



**Transitions for
Sustainable
Development**

Conceptualizing learning in sustainability transition initiatives

***A theoretical contribution to the assessment
of learning processes***

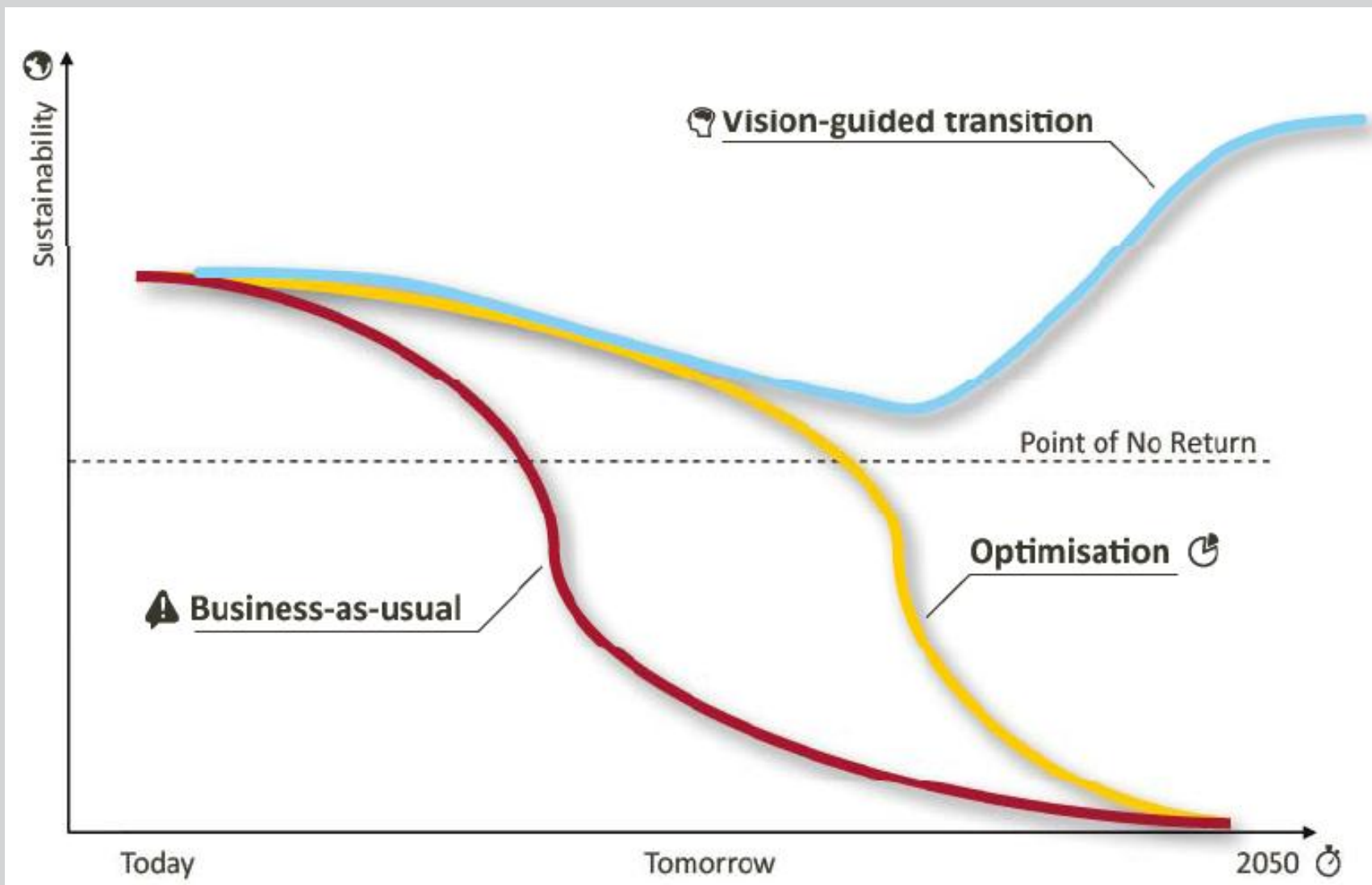
2nd European Environmental Evaluators' Network Conference

