

The MiL Learning Coach

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MiL Concepts

MiL Concepts publishes articles and reports about the MiL way of working with change and development – theories and models as well as empirically based experiences. It is always written in a 16 page format, to keep it short and succinct.

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Foreword

To be a learning coach in a MiL programme is a demanding task which generates personal growth. Since the late 70s, when the very first MiL programmes were held, it is perhaps the role of the learning coach that we have put the most work and energy into developing.

Thomas Sewerin has been extraordinarily active in this work. He has led several training programs for staff members and contact persons at the member companies. Thomas Sewerin has written several papers on the role of the learning coach, a task that requires a deep understanding of the role of the learning coach.

Thomas is a psychologist and a consultant. He has been a member of the MiL staff since 1985 and has had the role of programme director, learning coach and expert in all the different kinds of MiL programmes: open, partner, in-house and international programmes. Together with Irene Kejser he is starting up the MiL Learning Coach Academy in 1997. This Academy starts with two programmes: one partner programme in English for Electrolux, Tetra Pak and Volvo and one 40 days open programme in Swedish (Handledarskolan – Att leda lärande).

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Vasbyholm, February 1997

Lennart Rohlin

About the Creative Difference in an Action Reflection Learning Programme

"Each person was like a lock, each with their own key. Only someone like him, Jasja, could unlock every soul."

from Singer,
The Wizard from Lublin

The main thesis in this essay is that the learning coach in a MiL programme thinks and acts from an arena of knowledge and interest, which is different from the one the participants think and act from. When the learning coach performs his role successfully, a field of creative tension comes into existence between two different positions, the one of the participant and the one of the learning coach, which is the main vehicle for learning to take place on a personal level in the programme.

The polarisation in the outer pedagogical room between the participant and the learning coach has its mirror image in an inner field of polarity in the participant between action and reflection, practice and theory. The effect is that the participant after the program brings home an "inner learning coach", an increased capacity in the daily working situation to go from action to critical reflection and thus find new perspectives. This is one way to describe the learning which occurs in an Action Reflection Learning programme.

In his book "Mind and Nature", Gregory Bateson says that information is "news that make a difference". When you bring information into a system (for example a reflective person, a problem solving team or an organisation), you give the system news which is of such power that it opens new possibilities and makes a difference in its activities. In a nutshell, this is the role of the learning coach: to add information to the learning process.

Where does the learning coach get the information from?

From the pole of the antithesis! In my opinion, the reputation of dialectics has become

somewhat tarnished. What used to be the knowledge theory of the conflict perspective, has more and more become synonymous with harmony. When people say they think dialectically, they usually mean that they take many factors and perspectives into account. When people say, "You have to see it dialectically", it often means they have the synthesis hidden in their sleeve and intend to play it further on in the conversation, in the form of a solution to the problem, a holistic view. I have always felt suspicious towards the concept of "holistic view". In practice it often means "my holistic view", according to the one who speaks in favour of it.

In order to keep up the creative conflict in a dialogue with different perspectives, one has to be faithful to the antithesis. If my understanding of dialectics is correct, it is the antithesis that is the whole point: the contradictions, the hidden viewpoints, the concealed circumstances which grow stronger and stronger the more the antithesis is pronounced. The synthesis can not be predicted or controlled. It is like chance, the forthcoming result of a dynamic tension. It is as if it comes from another world. It brings a surprise. If one believes in dialectics, one also believes in walking on thin ice.

Those who say, "It isn't an either-or, it has to be a both-and", are sometimes saying, "Let's not argue!" This kind of philosophy can easily stimulate a field of action where everything is allowed, and which doesn't create or achieve much of substance. It is an art to lead a process which contains a "real" both-and (a process in which conflicting viewpoints coexist in a creative distinction) and not immediately merge them, with the consequences that a merging brings. It is a challenging art to direct a situation where both parties "win", as it were.

To a large extent, the activities in MiL build on a both-and philosophy. In favourable circumstances it means that the activities in MiL, particularly in the programmes, provide an arena where several conflicting viewpoints can be housed and played against one another in a creative dialectic process.

