the individual but in the space of what has been called “the intersubject” (Kennedy, 2004; Oliverio, 2020); and, as far as the presuppositions on which procedures rely are questioned, it wards off the risk that procedures turn into inert routines.

There is one more respect in which CPI can operate as a means to attain Schönian goals. One of the most relevant contributions of Schön, in cooperation with Chris Argyris, to organizational studies has been their theory of action and the identification of two Models. Their point of departure is the definition of what a “theory of action” is:

Theories of action are governed by a set of values that provide the framework for the action strategies chosen. Thus, human beings are designing beings. They create, store, and retrieve designs that advise them how to act if they are to achieve their intentions and act

consistently with their governing values. These designs, or theories of action, are the key to understanding human action (Argyris, 1993 : 50-51).

Argyris, Schön and their collaborators arrive at the identification of two kinds of theories of action:

One was the theory that individuals espoused and that composed their beliefs, attitudes, and values. The second was their *theories-in-use*—the theory that they actually employed. We did not expect that individuals would customarily design and implement a theory-in-use that was significantly different from their espoused theory, nor did we expect them to be unaware of the inconsistency when the theories they espoused and used were different. Therefore, it was a major surprise—given our view of human beings as designing organisms—to find out that there are often fundamental, systematic mismatches between individuals’ espoused and in-use designs. [...] The second major surprise was that, although espoused theories varied widely, there was almost no variance in theories-in-use (Ibid. : 51).

Against this backdrop, Argyris and Schön have outlined the main features of the two models: the theories-in-use of Model I are marked by four values governing action (“1. Achieve your intended purposes; 2. Maximize winning and minimize losing; 3. Suppress negative feelings; 4. Behave according to what you consider rational” (Ibid.: 52). I cannot dwell here upon a more detailed discussion of this model but I will confine myself to highlighting its complicity with technical rationality, to the extent that, on the one hand, it disempowers the possibility for real inquiry to take place (maximizing victories and minimizing defeats imply being unready to recognize those “surprises” (in Schön’s parlance) that go counter to our established frameworks and appeal to their revision); and, on the other, it emphasizes an instrumental rationality (it is along these lines that the adjective “rational” in the fourth value governing action should be interpreted).

When this model obtains – and it is perhaps the most widespread one – organizations turn into systems of “single-loop learning,” ruled by a defensive routine which “prevents organizational participants from experiencing embarrassment or threat and, at the same time, prevents them from discovering the causes of the embarrassment or threat” (Ibid.: 53). There is a deep solidarity between a defensive routine – making organizations incapable of processes of inquiry and learning – and Model I:

Organizational defensive routines are caused by a circular, self-reinforcing process in which individuals’ Model I theories-in-use produce individual strategies of bypass and cover-up, which result in organizational bypass and cover-up, which reinforce the individuals’ theories-in-use. The explanation of organizational defensive routines is therefore individual *and* organizational. This means that it should not be possible to change organizational routines without changing individual routines, and vice versa (*Ibidem*).

From this perspective, « [t]he challenge is to help individuals transform their espoused theories into theories-in-use by learning a ‘new’ set of skills and a ‘new’ set of governing values” (Ibid., 54).

Argyris is here speaking of a kind of learning that we could define as “transformative” (Mezirow, 1991) and, in order to promote it, we need educational interventions that foster inquiry (Argyris and Schön, 1978). The pedagogical hypothesis here advanced is that the practice of philosophical inquiry within CPIs can contribute to realizing the shift from Model I to Model II. I would like to suggest, in conclusion, three reasons which underpin this hypothesis and seem to recommend CPI as one of the educational strategies to cultivate reflectiveness in the organization, especially when the issue of a shift from Model I to Model II is at stake: first, as it is pivotal to intervene on beliefs, values and attitudes, a setting like CPI can grant the opportunity, on the one hand, to unearth the web of hidden assumptions and, on the other, to examine it. Secondly, as the desired transformation should occur fundamentally at the level of the values governing action, a kind of radical questioning like the philosophical one allows us to operate precisely at that level that is most significant to activate a transformation of meaning perspectives. And thirdly, as it is important to cultivate behavioural habits which are attuned to Model II (and therefore such as they are inspired to confutable processes, frequent control of theories and interpersonal relationships and group dynamics not intoxicated by defensive attitudes) a practice like that of CPI can turn out to be particularly effective in order to overcome the barriers to the co-construction of knowledge and to learning and, thereby, to reduce organizational inefficacy: indeed, in CPI participants co-construct the concepts which are necessary to make sense of the theme under discussion, they assume a fallibilist attitude and they pursue self-correctiveness as a criterion of ‘success’ (which is opposite to the second value about the maximization of winning).

What has been proposed is admittedly a pedagogical hypothesis, which demands further investigations and also methodological clarifications, which have not been undertaken in this context (e.g. what stimuli to use for the sessions of philosophical inquiry within organizations? Are there in the history of philosophy topic that – operationalized as Lipman and Sharp did through their IAPC curriculum – can represent a store of themes to create materials specifically addressed to the organizational reality? How to integrate CPI as an educational approach with other forms of philosophy in the organization? How to integrate CPI as an educational approach with other educational devices to promote transformative learning (Fabbri and Romano, 2017)?

Experiences of CPI in the organizations for professional development already have taken place in Italy (Cosentino, 2006). The focus of this paper, however, has been on the endeavour to outline this educational proposal in such a way that its affinity with the efforts to promote reflective professionalism would be foregrounded (rather than with the vocabulary of “philosophical counselling”). ‘Action philosophy’, as I have called it with more than a grain of irony, will have the more opportunities of flourishing in future the more it will preserve a connection with educational interest and the pedagogy of organizations.

Keywords

Reflective practitioner; Reflective practitioner; Community of Philosophical Inquiry; Community of Philosophical Inquiry; Theory of Action; Theory of Action Complex Thinking; Complex Thinking; Matthew Lipman; Matthew Lipman; Donald Schön; Donald Schön Learning Organization

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