April 9, 2013

Matthias Bussels, Sander Happaerts & Hans Bruyninckx

- Policy research centre on sustainability transitions
- Objective: policy support through research
- Funded by Flemish government
- 4 year programme, 8 research streams
- Research stream 'monitoring & evaluation'

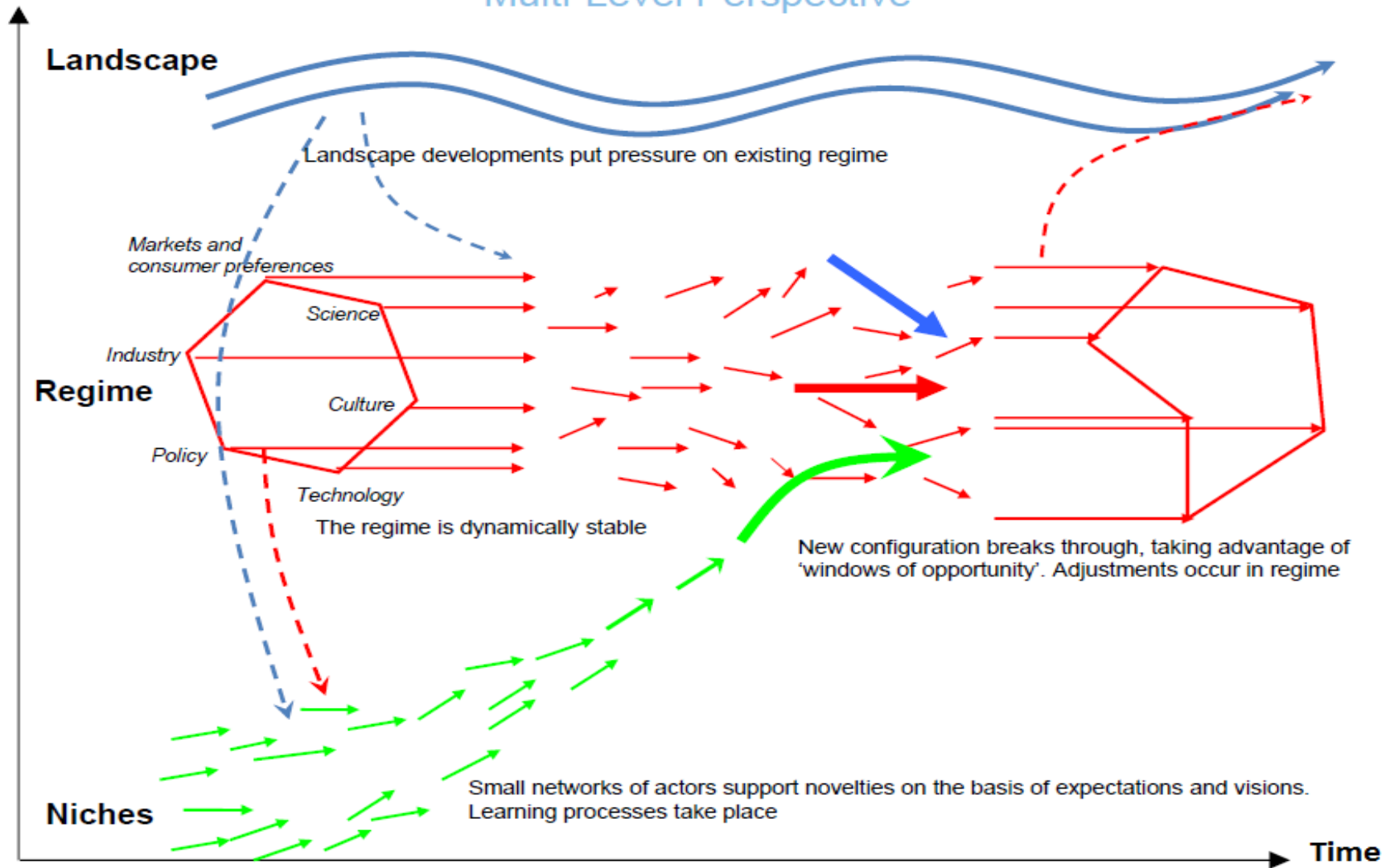
Sustainability transitions



VITO (2012)