MiL often defines itself negatively, in terms of what MiL and Action Reflection Learning is not. This MiL Concept is an attempt to turn things around and define the learning coach in positive terms. The learning coach is a wizard. Listen to this!

About Merlin

Merlin was the Wizard in the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. His was another virgin birth. His mother was a nun, and the origin of the father is uncertain. Perhaps the father was not a mortal being, but an Incubus, a spirit being from the realms of evil. Merlin's mother had him christened as soon as possible, wanting him to grow up with a certain amount of human goodness. In his character, this goodness gradually merged with many other qualities which revealed his not so human origin.

At this time England was ruled by Vortigern, an impostor who had killed King Moines and driven his two brothers Uther and Pendragon into exile. Vortigern lived in constant terror that the rightful heirs to the throne would return, and thus he started building a huge tower of defence. When the walls had reached a certain height, the whole building fell down. This happened three times. The king consulted with his astrologers, who suggested that he find and kill the baby who had been born in the country with a father from the regions of the devil. The child's blood would be smeared on the cornerstones of the tower. Subsequently, the tower would stand.

Messengers were sent out into the country. They found the new-born Merlin and brought him to Vortigern. Merlin was a precocious infant. He explained that the reason for the instability of the tower was that it was built on sand which lay on top of a nest where two giant dragons were fighting, and that it was the fight of the dragons that made the ground unstable. The king gave orders for the workers to start digging. They soon found two giant snakes, one white as milk and the other red as fire. The snakes unfurled their immense wings and threw themselves at each

other in a fight of life and death. Everybody fled in terror except little Merlin, who stayed behind clapping his hands in delight. The red dragon was killed and the white one slipped down through a crevice in the rock under the sand and disappeared.

According to Merlin, the two dragons represented Uther and Pendragon, the rightful princes, who soon thereafter invaded the country and killed Vortigern, whereupon Pendragon took the crown. Merlin stayed in the country. He became Pendragon's and later on Uther's and his son Arthur's advisor.

One of his famous qualities was that he could turn himself into any guise of his choice. In the legend he appears as a dwarf, a maiden, a page and even as a wolf and a deer.

Merlin's role in the legend is to be an embodiment of wisdom. He acts as a mystical spiritual force behind the scene of King Arthur's round table. From his virgin mother he has inherited the capacity to see into the future, and from his demon father the gift to understand the past. His double nature (he appears as a wise old man and as a jester, a merry prankster) and his knowledge of the past and the future tells us that he is much more conscious than Arthur and his knights, who appear very human (unaware and thoughtless) throughout the whole story. When he points out human frailty and mistakes, Merlin, like the holy grail which appears later on in the legend, has the role of a kind of projected conscience.

There is an episode in the legend of the knights of the round table, when the knights have been sitting, month after month, feasting around their table. Through their own doing, all wars have ended. At last, there is peace in the country, and the knights are simply bored. One of them asks Merlin if it is possible to root out evil and conflict in the world. Merlin replies that evil turns up when you least expect it, that conflict is inherent in harmony. Before the feast is over that night it has been discovered that Guinevere, King Arthur's wife, loves Lancelot who reciprocates her feelings. This revelation becomes the beginning of a civil war, in which practically every key figure

in the legend perishes. This breathtaking chain of events, including the search for the holy grail, is the material around which the beautiful story of King Arthur and the knights of the round table is woven.

Merlin is an archetype. He is the embodiment of the intellectual and spiritual person, who alone and independently opens up dimensions which are unseen or self-evident to those around him. Thus he becomes a guide, a guardian, and a link to the spiritual realms to the people around him, to his employers.

Towers Fall Down and Snakes Fight In the Sand Below

Let us direct our attention to some of the elements of this résumé of the legend, and let these elements become building blocks in the definition of a role of the learning coach.

Merlin uncovers the fight of the dragons and laughs when everybody else is terrified.

Merlin does not sit at the round table.

Merlin is and has a double nature.

Merlin shapeshifts when the situation so demands.

