CHAPTER 6

Reading the Road with Different Maps

Øystein Rennemo

> "All meaningful knowledge shall serve *action* and all meaningful action shall serve friendship."
>
> Macmurray, 1957

I had the fortune of being one of MiL's learning coaches in the global management development program, The Edge, for the Volvo Group between May 2000 and May 2001. This was also the first management development program that involved all the different subsidiaries within Volvo, but it was based on experiences from a similar program at Volvo Truck Corporation (VTC), which MiL has coached since its start in 1990. The 30 or so participants from a number of countries and three continents, met physically three times in the whole program group (in South Korea, Mexico and Sweden) and another three times in the two project teams of the program. All together, this encompassed about 30 days. In addition, a considerable amount of time was spent both in smaller groups and individually, mainly dealing with the two business development projects the participants worked on. This was truly an extensive and a labor-intensive program.

It was a program with an unusual tough learning process which still managed to achieve a good outcome. In the final evaluations one can read about how contented the participants were, but they also indicate that there had been problems. Perhaps this can be expected since development deals with both resistance and pain. I would like to point out a fundamental relationship, which should be of interest for similar programs in the future. I also think it is of general value for Volvo as a large and global corporation as well as for MiL.

In the program there were strong collisions between different frameworks of understanding the world (referred as *frames* in the rest of the chapter). This involved the social actors, e.g., program participants and the Volvo managers, organizers from Volvo Learning Partner and MiL lear-ning coaches. It also involved material actors, e.g., The Volvo Way, The Global Leadership Model, The Learning Philosophy in Edge. It is obvious in this kind of program, with participants from many parts of the world, that one should let the diversity in knowledge, values and norms be a positive force in the learning situation. The obvious, however, is always connected to "what is known" or "what is known about the unknown". But what about the relationships that lie beyond our limits of what is the acknowledged "unknown"? What I would like to call attention to is:

1. That we experienced discrepancies in frames on which attention is seldom focused and which therefore are difficult to observe. I will describe these different ways of understanding the world and then go on to show the consequences for the participants and others in the program.

2. The strong recommendation that these kinds of programs should work to a large extent with *de-framing* (i.e., the dissolving of frames of understanding) as a process.

FRAMING AND DE-FRAMING

> A: We are missing the point!
>
> B: I think the opposite.
>
> A: We are afraid of making mistakes! It seems to be difficult for us to delegate.
>
> B: I don't know if it is a language problem or not, but sometimes it is difficult to follow you.
>
> Two Edge participants

For most of us, it is meaningful to say that we act and maneuver in our daily lives with the help of an inner map (frame), an understanding of how things are related. This understanding helps us to become good at maneuvering; we can make choices and decisions. On the other hand, when the question arises as to if this understanding is based on objectively true knowledge, and as such can give us permanent guidance, then science and we ourselves become more uncertain. Most modern science is based on a rational belief in objectivity, but supporters of the assumption that our knowledge has a far more limited scope are also many. They maintain that truth is a subjective quantity that is continuously being created in a constructive process bound to time and space.

In organizational theory, it has also become common to describe organizational behavior by using the metaphor of different “maps” or “eyeglasses”. When one changes glasses one focuses on different aspects of organizational life; different conditions stand out as more or less important. The books of Gareth Morgan (1986) and Bolman & Deal (1991) are well known on this subject. Both show how different organizational perspectives can be useful under different conditions and in different contexts. Morgan also shows how one of the perspectives has had a dominating position during certain periods and has been looked upon as “the truth”. Sometimes, the transition between these frames of understanding can be quite unclear and can overlap in some areas. At other times, though, they are so far apart that one makes use of the paradigm concept (Kuhn, 1970) to clarify the basic differences. We speak of paradigm shifts when we realize that considerably new ways of understanding the world have “arrived”.

We all have our opinions of how the world should be understood and how life in an organization should be conducted. Some people are consciously aware of the limitations of their frames of understanding and may also be capable of using different ones. Others have one conception of the world, which is anchored in just one place, so they are not in a position to see that there are alternatives. Neither do they see that this could be an issue.

The function of frames is to assist us in sorting, maintaining focus and making choices in a complex world. The price we pay for freedom of action is, in part, a simplification in which a number of relationships are excluded. It also means that the choice of one frame results in the deletion of another.

> "By using such shorthand ways to identify complex reality, people start to define and prescribe rather than perceive and describe what they see. Implicitly, they also define and prescribe what they will not see. Their ways of seeing become ways of not seeing." (Dunbar et.al., 1995)

The need for new frames

Our frames work as long as they help us to meet daily challenges, the map fits the terrain, and as long as it is shared (at least to a certain degree) by people around us, the frames will not be questioned or attacked. But when the frame and the approach it prescribes no longer make sense, problems arise. We suffer from our picture of the world (Sewerin, 1996). It is the worst for those people who have learned to trust their frame and never focused attention on its limitations or seen that as a problem. When its approach no longer provides insight and understanding in new situations, surprises arise. "*They feel helpless and even betrayed*." (Dunbar et. al., 1995). This also happened in The Edge Program, especially in the first phase.

> "Why am I here?"
> Edge participant in the first session in Korea

In cases where people and organizations (in the sense of sharing frames with several people) almost without question trust their existing frames, the time will always come when they are confronted with developments and events that are unexpected, not least of all in a global corporation. Not only do the rapid changes in society need to be handled in new ways, but the global arena also demands that one deals with culturally conflicting frames. With members of an organization from a well-defined cultural network, the chances are that the frames will be similar. The opposite can be expected in a globally constructed network. In an ever-changing world and in a global context there will be a need for the creation of new frames. But for this to occur, existing frames must be de-framed as a prerequisite for new ones being accepted and understood. This is a noble and necessary task for leaders in a global company (Dunbar et al. 1995). It may also be the most important element in a global program such as The Edge.

