

# Adult Education: A New Paradigm?

Educating, learning, succeeding together



## COOPERATIVE APPROACHES #°4

“The only way that offers any hope of a better future for all humanity is through cooperation and partnership”. Kofi Annan

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**EDITORIAL**

# We are a teaching species

By Michel Seyrat

To open this issue on adult education, we can mention three "historical" situations which required a great deal of training for many individuals at the same time, and which show that learning is above all based on a relationship between people committed to the same goal. The testimony of Michel Payen makes this vigorously clear.

## ***Cathedral builders***

The fear of the turn of the millennium forgotten, and prosperity returning, the bishops want to shine by building new cathedrals. For more than a thousand years, builders have mastered the art of the semicircular vault. But the princes of the church want things to be bigger, taller and brighter. The master builders are asked to innovate, and masons, stonemasons, carpenters and ironworkers are asked to follow their lead. This "art nouveau", later called "gothic", spread throughout



Europe for two centuries. A very large number of groups of men and women, and several generations, followed one another in constructing each building, each one transmitting to the other the spirit of the building, its laws and forms. In the lodges of masons, stonemasons, carpenters and blacksmiths, newcomers were constantly being trained, skills verified, news shared, difficulties overcome, and failures analyzed and compensated for when a vault collapsed or a frame was broken. Sculptors got involved, master glassmakers surpassed themselves, companionships and

brotherhoods were established, and art nouveau moved from being religious to civil, etc. In short, people learned through transmission and experience. Let us imagine for a moment this immense effort of reflection and training, whose masters have for the most part remained unknown. Education step by step, from hand to hand, in an intense sharing of reflections, knowledge and know-how.



### ***Gutenberg's companions***

Another phenomenon is indicative of the immense human effort involved in any transmission: the spread of Gutenberg's printing techniques. The processes of this adventurous inventor with a complicated destiny spread at great speed across the continent thanks to his companions, who could be followed as they founded "printing works" in European cities. These "printers" met, worked and accompanied Gutenberg in his

tests, first works, failures and trials. And then they themselves passed their knowledge on to others. This prolific "strain" is all the more moving because Gutenberg experienced challenging moments due to his inventions.

### ***The schoolmasters***

Another fascinating effort in adult education resulted from compulsory schooling in France. From 1879 to 1882, school laws instituted compulsory, free and secular elementary education for all boys and girls in France between the ages of 7 and 13. This compulsory schooling forced the state to build thousands of schools according to architectural rules designed for the well-being of the pupils and to train thousands of teachers in departmental teacher training colleges. Even today we are still astonished by the pedagogical relevance of many of the texts produced at the time and by the humanism that inspired the "black hussars of the Republic", as schoolteachers were called at the time. Many false clichés have distorted this "pioneering" school which, within a few years, became general and massive. But those who developed it had education in mind, exchanged and shared their experiences, and democratized knowledge and the art of learning.



## ***Why train?***

In these three examples, men and women knew why they were being trained, and what meaning it had. Not everything is always so clear: Who trains? Who finances training? For what? Is it possible to provide training without developing the critical thinking skills needed to analyze it?

## ***Training for reform?***

Often training is driven by a reform that forces change. But reform has two meanings: to give a new form but also to discard the old one. The development of the written word and the printing press has relegated the oral tradition of "learning by heart" to the past, "Gothic" art has displaced "Romanesque" art, the audiovisual industry is displacing the written word, speed is denigrating slowness... But this is a kind of optical illusion, because to be effective, training among adults never starts from scratch, but must

be rooted in transmission, cooperation and exchange. The master of change, in a period that saw many changes, proclaimed in the words of François Rabelais: "I build with living stones".

We are a teaching species, wrote the American psychologist Erik Erikson: we teach children and help them to learn, but we also teach each other "*the continuation of mankind challenges the generative ingenuity of workers and thinkers of many kinds*".