The episode of the dragons shows us that Merlin reveals or points out the conflicts and the double nature of life and the human heart. Life's contradictions have become unconscious (hidden in the sand). They undermine peoples' projects and thus need to be brought into the open. Merlin directs his attention towards something other than the project itself. He sees what lies beneath. The fact that he stays behind laughing when everybody else flees in terror, means that he is confident in his focus and his knowledge. This confidence of his is undoubtedly the prerequisite needed for people to find the courage to face the hidden conflicts, to see them and handle them and then complete their projects.

Merlin's divergent knowledge and focus is founded on a position in the legend which is both mental and spatial. He is not present at the round table. He has no place there, and he has no interest in the issues debated there. His duty is to be present when the projects and conversations handled around the table go awry. He has his own, separate motives for being present in the legend: not to take part in the course of events of power, war and even life itself, but to bring knowledge and insight into these realms.

Merlin is a double nature. He is both human and inhuman. His father is a spirit being and his mother a mortal woman. He carries within him the contradiction, the creative difference, which he represents in the legend in his relationship to King Arthur and the knights. On a practical level, it makes him detached and trustworthy in his actions. On another level it is an expression of a parallel process between inner and outer reality, which I interpret as the moral of the whole legend:

There are two kinds of power, the power of action and the power of wisdom. In the legend they appear as two separate personages, both very distinct in their roles. Merlin and King Arthur are both seen as authorities. They don't compete for power. They represent two different spheres of life, two separate fields of interest. It is Merlin's task to be a source

of internalisation of thought and reflection to the men of action. Likewise, it is the task of every human being to integrate thought and action in his inner, spiritual nature. This inner integration becomes easier when the two poles interact visibly in the outer course of events. Thus Merlin's interaction with the knights in the legend helps us create our own inner wizard.

An important quality which enables Merlin to balance power and strength of the knights is his capacity to shapeshift when the situation demands it. Sometimes he appears as an animal, sometimes he changes sex or age, etc. This quality, this adaptability or contextual talent, is a gift enjoyed by all parties in the legend and helps them reach their goals. It is a capacity which, in the organisational systems theory, is called "requisite variety" and which sometimes is expressed as a law: The most flexible component of a system, the one that has the highest capacity for va-

riation, is the one that has the most influence and is the most efficient in the system.

When it comes to the tower in the legend, you could say that the organisation, both the outer one in which many people work for a common goal and the inner one in which every person is an organisation of personality structures, is a form of architecture. An architecture which, both literally and metaphorically, is made up of walls, structural beams and decorative surfaces. Learning, individual as well as organisational, is a rearranging of habits and ways of thinking. In other words, learning is the building, or rather the rebuilding of existing and not completely satisfactory mental structures. In order for the building to stand securely, the contradictions beneath it need to be uncovered and handled. We must dare to face the dragons.

The Learning Coach as the Wizard

In the interpretation of Merlin's role in the legend, we find some of the elements which should be able to serve as qualifications for a learning coach.

The learning coach needs to have an authority which comes from a field of action and knowledge that is completely different from the one the participants represent. The participant comes to the MiL programme during a certain period of time to go through a process of personal development. The company which is sending the participant to the MiL programme has a business which it, more or less, directly or indirectly, intends to develop as an effect of the programme. The participant comes to the field of the learning coach, as it were, in order to problemise his or her working situation and gain insight into the area of management, partly in general terms but particularly in terms of his or her own specific leadership situation. It is the task of the learning coach to create learning situations. Some of the learning takes place outside of the learning coach's direct influence, for instance in the interaction with colleagues in a similar position in other companies, during seminars with visiting lecturers and through environmental influence in the close contact with an unfamiliar

company during the project work. Some of the learning takes place directly under the guidance of the learning coach. The key factor in this learning process is the learning coach's capacity to maintain the position of the learning coach.