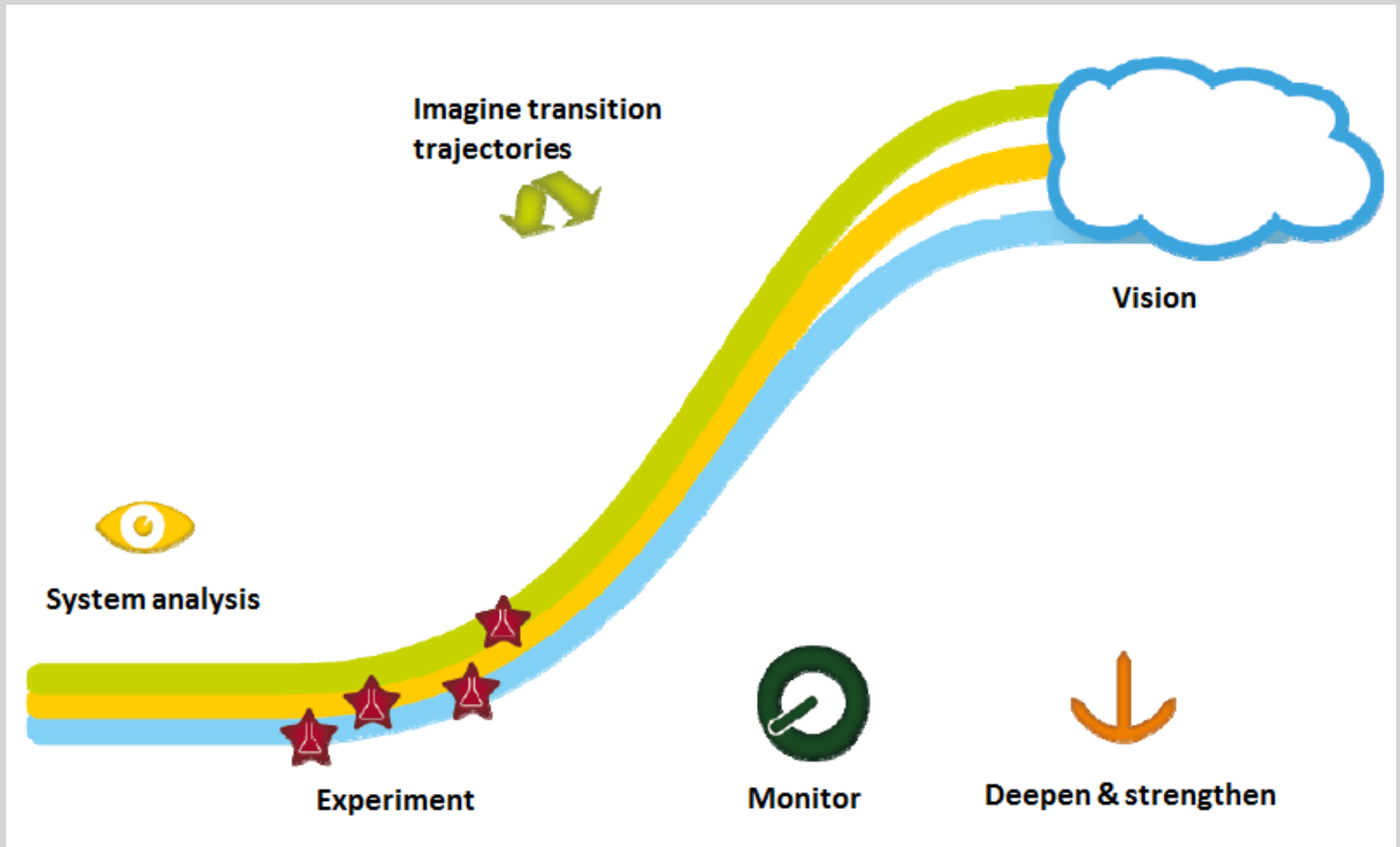
System transitions: the dynamics

Multi-Level Perspective



Based on Geels & Schot (2007)

Accelerating the shift: transition governance



VITO (s.d.)