## STORY

# The three eras of training

By Michel Payen



Michel Payen's childhood dream was to build a car that flies or an airplane that can be driven... He therefore studied engineering at the Ecole Centrale, one of the most prestigious engineering schools in France. But his deepest desire was to keep a foothold in the human world, so he turned to postgraduate studies in economics. Hired by major companies such as

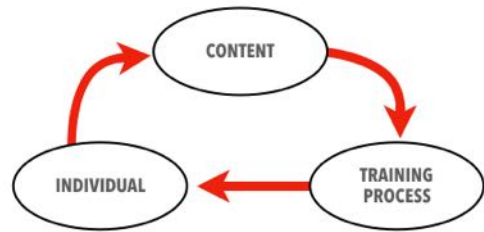
Electricité de France, then the French Petroleum Institute, he held positions in both economic and management consulting, and professional training. After a few years, he left the corporate world to join the world of associations. He started as National Training Commissioner for the Scouts de France, then in charge of development, operational projects

*and training for the Telethon, a fund-raising event to finance research projects on genetic diseases. At the end of this intense experience, he decided, with a friend, to create a company for training, facilitation and tutoring, and developed complementary skills in coaching. Michel works for both companies and associations. Throughout his career, Michel has been well aware of the paradigm shifts and tensions that have marked professional training.*

### ***The three great eras of vocational training***

In my experience, three major eras can be distinguished based on how the issues and approaches to vocational training are understood.

All training articulates three key elements: a person in training, content to be acquired, and the training process that makes it possible. The perception of the relationships between these three parameters has changed considerably over time and as the humanities and social sciences have advanced. Training's "center of gravity" has moved successively from the content to the training process and then to the person.



#### **1. Primacy of content**

Since ancient times, training has been conceived above all as the transmission of valuable content and knowledge. Learning is defined as a process of memorization. In the 19th century, with the rise of objective sciences, skills were conceived in the form of rigorous, reliable and shaped knowledge. Trainers are "knowers", i.e. experts in a given field of competence; they transmit their knowledge to non-knowers who must listen and memorize the content. With very good speakers, people who master "dramatic effects", training designed in this way can be exciting, but more often than not the results are very poor. In the 1950s, analyses show that in lectures, people only retain about 5% of the content (see diagram).

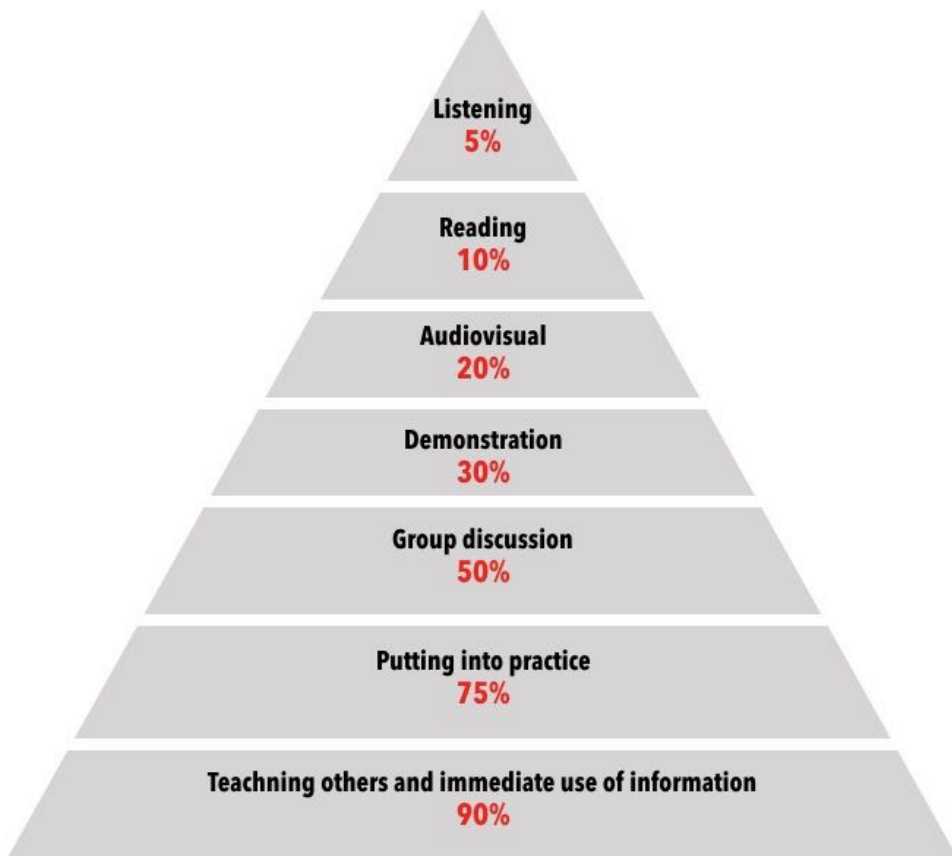
#### **2. Primacy of the process**

Work in the social sciences and humanities reveals the mechanisms and conditions for an effective acquisition process. It shows that active methods are