On the basis of his observations, the learning coach needs to problemise the structures built by the group as they work at their project. The task of the learning coach is to point out the underlying contradictions in the group's way of thinking about the factual project task as well as the group's way of solving the problem and interacting with each other during the learning process. The task of the learning coach is to cause frustration in the learning process and thus create a field of tension in which new ideas, attitudes and patterns of action can be born. The task is to interpret the course of events and add "information" in the sense Bateson gives to the word.

In order to succeed in this task, the learning coach needs to be flexible and diversified in thought and deed. Moreover, it is important that the learning coach takes the position, not of someone who is a member of the group, but of someone who is sometimes part of it

but is radically different from the participants (like Merlin in the circle of knights), a person who monitors the progress of the project group and at the same time sees himself as having a different task and other motives than the participants, and who is capable of carrying the loneliness that comes with this position.

If the learning coach is successful, the participant can "bring home" a creative tension to his or her organisation. This is a polarity, or difference, which originates from the outer interaction in the project group.

It is characterised by an open mind, by an inner field of tension. The participant has integrated his or her role as a leader with the role of our learning coach-wizard. He or she has internalised the learning coach – not the actual person, but rather the method and logic of action represented by the learning coach (= the "law" of the learning coach, as Lacan puts it). The participant creates an "inner learning coach". In practice he or she achieves what the legend of Arthur and Merlin conveys to us.

The Prince and the Philosopher

There is a historical parallel to the relationship between Merlin and King Arthur and his knights, which is the relationship between the prince and the philosopher. From time immemorial, princes have surrounded themselves with philosophers, maybe both for the purpose of glorifying their own wielding of power and for the reason that their power and responsibility gave rise to a need for wisdom and understanding. From time immemorial, philosophers have sought out the princely courts, perhaps to find a market for and encouragement of their thoughts, and perhaps to be part of the world of action and exert influence with their knowledge.

My thesis is that the relationship between the prince and the philosopher works best when they meet each other with equal strength, with the same amount of confidence and self-esteem in their respective roles, with a balance and a complementary function between them.

There are many historical examples (and they are usually concerned with the darkest periods in history) when one party, the prince or the philosopher, prevails. As when thought and ideology reigns supreme, for instance in Savonarola's Florence, in Spain during the inquisition or in the Soviet Union, when the concept or idea of the perfect society becomes a prison for the people, a Gulag archipelago. Or when brute power loses every trace of consideration – as in Nero's Rome and Idi Amin's Uganda. It seems like civilisation is built and developed when

there is a dialectic tension, a good balance between the prince and the philosopher.

When this thesis is applied to the task of the learning coach in a MiL programme, it means that the learning coach should find and define his or her own field, an area of action separate from the participants' and in which the learning coach feels secure and at home. The separateness is the point, and it makes it possible for the participant to take a creative distance to his or her own future actions.

The position of the learning coach in relation to the participant and the project group, is an act of balance in which it is important to neither get too close or disappear too far away. Problems arise as soon as the learning coach comes too close, i.e. starts thinking, feeling and acting as if he or she were a manager in a corporation or a member of the project group. Likewise, it has a negative effect on the process when the learning coach puts too much distance between himself and the group, i.e. shows too little physical or mental presence.

The field of the learning coach is Merlin's, the wizard's and the philosopher's field of activities which I have defined here, just as the participant's field is Arthur's and the knights', the prince's and the manager's field of action and activities.

How does the role of the learning coach work in practice?

The Triangle Drama in the MiL Programme

As soon as people come together or are organised for a purpose, they tend to form triangles (two against one or one against two). This "process of triangulation" is one of the main characteristics of the dialectics between people. Formally, working relationships in an organisation are built so that two "parties" justify their existence in relation to a third party, for example the customer or the management. Furthermore, informal and emotional ties are created the same way: the two of us in relation to a third party. All such triangles imply a challenge. They are unavoidable, and often the informal triangle processes develop in destructive directions and become blind alleys on the road to a common goal.