TM-approach at Flemish level

- ‘Old’ wave: housing & living, waste management
- ‘New’ wave:
 - Flanders in Action: 13 transition initiatives
 - Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development: 6 (2 old, 4 new)
 - Integration between documents

Other levels

- Cities: Leuven, Ghent
- Other: civil society

How to accelerate the shift?

← organizing **sustainability transition initiatives**: exploratory multistakeholder forum

Focus

- Problem definition
- Sustainability
- Possible action: room to manouver
- Reflecting on own position
- Reflecting on network position

Process characteristics

- Open network
- Commitment: financial, time
- Long-term change
- Non-linear change
- Intense interaction
- Changing, resistant environment

M&E questions

- Accountability
- Impact & contribution
- Management
- Windows of opportunity
- Progress

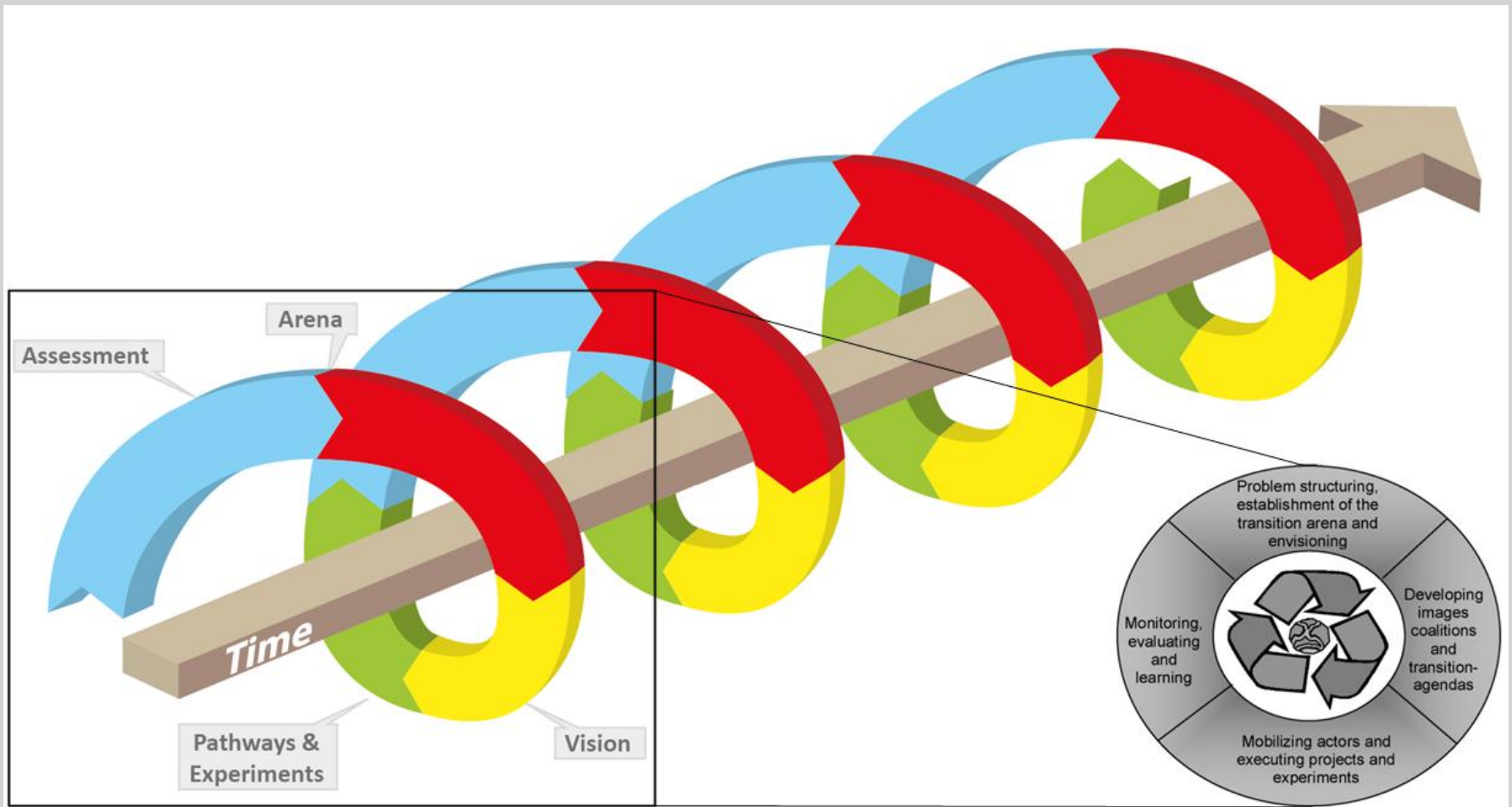
- Bressers (2011): impact as ‘alignment’ with context
- Taanman (forthcoming): management & coordination
- Van Mierlo (2010): social & reflexive learning