De-framing as an active process

Dunbar et al. (1995) introduce de-framing as an active process that needs to be worked at. Most of our actions are automatic and self-referential, constantly relying on our existing frames. It is impossible for us to avoid dependency on them, since we simply are unable to see alternative ones as a basis for understanding.

> "Only when people directly consider whether current frames are adequate, and hence, whether they need to be deleted, will they be able to recognize and appreciate the importance of new and unique phenomena." (Dunbar et al., 1995)

So, de-framing does not mean that we need to abandon all our former ways of thinking; nor is this possible. What it means and calls for is the ability to put one's self on the sidelines and the courage to reduce dependency on the frames we have trusted. De-framing means: (1) an acknowledgement that "my" frames are limited, (2) an acknowledgement that for "me" there are too many unknown frames and that there are new ones evolving all the time, (3) the courage to search for these frames as well as those of other people and (4) a desire to see the world through new frames, to see what then appears and how we can make use of this insight. Not until then can we supplement or replace existing frames with new ones and use this newly won insight to solve problems that occur in everyday life in a new and better way. The process of gaining new, helpful frames can be time consuming. The advantage with complex networks (organizations) is that we have many close by, provided we are willing to see them.

De-framing may lead to temporary paralysis and chaos, but hardly of a permanent nature. Since we are constantly searching for meaning in existence (Weick, 1995), it is natural to organize perceptions into categories and frames. This reduces the amount of detail that needs to be saved, while at the same time making it easier to remember what is focused upon (Weick, 1979). Framing will come of its own accord; the problem that arises is connected to de-framing, the prerequisite for new framing.

> "While framing comes naturally, de-framing can be messy, seem difficult, even threatening." (Dunbar et al.,1995)

To work as a leader in a global company is at the same time to develop your own de-framing. When you really begin to believe in something, that is, have accepted new ways of understanding the world, you may at the same time start being critical of the new frames (Rorty, 1989), i.e., the process that raises doubt of the excellence of what is observed.

The collision of frames

There is, however, a discrepancy between the contextual frames that very many leaders find themselves confronted with and the management literature that has predominated. Some of the literature gives the impression of being formulas that once and for all will solve the big issues of leadership and organizational challenges with simple and clear solutions. These formulas sail right into the companies with penetrating power, and quickly win terrain and are given high status for a period of time and then disappear as quickly as they arrived (Røvik, 1998). They are normative models, holding out the prospect of the right doctrine.

Another large portion of the literature takes contextual stability for granted. Porter's "Five Forces Model" is an example that has had a great impact on strategic frames. Porter takes the free market for granted. But how often is the market really free? A de-framing of Porter makes it necessary to question the fundamental assumptions on which the model is based. As a result of this, we begin to see the development of phenomena, or network elements that lie outside of the model but never the less exert an influence in most strategic situations. Company duties, loyalty, trust and friendships; all are relationships that many people recognize from their empirical experiences in the field, not least of all in non-western cultures, but these do not fit into Porter's model.

Now we can start looking at the frames that collided in The Edge Program. I have chosen to call this a collision between a substantial frame and a relational one. This collision was not totally acknowledged by the MiL learning coaches, and therefore they did not really manage to call the participants attention to it. This relates to the fact that the relational paradigm (I am tempted to call this a paradigm, since it represents such a basically different way of looking at the world) is only formulated to a limited extent as a position within scientific and organizational theory.

In The Edge Program it was beyond the limits for "what was known about the unknown", but it was there. First, I will present the theoretical background necessary to understand the clash, and then I will illustrate how the two different frames surfaced side by side in the program – and resulted in frustrations instead of dynamics and progress as they should have done if it had been handled better.

SUBSTANTIALISM VS. RELATIONISM

Several researchers have formulated relationism as an independent scientific position. It is, however, a rather new tradition (1990s) if we are putting the position forward as a more comprehensive framework of observing and understanding society and organizations. Within relationism, there are different subtypes, and I have chosen to define two of them. The first is the socio-relational, in which one is mainly concerned with the interplay between human actors, and in which these actors create themselves and the meaning of their existence through this interplay, social constructivism. But there is also a socio-material relationism, that on a purely analytical level places human actors on an equal footing with nonhuman actors (e.g., nature and technology). Meaning is constructed in this heterogeneous interaction, and thus is not just of a social nature, hence constructivism. But first, a little about the dominating tradition in our society, and in which most of the organizational and societal frames lie, namely substantialism.

Substantialism

Views of life that have substantial and statistical elements as a starting point can be found in rational actor models, norm-based models, holistic and structural explanation models and statistical analyses of variables, among others (Emirbayer, 1997). An unadulterated form of substantialism is what we are acquainted with from classic decision-making theory, also called Rational Choice. This approach is based on the rational, calculating actor, as are many of our economic models. Here too, one assumes that through opportunistic behavior one tries to produce results that fulfill the subject's needs. This approach claims that social institutions and social changes are a result of individual actions and choices.

A common sociological approach is the understanding that individuals are directed by inner forces and internalized norms. In theoretical science this is often presented as the main *apparent* opponent to the rational approach. However, this approach is also of a substantial nature (Emirbayer, 1997). It describes the individual as an independent unit who follows the internalized norms. Individuals strive not for fortune, status or power, but seek conformity with the social ideals that they have accepted as their own. Consequently, this is a holistic approach, which exclusively places the basis of action on self-supporting social structures and systems that originate outside the individual. You could say that the individual is plural before he or she becomes singular (Hollis, 1994).