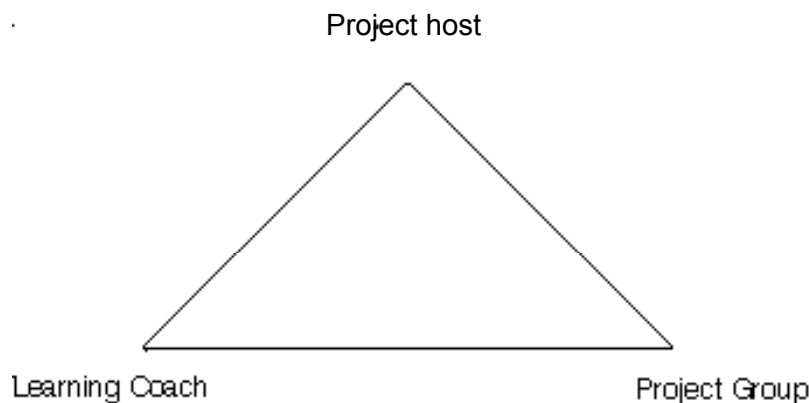
When taking the whole network into account, MiL's activities give rise to a great number of triangles. One example is the relationship between the programme director, the learning coaches and the participants, which can sometimes have the psychological character of a family with two parents and their children. Another example is the relationship between the participant, his or her manager and the program staff, in which a certain amount of rivalry, and sometimes creative tension, can arise. Or the relationship between MiL's own managing organisation and the different programmes, where competition can have both positive and negative consequences. The triangle, the triangle drama, is nothing strange or unusual, but an unavoidable consequence of stepping into an organisation. The challenge is to pay attention to it and handle it well.

Here, we will focus on an important triangle process: the one that is created in MiL's core

activity, the project group. It is of utmost importance that the learning coach can turn this triangle process around from being a drama to becoming a constructive learning process. The triangle in the project group is the one created between the members of the project group, the project host and the learning coach.

It is important that the project task has considerable support in the host company, that it is urgent and has a realistic time frame. The task of the project host is to be serious and committed in his or her approach to the project, to open up the organisation and make it accessible to the members of the project group. Their task is to solve the project assignment in the best way possible, and to have the courage to apply the ideas they arrive at in the host company. The presence and competence of the learning coach is vital in order to make sure that the best learning possible takes place while the project task is being solved.

There is a healthy and important competition in the triangle between the project host and the learning coach. The project host is focused on project results and wants to get a solution to the task or the problem. The learning coach pays very little attention to the solution to the advantage of the overall interests and purposes of the programme – to create as much learning as possible about management, and to create as much learning as possible while working with the project task. Thus, a conflict can arise between the differing goals of the learning coach and the project host, a conflict which the project group can profit from constructively.



The triangle becomes a destructive drama when it gets stuck in "mésalliances", in a situation of "two-against-one" (or "one-against-two"), an apparently unavoidable situation which it is important to balance and resolve as soon as possible. There are three possible pitfalls in our triangle, and two complementary varieties of each pitfall, in which one party or the other is the initiator in creating the distance:

Pitfall No. 1:



The project group and the learning coach establish a mésalliance against the project host. They distance themselves from him or her. The distance can be expressed in the form of suspicion toward the motives of the project host, of going against him or her and building other alliances in the host company, or of exerting pressure on him in order to show that he is part of the problem. The group, the learning coach included, express themselves in terms of, "If it wasn't for the project host, the project would...". The group and the learning coach see the project task as their own task and act accordingly.

The project host disassociates himself from the project group and the learning coach. This can be an expression of disappointment, for instance he regrets having given the project to the MiL programme at all. He may engage someone else within his organisation, or even external consultants rather than letting the MiL project group solve the problem. He goes against the group and may even close his organisation to them.

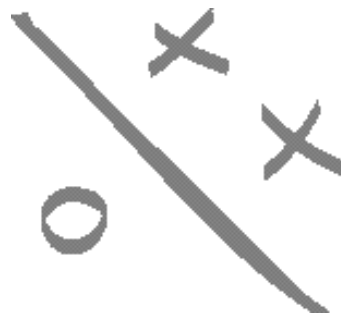
Pitfall No. 2:



The project host and the learning coach "team up" against the project group. They may appear as a two parents, moralising over the group in an attitude of, "We have to help the poor sods", or "What a lousy group we got this time!"