Similarities

Complexity-oriented, adaptability, monitoring vs. evaluation, learning

Learning to/for change

Centrality of learning in TM



Adapted from Loorbach & Rotmans (2010) and VITO (s.d.)

The many levels and guises of learning

Meso >< Macro

- Learning of STI as adaptability to changing environment: frontrunner status, sustainability
- Learning by organizations involved in STI

Meso level

- Learning *about* the intervention: how to optimize/manage (programme, experiment)?
- Learning *across* interventions: how to connect practices?
- How is learning in STIs shaped by the participants?

Micro level

- How and when do individuals learn, and adjust behaviour

The importance of actor constellation

Meso >< Macro

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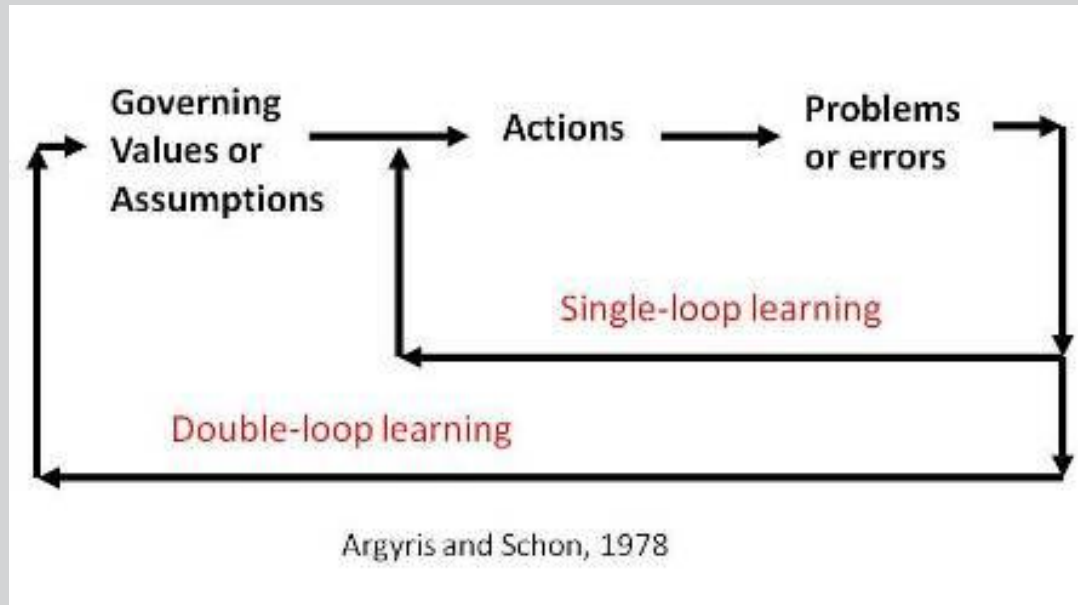
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Micro level

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Process: cognitive learning



- System innovation: second-order learning
- Hard to assess: familiarity with actors & settings
- Hard to achieve: measure of 'progress' (potential)
 - ← Interplay of actors

Outcome: learning consequences

- Sustainability: direction of learning
 - Transposition of second-order learning to context
 - ← Importance of actor's organizational identity
- cf. direct or indirect results of STI

Process

- Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity
 - Position in system (chain)
 - Visions, action theories, values
 - Influence/mandate
- Manoeuvrability: time & budget
- Ambition, sense of urgency
- Power relations

Outcome

- Position of individual within organization
- Position of organization within network