

## Reading Tips and Study Questions

### Session 9: Action learning and communities of practice

#### Required reading:

1. Chris Argyris, *Knowledge for Action* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), Introduction, pp.15-31, chapter 2, pp.98-99 ("Director's map).
2. Pp.4-25 in William Snyder and Xavier de Souza Briggs, "Communities of Practice: A New tool," IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2003 at [www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/Snyder\\_report.pdf](http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/Snyder_report.pdf)

#### Further reading

3. John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), chapter 5.
4. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (New York: Oxford, 1998).
5. Wenger et al., *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

#### Tips and questions

Thus far, we have focused primarily on policymaking settings and the broad "public arena," mostly ignoring the organizational settings in which managerial routines and practitioner discretion come into play. Yet these routines and settings are enormously important for understanding how systems produce and reproduce the "state of the world" that researchers (or those who employ research knowledge) may be eager to change.

Our core concepts this week are *action learning*, *actionable knowledge*, *defensive routines*, and *communities of practice*.

1. Why, according to **Argyris**, is much "applicable" knowledge unlikely to be "actionable"? Why might it be important for a researcher who seeks change to grapple with the distinction between Model I and Model II learning?
2. What do organized learning networks or "communities of practice" (CoPs), as they appear in **Snyder and Briggs**, add to the concept of actionable knowledge? What key limits might CoPs face as mechanisms for *using* learning to drive changes in practice or policy? Think about the politics of the policy process, for example. Are any of these limits evident in the Boost 4 Kids case?