Conversely, the group run their own race completely. They meet at their own respective companies and at conference hotels around the country having a good time while incidentally writing a report for the project host. They have little or no confidence in the learning coach or the host company. They only have eyes for each other.

Pitfall No. 3:



The project group and the project host find each other and understand each other perfectly. Heart and soul, they throw themselves over the project task, calculate market shares and quickly and efficiently put together a solution for implementation. Both parties ignore the learning aspect and see the learning coach as an odd customer. His or her presence may add a certain element of entertainment, but other than that, the learning coach is severely questioned.

The learning coach disassociates himself, participates only half-heartedly in the process for one reason or another. The learning coach gives higher priority to other tasks and feels no commitment neither towards the project host, the task at hand or the group. The learning coach joins them once in a while and offers a lecture at the most.

These pitfalls exist as real and constant fears and possibilities during the whole process. In order for there to be a commitment to the project work, bonds and alliances must be created between the active parties in the process. It is not unusual or remarkable that such alliances develop in the direction of a triangle drama. It is probably unavoidable, and during the course of the six to nine months of project work, most projects have fallen into all the pitfalls and climbed out of them again. Sometimes they get stuck in one position, and this becomes a lasting impression of the whole program for everybody involved. It is the task of the learning coach to understand, interpret and use the triangle drama in a constructive and pedagogical way in order to prevent it from being an impediment to the learning process.

How can the triangle drama be turned into a constructive process? What would Merlin do? Above all, he would open the eyes of the participants to what is going on, point out and interpret the drama, but not participate in it. He would avoid creating an alliance with the project group against the project host, and he would be careful not to team up with the project host against the project group.

In a convincing manner, he would point out that the pattern of interaction, which I describe here as a triangle drama and which has become a problem for the project group, is also a part of the problem in the project task and in the host company; that the triangle drama is omnipresent. Furthermore, he would make it clear that if the project group, on their own and in relation to the project host, have the courage to face and work on the shortcomings in their own process, this will contribute to the solution of the project task. Merlin would invite them to take part in a parallel process in which the project group (at the same time as they analyse and work on their problem "out there" in the context

of the host company) also examine and work on their own reactions when they carry out their project work.

The kind of observations Merlin would have expressed in the project work is "information" in Gregory Bateson's sense: news that makes a difference, a difference in the participants' way of thinking and acting when solving the problem, a difference which has the possibility of becoming permanent even after the program is finished.

Such news is sometimes difficult to give and receive, since it can be quite personal. The prospects for the learning coach to succeed is dependent on whether he or she has the courage to give feed-back to the group. The courage needed also depends on the learning coach's own ability to receive criticism.

The learning coach must have keen powers of observation, of simply seeing and hearing what is going on in the process and of putting these observations in a good and sensible order. Furthermore, he needs to have a sense of timing and a gift for putting his observations in words. To a large extent, it is possible to cultivate these skills through theoretical studies and practical training. Most important of all is the willingness to examine himself critically, the willingness to learn from the participants and the process, and an interest in facing his own "dragons" when confronting and working with his own imperfection in the role of the learning coach.

"Dragons" In the Role of the Learning Coach

The strength and credibility of the role of the learning coach lies in the learning coach's ability to contain his own process. In order to be able to transfer the understanding to the project participants that they themselves are a part of the problem they are solving, the learning coach needs to constantly be aware of himself. The ability to give feed-back and constructive criticism on the participants' ways of thinking and acting etc., must be built on the learning coach's willingness to be self-critical. The role of the learning coach is a structure in the project group. It is important that it is built on solid ground and that the learning coach is prepared to face the dragons which lie beneath it.

In addition to his way of thinking and acting in the group, it is important that the learning coach is aware of his own motives, *general* motives as to why he or she performs the function of the learning coach and *specific* motives in the actual coaching situation in the project group: Why is the learning coach acting in a certain way? Right now?