much more effective than passive methods. The challenge is therefore to make the trainee active. This has resulted in the blossoming of active pedagogies of experiential learning. It is no longer a question of memorizing transmitted knowledge, but of discovering it by oneself in order to better appropriate it. What is to be learned is no longer described in terms of content: the notion of training objective appears to name the result to be achieved, the competence that the active

process aims at. The training process becomes a learning process. The trainer is no longer a teacher, but becomes a facilitator of active methods, a learning mediator.

For the sake of objectivity, the training objectives are defined in terms of new behaviors to be observed at the end of the training, and not in terms of states or an individual's inner states, which would be unobservable. The trainer's role is then to design



**Retention percentage according to learning methods (University of Madison, USA)**

experiences that will allow these new behaviors to appear. For example, based on a case study, a role play or a simulation, the individual will react to a situation and will therefore adopt this or that new behavior. The training process becomes active.

The effectiveness of this approach, whose strength lies in being based on objectives defined in terms of observable behavior, has been proven in technical and vocational education. It has given rise to programmed and computer-assisted teaching.

However, this goal-based approach has several limitations. Just as it is fairly easy to formulate objectives and assess learning for a skill - practical skills are best described in terms of observable behaviors - it is more difficult in the area of knowledge: it is a matter of translating the level of knowledge into the behaviors made possible by that level. This becomes almost impossible in the area of soft skills. Indeed, it is very difficult to formulate attitudes, levels of consciousness and sensitivities into a few observable behaviors: it is reductive of the desired "inner state".

### 3. Primacy of the person

The process gradually makes way for the person as the central element of the training triad under the effect of several factors:

- The development of neurosciences that specify how humans acquire and manage their knowledge,
- The rise of digital technology, which makes it possible to individualize training,
- Finally, the context of the fight against unemployment, which requires the empowerment of the individual and exerts political pressure to this end.

Cognitive scientists see learning as an active process of information processing and problem solving that leads to changes in mental structures. In order to create a favorable and motivating learning situation, it is necessary to:

- Take into account the characteristics of each individual as they process information according to their own representation;
- Encourage activities involving long-term memory;
- Implement strategies that involve problem solving and

develop metacognitive processes (reflection on one's own way of reflecting).

The idea is therefore to have the learner discover a number of things he or she needs and let him or her do the assembling. To do this, the trainer provides learners with learning systems, i.e. a diversity of approaches and devices: on-the-job training, distance learning, peer training based on reference frameworks and the certification of skills. The trainer is no longer central to the learning process, he or she becomes a device technician, an experienced facilitator and a coach, rather than a transmitter of knowledge or a facilitator.

### ***Tension between the organization and the individual***

In fact, in practice there is a fourth key element that remains central: it is the organization of which the person is a part and which creates the conditions for training. The paradigm shifts mentioned are all motivated by the desire to make people effective in relation to the issues of their organization: through new skills to achieve tangible results in the field. Behind the person undergoing training, there is a sponsor, funder, boss or

HRD: a representative of the organization, association or company, who places an order with a set of specifications with the training organization. An individual's interest is considered de facto, based on the interest of the collective to which he or she belongs. This generates tension between the individual and the organization.

### **Training and learning**

Training is usually an ongoing concern of an organization, company or association. It constantly needs high-performance employees and wishes to provide them with the necessary new skills through training. It is therefore the first to identify training needs, in the light of its need for results. The training courses it purchases are developed within this framework. But training is not dressage: its success requires the agreement and consent of the person, since it is he or she who will do the work of learning. The person has a greater or lesser motivation to acquire the proposed skills. Their perception of their own needs may differ significantly. While we can help people learn, we cannot train them by force: for learning to work, it is necessary to obtain the person's commitment.



So there is tension between the sponsor who buys the training and the participant who thinks: "Do I want this? What is my real need? What means do I really have at my disposal?".