These two approaches are the starting point for most frames in modern western science, and have their predecessors within organizational and management theories. They all belong, however, to a substantial tradition. They are based on units of solid substance of a lasting or more permanent nature. When it concerns scientific ambition, there is a strong emphasis on and belief in the objective and "the eternal truths". And when it concerns the view of knowledge, the emphasis is on the deductive method to a large extent, where knowledge comes from established truths and discoveries, and then is transferred to new situations. Within this tradition there is also a certainty of clear cause-and-effect connections. This type of rational thinking can be called consequence-rational or procedural-rational.

The belief in the rational is strong in the western world (March, 1995). By rationality in this context, I am thinking of the action process itself and on the procedures it involves. We imagine that in a rational action process alternatives arise. These are coupled to clear consequences, and these consequences can be evaluated on the basis of preferences. The alternative that is chosen is characterized as having the best consequences in relation to these preferences (March & Olsen, 1989). In its most unadulterated form we maintain the belief in total rationality, i.e., that we have full control over all alternatives and consequences. Others maintain that this has to be interpreted more restrictively (Simon, 1947). In every day life, however, we still experience that this is not the case and that the world is infinitely complex and immense. But still we hold on to rationalism – as a myth. It tells us that we should use rational procedures to best look after our interests and that people's actions can be understood from such a perspective. Science has supported this myth, because most theories of reality, no matter the scientific discipline, are based on such an understanding.

I would also like to devote some time to hindsight wisdom. In our complex society, we regularly experience that things do not work out as expected. The rational procedures that we choose do not result in the consequences we anticipated. I have seen this in my own research on integrated organizational forms such as partnerships and alliances. In such complicated organizational networks, it is naturally difficult to have an overview of all the active network, elements that influence events and processes. Hence, it is not unusual that life is filled with surprises for the human actors. But most often they thought that they had control and could steer the network's active elements and that they knew what the consequences would be of alternative actions. Almost always, the course of events was different from the expected.

This created, of course, some confusion, but less than could have been expected because hindsight wisdom arrives on the scene to rescue the idea and help tidy up the mess. And hindsight wisdom is solely of a substantial nature. Something or someone is blamed for the surprise. It was not the complexity and the subtle interplay that came into focus, but the simplicity of the single elements (Rennemo, Ph.D. thesis in progress). A global corporation such as the Volvo Group is also an integrated organization, especially after all the acquisitions of former competitors that have taken place. Do we find the same mechanisms here, as I found in my research?

James March has formulated interesting ideas about the connection between rationality, hindsight wisdom and the social sciences.

> "Since we live in a society that insists on rational thoughts, the social sciences also insist on rational explanations. And just as we in society have become exceptionally good at applying hindsight wisdom to our actions, we in the social sciences have become exceptionally good at

> applying hindsight wisdom to our observations. Because of this, rational explanations have been reduced to exercises in inventiveness.
> The classic example is, of course, modern economical theory, but the same thing is also applicable to other areas of the social sciences. What does it really mean to ‘explain’ something in our modern scientific tradition? The answer is mainly that we have ‘explained’ the action when we have shown that it is in accordance with rational guidelines, i.e., when we have applied hindsight wisdom to it. In many of the social sciences this has precisely passed the criteria for a good theory.” (March, 1995)

In the substantial orientation, which is an enormous and all-encompassing term for many societal and organizational perspectives, it is common to establish polarizations to illustrate the internal differences. Among the most common dualistic contrasts are: material vs. idea, structure vs. agent or individual vs. society.

Relationism

Relationism departs from the concept that the world consists of entities of solid matter. The focus moves away from the elements to the relations and what goes on between them. The elements re-create themselves continuously in the interplay or network that they are a part of at any given time and, consequently, are to be understood as a far more “loosely connected system” (Scott 1992). From such a perspective it is easier to understand why single elements in a network more easily change meaning, behavior and appearance (the elements, in one way, are more “vulnerable” to change), and this is one of the reasons for the relational paradigm’s rising popularity – it has clear advantages for understanding change; and rapid change is something that most companies recognize today.

Relationsim in many ways is built on a tradition that can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Heraklit, who maintained that everything floats. Adherents to this tradition are more often to be found in the arts than in the sciences. The ever-changing nature of objects and their mutual dependency is a far more central theme in art than in science. The work of a Norwegian and a Swedish lyric poet are good examples of the legacy of Heraklit:

I hold your head *in my hands, as you hold* *my heart in your tenderness* *just as everything holds and is* *held by someone other than itself* *just as the sea lifts a stone to its shores,* *just as the tree holds the autumn's ripe fruits,* *just as the globe is lifted through space* *just as we both are held by something and lifted* *your riddle holds a riddle in its hand* Stein Mehren	*It is strange, so strange,* *so strange, my friend* *but if you ask someone he'll only say:* *What then?* *Nothing stays,* *Nothing remains what it was.* *So put on your prettiest dress tonight,* *make yourself lovely,* *do it right here and now.* *We'll go and meet* *the others tonight* *and say goodbye to a lost world.* Ulf Lundell

As already mentioned, the relational approaches can be of different natures. I have chosen to differentiate between the socio-relational and the socio-material relational.

Socio-relationism

Socio-relationism is of a social nature. Meaning is created in a network of social actors and actions are the result of dynamic socio-relational processes. Many refer to Berger and Luckman's (1967) theoretical contributions on social constructivism. They argued that a social reality is a human construction that is created through social interaction. The concept of meaning and the derivation of meaning are central in social constructivism. One person who has developed an understanding of this process is Herbert Blumer when he formulates the principles for symbolic interactionism:

> "Symbolic interactionism rests ... on three simple premises. The first is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them ... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters." (Blumer, 1986)

Attention is consequently focused on the social actors, who recreate themselves in a constant, ongoing interaction.