Primarily, triangle dramas are developed and established when there are several hidden or unclear motives in a situation. My own experience and observations as a learning coach has led to the following collection of examples of hidden learning coach motives which create problems in the practical coaching situation:

The learning coach wants to *make a good impression*: in general, because the companies pay substantial program fees for their participants and he wants to justify their investment; in relation to the participants since he doesn't want to make them disappointed; in relation to the colleagues in the program staff, the learning coach wants to show his competence in order to be selected for further programmes; or for a specific purpose, for instance because he sees the possibility of getting his own private consulting assignments with the host company.

The learning coach *feels alone*: in general, because the research and consulting business is a lonely existence and he feels a great need for networking and making friends;

specifically in the coaching situation where the demand of not being part of the group can be a heavy burden and the desire to slip in and socialise becomes overwhelming.

The learning coach wants to be *close to the power*: sitting with a project group in the company of top executives from several companies, and having access to the CEO and key people of a specific company, is a privilege which comes almost for free and apparently without obligations. This privilege can tickle his personal vanity and give a "social capital" which is useful in many other contexts.

The learning coach is *insecure and fearful*: fearful of failing, he almost panics when his creativity dries up; fearful of not being liked; fearful on the part of the participants when they are hard pressed by the management of the host company; etc.

There are many other and hidden motives in the coaching situation. The point is for the learning coach to make them clear to himself and make sure he fulfils these motives and personal needs elsewhere than in his work with the project group. If frustration rather than gratification is the mother of good learning strategies, it is important that the learning coach is able to frustrate his own motives.

The learning coach should meet the group with clarity with respect to his own motives, preferably without memories from his previous experiences as a learning coach and without a fixed concept and understanding of what kind of group he has in front of him. Memories from other groups and too many preconceived notions of what is going to happen, can often have a hampering effect on the insights born in a process. The learning coach's own attitude or approach can easily obstruct the discoveries made in every group. The group's capacity to explore and create new solutions is greatly dependent on the learning coach's own curiosity and joy of discovery. In other words: The learning coach should meet the group with as open a mind as possible, focusing both on the group and their work and his own work in the group.

It is important to point out that the learning coach's competence in the triangle we have focused on here, is not only dependent on the learning coach as a person, but also on the network of factual and possible triangle constellations surrounding it. In the large MiL network, where the organisation meets the participants and their companies, there is an abundance of conceivable triangle constellations. All of them need to be tended to in order for the learning coach to be able to focus on his task.

The demands made on the learning coach in a MiL programme are high, demands that primarily should be regarded as guiding stars for the development of competence among MiL's learning coaches. The development of the learning coach competence can for instance be done along two parallel lines: One of them is what we could call a "mutual authenticity check-up", in other words, the learning coaches act as each other's learning coaches. The other is a concentration on the development of knowledge and competence: new concepts and theories about learning processes in programmes and learning organisations.

By mutual authenticity check-up I mean something along the lines of role-playing

"the prince and the philosopher": creating situations where the learning coaches act as each other's learning coaches, where MiL staff members humbly subject themselves to each other's critical examination, sharing their experiences, the painful ones in particular, for the purpose of achieving greater clarity and of clarifying their own experiences. In this process it is of particular importance that the learning coaches leave behind their other roles in MiL, for instance the role of programme director or the role of psychologist/economist, and for them to act only out of their experience as learning coaches.

The development of knowledge means working hard at digesting experiences from the MiL programmes: making observations, analysing, formulating concepts and theories, testing the theories, writing, sharing and discussing the results. This work gives two things in exchange. Naturally, it gives increased knowledge and nourishment to the discussion of leadership development. Secondly, it brings with it the creation of and elucidation of the field of knowledge and interest which is the foundation for the learning coach's work in the project group: the world and home of Merlin.

The Leader as a Learning Coach

There are universal aspects of Merlin's and the learning coach's unique position and competence. Today, it becomes more and more common to discuss the role of the leader in terms of being a pedagogue or a learning coach. It is stressed that the leader every once in a while should leave the field of action (the business activities) and contribute to the learning and development of his employees.