The organization does not always understand that its members are not docile. It gives a technical slant to skills without recognizing that they have an impact on people's lives. It says to the individual, "I'm offering you a professional path where you'll develop your skills to be able to do this or that task"..." and the individual replies, "Yes, but I'm not interested!"... This means that the conditions for dialogue

between the individual and his or her organization are too often lacking to reach full agreement on the training we need together. For its part, the French State has just introduced a reform to give everyone back responsibility for their own professional training. This is fundamentally a good thing, because there are still too many organizations that only care about the short term and seek to use the their employees' skills without opening up any new opportunities for them. It is necessary to develop people's employability by enabling them to adapt to change and to be able to bounce back. But it is understandable that no

company wants to develop its employees' skills only to see them leave for competitors. The good idea behind the reform is based on people's ability to be mature enough in their professional projects to negotiate with their companies: it is a cultural change that will take time.

### **The trainer as an interface**

Concretely, trainers find themselves from the start of a training course serving as interfaces between the organization and those being trained, who do not have the same expectations and training priorities: one pays but the other is present. The trainer negotiates in a way that best meets the needs of the individuals while taking into account the sponsor's requirements.

Not everyone has the same learning needs and abilities. For example, in order to achieve the training objectives selected, some people will need 10 days of training while others will be able to do it in two days. And the sponsor, stingy with both money and staff time, will say to the trainer, "Well, if they can learn in two days, I'll only pay you for two days!" But the trainer cannot guarantee to the sponsor that everyone will achieve this, because it is impossible. He or

she will therefore answer: "If you allow me to accompany these people for two days, I commit myself to doing it thoroughly, with all possible means, in terms of training, coaching, and supervision. But I can't guarantee that all of them will achieve the objectives that have been set." As gardeners say, you don't grow plants by pulling on the stems.

Personally, at the beginning of any training course, I tell the participants: *"It's okay if you don't reach the objectives. They enabled me to design our approach on the basis of the needs identified upstream. But they are not necessarily yours. And some of you will reach these objectives, others will go further, stay below them or learn different things. It's not a question of achieving these objectives, it's a question of achieving those that are within your reach, of progressing, of acquiring tools and learning how to use them"*.

By this I mean that the collective objectives in a training course are the direction given to the group as a whole - we still have to move together in the same direction - but each person will progress with who they are, with their culture, with their own parameters but also with their challenges and desires.

Each person will have a personal trajectory, make the acquisitions that are adapted to him or her, reach a level of competence that is personal: the training space is a place for this, the others are a catalyst for personal progression.

With practice, I have understood clearly that in the training space it is necessary to focus on the individuals and on the way in which they want to experience the training, in order to motivate them to undertake training, to arouse their interest, to make them want to do something, to make something useful happen. But a company's quality procedures mean that the provision of training is a guaranteed process, regardless of the people who take part in it.

### **Two cases of discrepancy between people and their organization**

By way of example, here are two cases that have left a strong impression on me.

#### **The unhappy assistants**

The first one is already old. I was running a training course... At the time, I was an economics trainer and for three days I had to train the assistant managers of a major oil company on the economics of the oil value chain. The aim was to

enable them to identify the economic risks linked to the various business lines, such as oil exploration, field production, transport and refining of crude oil, and finally the trade and distribution of petroleum products. It was important for them to understand this, even with simple notions, in order to be more committed in their respective roles. I started the training with a game about expressing expectations and after an hour they started to cry.

I ask them: *"Listen, what's going on? Have I shocked you?"*.

They said, *"Sir, we have to tell you, we don't understand anything... Because anyway, our bosses make us work without asking us to think... For example, I have to type texts in English all day long and I don't know English. I don't understand anything about what I'm working on. We don't even understand what's going on in our own jobs. So what you're proposing is certainly very good, but it's useless."*

I suddenly realized that before dealing with the economy of the trades, they already had to identify what these different trades were... And also that I motivated them to train because their need to express their suffering at work outweighed their desire to move. I chose to abandon the planned program

and transform everything around a sharing group. For two days, I worked hard to get these women to have confidence in themselves, to tell themselves that it was possible to learn something, and to master their destinies a little more by becoming aware that they had the right to be happy in their jobs... After two days, they were ready and we did a final day of training on the initial objective: understanding the economic stakes of the different oil jobs.