Emirbayer tries to describe simple theoretical consequences of a relational approach. We can take a central organizational concept as an example, namely power. While the concept usually is described in substantial terms, as something one grasps or possesses and that is connected to someone or something, in a relational approach one would instead consider this concept as a force that is placed in the space between the different elements. This force will sometimes be directed at something or someone that for a while is given or assigned power. But power is constantly in motion; it stretches out and balances back and forth. In order to exercise power, "those in power" will be dependent on being ascribed power by the "powerless". And in this way, most concepts can be understood. They are situated in the space in between and are continuously changing.

Emirbayer deserves attention because he so clearly illuminates the difference between substantial and relational assumptions. He is by no means alone. One of the educationally prominent people of our time, John – learning by doing – Dewey, is decidedly relational in his view of human growth and development.

> "For Dewey this continual process of development and awareness is summarized by the term 'growth'. Since all entities are entities-in-process, they are continually being influenced and altered by the relationship in which they are immersed. The various projects we undertake, relationships into which we enter, and struggles which we undergo, help shape who we are. When process and change are taken seriously, the affair that is human being can be understood as a continuously growing self." (Boisvert, 1998).

The different elements in the networks, or "affairs" as Dewey calls them, are never frozen, established or complete. "Man" for Dewey is a participant in a world of constant, ongoing change and in this change man is recreating himself in a continuous process.

What about the logic and the connection between cause and effect from this point of view? The procedural rationality that we saw had its place in substantialism can also be given a relational interpretation. But in this context it would be better to call it "process" rationality. What happens has to be understood from the dynamic process in the here and now. Being able to predict behavior would be far more difficult because of the complexity in the pattern of the interaction, and, not the least of all, in the inherent changeable nature in the elements which would make "fast freezing" or the recreation of situations impossible. Our attitude towards knowledge will also be process orientated. It is developed in the here and now, in a dynamic process. We can and should use previous experiences, but we can never be certain that a pattern of reaction will be repeated. Thus, questions need to be answered in a local and empirical context.

Socio-material relationism

Network elements of a nonhuman kind are of little importance in social relationism and social constructivism. In socio-material relationism it is different. Here the process of construction is not just of a social nature, but involves all different kinds of material (man, nature, technology), and that no one of them in advance (a priori) can claim to have a greater impact than then others (Latour, Callon, Law). The notion that our perceptions (about society and organization) are constructions is included, but it would be wrong to call this social constructivism. Constructivism is more correct.

Other elements of a material character are elevated in this form of relationism and are put on the same footing as the human interactive process. This theory is more extensive, even more complex, but gives a different insight – not the least of which is useful for understanding global and complex patterns of organization. What follows is a brief description of the socio-material relationism that we find it in Actor Network Theory (ANT).

Authors on actor-network theory first appeared in the sociology of science and technology (Law, 1992). They argued that knowledge is a socio-material product. Knowledge is manifested (is materialized) through lectures, presentations, books etc. and/or is expressed in skills embodied in people such as scientists or engineers. However, the knowledge comes from a range of network patterns consisting of a number of elements that together are capable of overcoming resistance and obstacles. And so it is with social institutions. The family, the organization, the economy and technology – they are all made up of networks of heterogeneous elements. This is the crucial analytical feature in actor-network theory: The assumption that the social is nothing more than a network pattern of heterogeneous elements.

The actor in actor-network theory is the element that generates action, "it acts" (Law, 1994). But an actor in actor-network theory can be anything, human or nonhuman. From the ANT perspective, man (and other things that have actor status) is also a network (Callon, 1991). If we add the personal perspective to this organism, a number of other elements need to be included and this will make the network even more complex: the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, all the social relationships we are involved in, the social narratives we are a part of, the tools of technology that are available and so on. So an actor is a network, an actor-network. (Law, 1994).

An interesting observation I have made while working with the ANT perspective is that in everyday life and far from modern science, there is a much greater acceptance of relational socio-materialism, than we find when we theorize about every day situations. Some examples: "Clothes create people", is an expression that many use and some believe in. "You are what you drive, brother!" was on the back of a VW Beetle that recently passed me on the road. In other cultures, relational thinking is even stronger. There were some examples at The Edge meeting in Korea. Here we were told that the human actor is given a name based on the network that he or she is a part of at the time: Lars the manager, Lars the golf player, etc. We heard about language as an actor:

> "When people start to speak English or any western language, both their way of behaving and their values change."

Nor can we disregard the fact that cultures other than western ones are far more comfortable with a relational-oriented understanding, and that this perspective would not at all be looked upon as something fundamentally new. One example of this is the Japanese word "ma" (Sewerin, 1996). In the West we do not automatically think along the lines of relations. We are used to focusing on single elements. How objects exist in themselves and are considered as being independent in relation to other things.

> "Japanese rooms are far more sparsely furnished and with things that have special relationships to each other. In a Japanese home it is as if the objects together define and limit an area in the room, a harmonious sphere where the spirit of the home – its ma – has its quarters." (Sewerin, 1996)

The principles surrounding "ma"– sparseness, relation-orientated and focus on the spaces in between – are also valid for other aspects of Japanese culture. It is the connection between single objects that is the point. The details and the single elements on their own are secondary.