With two concepts from the English psychoanalyst Patrick Casement, I would like to sum up the main message in this essay and connect it with the role of the leader in the everyday life of the working organisation. Casement mentions "the caring triad" and "the inner learning coach".

The concept of the caring triad is a way of looking at triangle processes from a con-

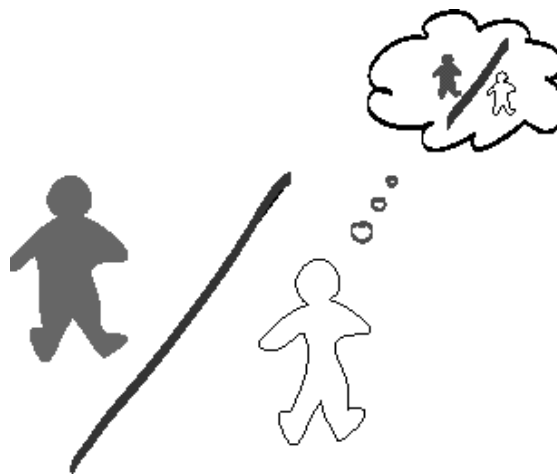
structive perspective. If we start out with the most primordial relationship of all, the one between mother and child, we can say that this relationship at the very beginning needs to be held or nurtured by a third party. It is the duty of every mother to be as good a mother as possible to her child, and to react in accordance with the varying needs of the child. It is important that the mother and child receive emotional support during the time when they are getting to know each other. It is the task of the father to "hold" her emotionally while she is nurturing the child. If he is not accessible, someone else in the mother's presence performs this function, for example her mother. What the mother primarily needs is someone who believes in her ability to be a good mother, someone who can show her this confidence in practical action.

If the mother receives the sufficient support and acknowledgement from the beginning, she does not have to worry about her inadequacy. However, if she lacks this emotional and affirmative support, there is a great risk that she will lose confidence in herself and fail because of her worries of not succeeding. The father's (or someone else's) presence and position, his willingness to carry her, is thus of paramount importance for the mother's ability to fulfil her task. The child benefits or suffers depending on the quality of the father's support.

The most primordial nurturing triad can be seen as a metaphor for building relationships in a working environment. One of the most important tasks of the management is to perform the function of support and affirmation, of "holding" the employees. The foreman, supervisor or manager is present in the background as a significant person who affirms and believes in the employee's capacity to hold his relationships (to the task at hand, to his colleagues and to his customers or clients). When this holding is

present, there is an increase in the employee's possibility of achieving self-confidence and high performance. If it is missing, there is often a tendency to be insecure and to worry, and to neglect the task at hand. To use the metaphor of the tower in the legend of Merlin, one could compare leadership to architecture, to a *structure which holds* an organisation with its people and its tasks.

The "inner learning coach" is the result of having had the experience of being coached. When the manager is coached by for instance an older colleague, a mentor in the organisation, or a learning coach in a MiL programme, a safe relationship is created in which the manager can bring up and problemise his dilemmas in his everyday activities as a leader. He, or she, receives advice and comments from the learning coach, and these insights become integrated into the manager's activities in his area of business and with his personnel. It is as if the manager "borrows" the thoughts of the learning coach.



The following is a way of summing up the main message of the text: The difference between the fields of action and reflection (the "prince" and the "philosopher") in the outer world, for instance in the project group, leads to an inner creative difference between an action-oriented and a reflection-oriented aspect of the self.

By interacting with the learning coach, the manager strengthens his own capacity for spontaneous reflection. Thus, the manager has access to two internal speaking partners, as it were: the internalised learning coach and the manager himself. At the end of a period of receiving coaching or mentoring, the coaching process has developed into a dialogue between the outer and the inner learning coach, and step by step the manager develops his own independent way of solving his dilemmas.

It is in this sense I have spoken about an inner learning coach, about a wizard in the soul:

When the relationship of trust and resolute coaching is clearly represented in the outer world, for instance during the course of a MiL programme, an opportunity is given to create an inner dialogue between the powers of action and reflection, an opportunity to become more wise and open-minded.

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