The ANT perspective maintains that when people build social networks, it is not because they cooperate with other people, but because they cooperate with other people *and* a great number of different kinds of objects. And just as people have their preferential ways of acting, these objects also have their preferences in a heterogeneous network. This means that if these other materials (objects) should disappear, so would the social order.

How can you stabilize social relations? In the actor-network theory, materialization is a central concept that answers this question (Latour, 1991). To be able to understand the large social networks, we have to turn away from the tradition in which we are only interested in social relations. Instead, we need to examine if and how these relations are also woven into structures that include nonhuman elements, elements that make it possible to establish a somewhat permanent and durable entity (Latour, 1998). Some materials are more durable than others and, accordingly, can retain their shape or pattern longer.

> "Imagine a continuum. Thoughts are cheap, but they don't last long and speech lasts very little longer. But when we start to perform relations and in particular when we embody them in inanimate materials such as texts and buildings – they may last longer. Thus a good ordering strategy is to embody a set of relations in durable materials. Consequently, a relatively stable network is one embodied in and performed by a range of durable materials." (Law, 1992)

The idea of different heterogeneous materials' varying degrees of durability leads to the assumption that some materials maintain their relational shapes longer than others. If the global corporation is developing towards a relatively stable relation, one could assume that it has been preceded by a reconstruction of certain elements in the networks from materials that are of a more fleeting and unstable nature (e.g., thoughts and contributions to a debate) to more stable ones (e.g., contracts, printed strategies and company philosophies, The Volvo Way, offices and information channels). The organization is looked upon from the relational approach, not as a substantial structure, but as a continual ongoing process, like a verb, organizing.

In order to clarify socio-materialism, we can look at the example of power again. The basis for power would be the same; it is located in the space in between the elements. The person or the thing that holds power has temporarily been given it. Socio-materialism, however, would maintain that this temporary assignment of power could be stabilized by being written down on materials of a more permanent nature than mere thought. It might be in the form of laws or rules, keys or security passes, decision-making procedures or in the height of the office chair.

If the human and nonhuman network elements can analytically be viewed as equivalent, and that one can not a priori be granted more importance in a network than the other, one can still ask the following question: Does the human have any precedence as an actor in a network? My answer is YES – and with the following reflection:

> An actor network, which contains humans, will have advantages in the process that contributes to both the strength and the distribution of the network. We can easily find many examples of nonhuman actors that set things in motion and have an influence on the course of events that would be inconceivable for the human actor alone. On such occasions, though, we will often find that human actors have been central in directing earlier generations of just this provisional and powerful version. Through the human capability for reflection, knowledge from experience, construction and language creation, and by virtue of the fact that we often are a part of networks that give us power to transport, we have the chance to develop new action strategies and to bring various kinds of added value to the networks that we are part of. We can do this more easily and efficiently than most other network elements. It is here that our precedence lies. In those networks that we are a part of, we can behave as intelligent actors.

Sustantialism vs. relationism – summarized

The following table clarifies the differences between the substantial and the relational frames. The overview is based on the account just presented. It is a simplification of the frames, particularly the substantial one.

	Substantialism	*Relationism*	
		Socio-relational	Socio-material rel.
Ontology: What *is* and what explains causes	Fixed entities, individuals or structures of a more permanent nature	Relations between social elements	Relations between socio-material elements, that again are their own heterogeneous networks
Epistemology: View of knowledge and science	Objectivism	Social constructivism	Constructivism
Rational understanding	Procedural rationality	Process rationality	Process rationality
Methodology: How we can develop new knowledge	Deductive: Knowledge derived from established truths and transferred to new situations	Local and empirical: Knowledge is developed here and now. We can and should use previous experiences, but can never be sure that reaction patterns will be repeated	

DIFFERENT FRAMES IN THE EDGE

If we group the actors in The Edge Program, using the ANT concept in which documents can also be actors, it would look like this:

Participants 31 people from South America, North America, Europe, Asia. Many with Volvo a short time, due in part to acquisitions	*MiL Institute* 4 learning coaches (not well-acquainted) and 1 coach/program director from MiL MiL philosophy and ARL learning philosophy	*Volvo* Volvo Learning Partner and the VLP's program spheres. Learning philosophy Volvo managers The Volvo Way Global Leadership Model

I will now explain how substantial and relational frames were operating, more or less, in each of these groups, and in the interplay between them. Unfortunately, this was not made sufficiently apparent and therefore was not put to use in a way that would have benefited the program participants – and Volvo.

MiL Institute

Relationism has a strong standing in MiL and in the MiL programs. We see it in many contexts. It is clearly visible in MiL's definition of leadership. "Leadership is a relation". During a large professional gathering at MiL in August 2001, MiL's president stated this as an official MiL desig-nation of leadership. Another of the established MiL associates, Thomas Sewerin, has developed the leadership philosophy and defines it as follows:

> Leadership is a relation. Leadership is nothing the leader has, a quality or such. Leadership is the answer to mutual questions that the parties in a leadership relationship have to one another… Leadership is a relationship between two parties that is built, developed and dissolved as time passes… We can define leadership as the quality of the binding of mutual expectations and demands that exist between manager and co-worker. It is a binding that both are responsible for. Leadership is what exists between them. (Sewerin, 1996)

The ARL learning philosophy

MiL's learning philosophy, Action Reflection Learning (ARL), is empirically orientated. The answers that should help in solving everyday problems will be discovered in the learning process, which in turn should be as close to the daily situation as possible. That is why real projects with business development as a goal, are important pillars of most MiL programs. The Edge Program had two large projects, one for Volvo Parts and one for Volvo Bus. Working with the projects is a means for the participants to learn something about themselves, about leadership, building networks and developing team understanding. They should, of course, contribute to the success of the project as well.

Learning comes out of the current situation in which the theories are built from ongoing experiences and reflection. Because of this, there is some reluctance on MiL's part to present ready-made theoretical formulas and prescribed approaches to current situations. That is why each situation (and each program) is considered unique. Replicability is therefore limited. The approach will be process oriented. And you can definitely count on the process itself to be the best basis for learning. This places great demands on the MiL learning coach, who needs to succeed in coming up with a good learning design and, not least of all, to keep the process going so that all learning opportunities are utilized.

Marginalized stories

One relational tool used by MiL learning coaches is to support the telling of marginalized stories that can be found in the group. Based on the assumption that progress is achieved by making people aware of conflicts and placing the conflicts in relation to one another, the MiL learning coach will pursue and support the stories that go against the mainstream. It is not easy to find solutions to problems by using the same ways of thinking that created them.

Another aspect of the marginalized stories is the idea that they are often individually represented. That is why a MiL learning coach will try to find those who support the idea of loving one's enemy as one's self, because the enemy's attitudes (or perhaps the image we project on them) are the sides of ourselves that we find hardest to recognize. This can be close to an actor-network understanding. If we take the youth rebellion of 1968 as an example, a substantial interpretation would maintain that the young people were rebelling against their parents' attitudes. A relational interpretation could just as well say that it was the parents' generation who were rebelling against the values of society they had wished for a long time to get rid of. Instead, the rebellion was produced and channeled through their children. An entirely new and exciting interpretation of the phenomenon is opened up to us.

Parallel processes

Other relational orientations I have found at MiL are parallel processes, the interest in working with meta-perspectives and the attraction to stories and myths. An example of parallel processes is when the strengths and weaknesses in a network (e.g., between managers and co-workers) are reproduced in the organization and appear as strengths and weaknesses in other places, such as in the relation between the sales personnel and customers.

A quest for consciousness in MiL

There are surely many divergent opinions on how relationism should be interpreted at MiL, but most likely attention has not been focused on this as a problem to any great extent. It should be. Then MiL would become an even more useful partner to its member companies and be able to provide even better learning services. This would also enable the people involved to see for themselves when they were using relational frames and when they were using substantial ones, since many examples of the latter can also be found in most programs.

One example is the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator which is anything but relational. It is built upon the assumption of strongly anchored personality structures, which are influenced to a limited degree or not at all by the relational contexts in which an individual finds him or herself. There is nothing wrong with this on the whole; the problem arises when learning coaches are unable to see that widely different systems of logic are being presented to the participant without calling attention to them.

The Volvo Group

We also find process and relational orientations at AB Volvo, perhaps many of which have been influenced by MiL.

The learning philosophy of Volvo

This brings to mind the learning philosophy of Volvo Learning Partner, which laid the foundation for The Edge Program. From the start of the program, this was a philosophy that the people involved were united behind and which the MiL learning coaches were supposed to convey. Nevertheless, the understanding of it was experienced as being somewhat different.

> “The program is based on new steps of Action Reflection Learning developed jointly by MiL Institute and Volvo Truck Corporation. The whole group of participants in the management program will turn into

> an internal consultancy organization which will work on a major project. This is learning by doing." (From the Learning Philosophy of The Edge Program)

Along with this process orientation there are also clear elements of procedural-rational thinking in the philosophy. It describes what will happen in the program: There will be 4 projects (there were 2), the projects are created under the headings Merger and Acquisition (it turned out differently), each project will have a host (it happened after much hemming and hawing), etc. The comments in parentheses are not meant to be ironic. I will put them in context later.

The Volvo Way

The Volvo Way, the document that is meant to clarify the expectations of a common company culture in the Volvo Group, also has a relational message. Under the heading "Respect for the Individual", diversity is embraced by the organization:

> "Respect ... involves listening to, learning from and supporting each other; working together and benefiting from each other's differences and experience. There is strength in diversity." (From The Volvo Way)

You can find other relational orientations in the promise of dialogue, open communication, decentralization, integration, team orientation and process orientation.

> "Strategic dialogues with everyone. Open communication..." … "We are participating in a process." ... "It is also important in determining the speed of change, the interplay between customer and supplier, and the process of learning together." ... "Learning and growing are part of the daily work" ... "Working together generally offers a superior way to develop new methods and solutions" ... "Teamwork is performed successfully in networks, including cross-functional groupings." (From The Volvo Way)

I would like to underscore that if we look at The Volvo Way on the whole, there are just as many statements that fit a substantial tradition. My point was to show that there are also a good number of relational examples.

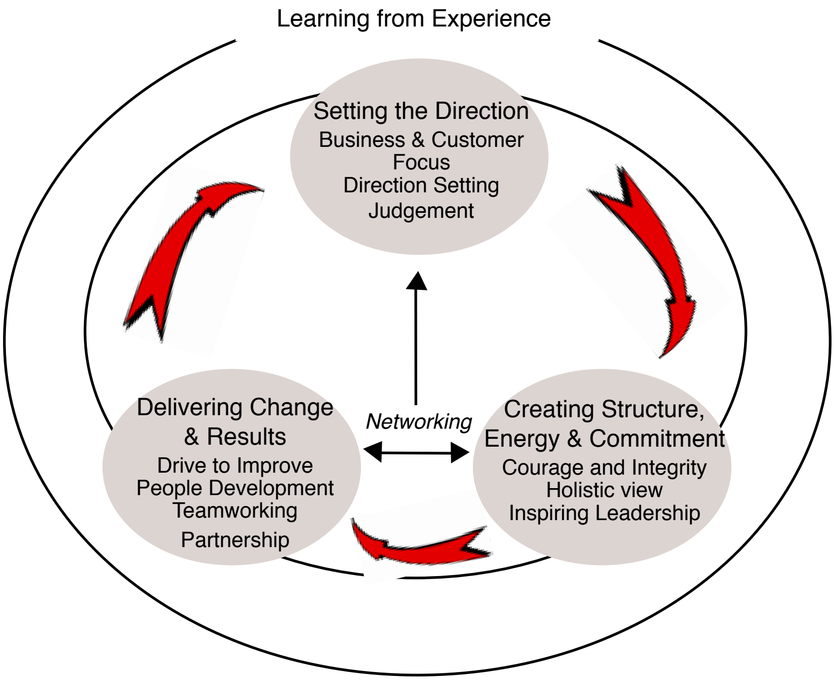

Figure 1: The Volvo Global Leadership Model

The Global Leadership Model

The Global Leadership Model is the title of the management model that was presented to The Edge participants, see Figure 1.

The model is quite process orientated as is apparent from the headings and the language that is used. Most of the concepts are defined in process terms, something that is going on continuously. This is why the -ing form is used: setting, creating, inspiring, teamworking, delivering. What binds the different elements together is networking. The learning philosophy hovers around the model: Learning from Experience. The local and empirical learning processes are advocated. I call this a socio-relational management philosophy. It should be pointed out that if you read the explanations in the 15-page document, you will find that the philosophy in certain places is described in a more substantial language. Nevertheless, the overall impression is of a socio-relational, process and network orientation rather than a hierarchical-orientated philosophy. Here are some examples in which keywords have been highlighted.

- Direction setting: "At its best it is a *process* which involves all members of a team in developing a strategic focus in their *own* goal-setting."
- Inspiring leadership: "… *walks the talk*."
- Partnership: "It involves *gaining and giving trust* and the ability to find and exploit complimentary activities ... Works to create *win-win* scenarios ... Is *fully open* with partners."

(From The Global Leadership Model)

Espoused theories or theories in use?

Both the Volvo Way and The Global Leadership Model are printed documents that can easily be distributed throughout the Volvo network and which can influence actions. The question, however, is how the documents will be understood. Their strength depends on everyone interpreting them in the same, desired manner. You can quickly end up in the position that such documents will become what the organizational theoretician Chris Argyris (1982) calls "espoused theory", while what is actually done, the theory in use, is something else. Many of the participants in The Edge commented on this. Remarkably, many were of the opinion that the documents were all well and good but that reality was something else. The expression that often came up was "Management by Fear". The learning coaches responded by asking the question how they themselves were a part of this and what the participants wanted to do about it.

So, the picture of Volvo is complicated. As is that of the Volvo Executive Management. We in the programme staff had the pleasure of meeting many managers in the course of the program as guest speakers and resource persons. They stood out as being anything but homogeneous in their expression of values and in their management philosophy. However, we were closest to the participants. Who were they?

Participants

There were 31 participants and they came from all parts of the Volvo Group (Bus, Construction Equipment, Truck, Penta, Aero, Parts, and IT). There were 11 Swedes (of which 1 worked in Brazil and 1 in the U.S.A.), 8 Europeans from countries outside Sweden (of which one worked extensively in Africa), 5 Americans (of which one worked in Asia), 3 from South America and 4 from Asia. Not all of the 31 participants completed the program, 5 quit of which 2 changed companies. At the last meeting there were 26 participants, but of these there were some who had participated on and off. On the whole, the program was very demanding and the effort the participants put in, especially in connection with the projects, was impressive.

Impressions of the participants' frames

To describe the participants in terms of relational/substantial is obviously very difficult. However, they should have been asked to do so themselves – that is an important admission on my part. But I was left with these impressions: Very few had studied and contemplated the philosophy of the program before the first meeting in Korea. Many experienced the learning approach and methodology of the program as something strange and in part incomprehensible. The expectations were probably for a more traditional learning situation in which you attended lectures where the correct theories were explained to you.

The Korean war

The organization of the projects, which were to be the pillars of the program, turned out to be something quite different than what was indicated in advance, and this made things even worse. Each project was supposed to have a host, but none were there and it was also unclear who they were. Hosts became ghosts. And the MiL learning coaches or facilitators, as they were also called, could not be the desired knights in armour. So facilitators became difficultators. The meeting was later referred to as the "Chaos of Korea" or "The Second Korean War".

A gradual acceptance

Nevertheless, the learning philosophy was eventually accepted by more and more of the participants and viewed as something positive, but it took time. It was easiest for the South Americans and the Europeans (especially Scandinavians) to accept. It was hardest for the American and Asian participants. However, it is not fair to generalize. One of the Asian participants quickly became caught up in the philosophy, which included much reflection. He especially liked the parts involving stories and myths. Quite a few called out for strong leaders in the confusion that arose at the beginning. As one American participant stated: "I've learned how critical it is to have a strong leadership." On the contrary, the Asian guy in the same discussion had the following comment: "We had a leader, but doing it without one is better."

> "The more we understand the learning philosophy the more we appreciate the learning coaches. We have to find the answer."
> *"Now I am starting to see the learning philosophy."*
> Two participants from South America in September 2000

Unnecessary negative feelings

As previously mentioned, the program ended with basically satisfied participants. But I believe that we lost an opportunity to enhance something that could have given the participants even more, something that perhaps Volvo as a global corporation needs, and that would not have created the unnecessary negative feelings of guilt that we also saw. I would like to conclude the article with a discussion of this topic.

> "What is the purpose of being here?" (American participant)
> "I find myself feeling guilty." (British participant)
> "I felt guilty but I was not the only one." (American participant)

WHY AND HOW TO HIGHLIGHT DIFFERENT FRAMES

> "It is important to have one Volvo."

The quote is from the Volvo Edge program director at our first joint planning meeting. It is easy to understand what he means. He described the diverse cultures in the Volvo Group, the different "purchasing" cultures and the representations in 120 countries. Who wouldn't wish for a more uniform Volvo? He also said: "Flexibility, yes, but not too far from The Volvo Way."

Instead of emphasizing homogeneity as a goal, though, one should cultivate heterogeneity as a value. Seen in relation to the concepts introduced at the beginning of this chapter – framing and de-framing – it is not until I have seen the limitations of my existing frames, that I can seek out and construct new ones. If not, new frames that someone else wants to impose on me will have the status of outer symbols lacking inner meaning and content. They will be like a Volvo cap we put on for a company photo.

Moreover, I certainly hope that there will never be one Volvo. A global Volvo means that there will be many Volvos. The development of Volvo will progress continually in many different networks, which in part have little or no connection to one another. Volvo is and will continue to be a large, complex organization, where a great number of network elements at different times will interact, elements of both a human and nonhuman nature. An example of the nonhuman would be IT. It is impossible to think of organizational processes in a global corporation of today without recognizing information technology as an especially important actor. Since the complexity and the extent are so immense, theories and models are also needed that are based on an understanding of the world in which these aspects are looked upon as being natural and normal. And which are able to explain rapid changes in networks and in the nature of network elements. This is what relationism is, with the socio-material subtype having a particular advantage. This does not mean that the substantial and "modern" rational views are worthless or wrong. On the contrary, they have been very successful and have given meaning to life. Still, their value is not fully recognized before they are put to the test. Then their limitations become apparent. This is what the relational "glasses" are good for.

We have seen that the process and relational understandings of the world have not yet gained a significant standing in scientific theory. Such was the case with participants in The Edge program as well. If we look at their ways of approaching the projects, it was clear that they were most comfortable working with procedural-rational models. They were also very content when they found recognized theories that could be applied to their own work. The group settled down when they got the really "hard stuff" to work with, something they could really grasp on to. But we have also seen ideas that are part of a relational tradition in Volvo, with the participants in The Edge and not least of all within MiL. I have maintained that we are more likely to find this way of thinking in people's everyday life, than among those who theorize about everyday life.

However, if the existence of such diverse ways of viewing the world is not defined and highlighted, then confusion and feelings of misunderstanding will follow. It can easily turn into a struggle as to who has the right interpretation. These contradictions, perhaps best represented by the two types of rational logic–procedural and process rationality–will live side by side in most organizations, not least of all in globally and culturally diverse ones. In this case, they should be brought to light, not as something negative, but as positive contrasts that can be mutually enriching and increase the understanding of what is going to happen and what has already happened. "The Korean War" is a good example.

The Korean war again

Many of the participants, the people from Volvo Learning Partner and those from MiL felt that a lot of things went wrong in Korea. Many did not understand why they were there, some felt betrayed, some placed guilt and some felt guilty. I felt strongly that there was a lot of process and little substance, but I did not have the courage to be able to intervene and guide in a constructive manner.

What really happened? It was a demonstration of what often occurs when a complex and immense network, with a range of different frames and with a sea of unknown, but active network elements are put into play. It was a demonstration of what often happens in a global corporation. And because of this complicated network, there were surprises especially with the projects. Since we did not help the participants to put this complex situation in a relational perspective, things happened as they were destined to. The leaders, learning coaches as well as the participants resorted to making use of the traditional and familiar rationality to explain what happened. Then it was the single elements of solid substance that bore the brunt. Someone had done a bad job. If others did not blame you, you could use the other well-known hindsight-wisdom mechanism, that of blaming yourself. There was fear in the eyes of many people at that gathering, managers in fear.

These mechanisms that were so obviously demonstrated in Korea, were also observed later on in the program, especially in connection with the projects (and here I can only speak for the one I coached). A problem for many was that they felt they had not contributed adequately to the project, even though most participants invested a great deal of effort above and beyond what was expected. This was followed by feelings of guilt and self-reproach. They readily measured their activities according to procedural-rational plans that they had previously agreed upon before they returned home to their respective countries and continents. What happened next was predictable if you put on the relational glasses. You become "someone else" when you leave one network behind and enter into others; things always are different than you expect and the world is not so easy to control.

Suggestions for improvement

Finally, how could things have been done differently? Here are some suggestions:

1. We could have presented different ways of understanding the world, and preferably the two widely different frames that I have dealt with: the substantial and the relational.
2. We could have let the participants examine their own rational understanding and their own frames. Some appropriate questions could have been:
   - How is knowledge acquired in your culture and what are your personal learning traditions?
   - How do you relate to concepts such as "truth" and "objectivity"?
   - How do you usually explain the connection between cause and effect?
   - Analyze a business situation where you have either succeeded or failed. How (1) do you explain what happened, (2) what would be the difference between a substantial and a socio-material relational explanation and (3) where does your explanation fit in?
   - How are you accustomed to decisions being made in your job and organization? What would be the difference between a process-orientated and a procedure-orientated decision making process?

3. We could have taken actual situations that occurred in the program as a starting point and analyzed these from the two very different perspectives (glasses), and evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of each.

By giving the participants in The Edge Program better tools to deal with their own diversity, we could have made it easer for them to understand their individual frames and those of others, and to improve the ability to create new and more purposeful frames. This is also a way of stabilizing the organization. Preparedness and tolerance for complexity and change would increase. More avenues of action would become apparent – and in this way you will build even stronger Volvo networks.

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