That year, this training session received the company's highest satisfaction score! Because the assistants were transformed. It was simply that, contrary to what the sponsor had told me, I had to do an analysis of their needs and their starting level to fully understand their expectations. At the time, I still had the impression that I had not respected the contract with the client! I went to see him and told him, *"There you go, I'd like to tell you how I proceeded"*... He was the person in charge of Human Relations in the company. He smiled and said "OK..."

I think he was very happy with the way I'd worked. But he couldn't sell it internally, because it revealed too many misunderstandings about labor relations and training.

## Stress management training

Here's another very recent case. I work for a large company that specializes in providing data to businesses. I appreciate it very much and I feel confident in it. I've been training there for quite a few years now on time and priority management.

The training manager at the time said to me, *"Michel, there is a lot of stress at work here, I think that a time management course would be good for people, a course that helps people to find their personal compass again."*

This training was planned for two days with the objective that people discover that behind time management there is first of all the management of their own objectives and relationships: not to be invaded by others, not to be overwhelmed, to know how to say no, to know how to set priorities, not to confuse the important and the urgent, to find what makes sense in one's life and work, etc. In the company's culture, there were real issues at stake, because in a highly competitive market, salespeople tend to sell very tight deadlines, which makes it almost impossible for the people who implement the contracts to carry out their mission. It's very tough. They are quite stressed and

unhappy. A lot of them work until 10 o'clock at night.

The training was therefore intended to enable them to both step back from this reality and make personal choices by saying "*I accept that, I don't accept that... I don't want to be subjected to that any more...*".

We ended with very operational personal action plans. The participants worked for themselves as well as for their jobs. It was a change and people were very happy. It was a training course that received one of the best evaluations in the company.

But my contact was retiring and the new HR director said to me, "*Michel, we have to reduce the duration, two days is too long.*" I said, "*All right, but then what are we reducing in terms of targets? Because if we make it shorter, we can't achieve the same results*". I said, "*I'll tell you, there are behavioral change processes that take at least two days. If we have less time, we can't achieve them, and the whole point of the training disappears*". She said, "*In training, I don't believe in behavior.*"

She felt that all it takes is some planning techniques and letting people get on with it. Without seeing or acknowledging that the

problem lies not in learning a technique, but in overcoming the obstacles to using it. Because in time management, everyone has known the techniques from childhood... The problem is understanding why we don't use them.

So sometimes we are faced with clients who don't even try to understand what their staff needs are anymore. They buy some sort of bandages, which allow them to argue to the unions, "*You see we're doing something*"...

So I did a one-day training program again and announced that unfortunately the result would be very poor... We've completely reverted to a rather vain transmissive approach. I think in a year's time, after the evaluation, she'll say, "*This training is not very satisfactory, people are disappointed, so we're going to cut it.*"

In fact, she's a "cost-killer", she wants to reduce her training budget.

## ***Training and change in the organization***

### **Resistances to change**

One of the crucial issues is implementing training outcomes.



When the trained person returns to his or her job, whether in an association or a company, it is often difficult to apply what has been learned. The changes they want to make encounter extremely strong resistance from their environment and in particular from their superiors. They want the person to perform better, but at the same time they do not want to see their ways of doing things questioned.

### **Accompanying change**

Support with implementing training achievements is essential. Everybody admits this now. This can be done by a trainer, tutor, sponsor, coach or the manager. The big question is: does it have to

be done by someone external or by someone internal to the organization?

For years nobody in the organizations wanted to take over this task. People used to say, "You can't ask managers to do that".

Very often, I insisted that managers should receive training that would enable them to understand the stakes involved and make them capable of supporting those who took part in it. This helped to trigger an overall change management movement and the results have been positive. But business leaders tend to say, "No, no, the training is done, the page is turned!"

This is paradoxical, since the expected results in the workplace depend on implementing the new skills acquired through training: the less this transfer is accompanied, the less profitable the training investment is.

I was so concerned about this situation that I took a coaching course, to be able to follow up on the training, to encourage and support managers in its implementation.

## ***The learning organization***

When trainers position themselves as experts on any given content, if they are not researchers, not actually operational in the organization and able to keep their professional experience up to date, their expertise will gradually become outdated and what they teach to trainees will increasingly be out of step with the level of competence required to remain competitive on the market.

Today, in a company, when we ask an expert, "*Would you like to be a trainer?*", we realize that after three months he or she is no longer keeping up to date with the required expertise.

## **Sharing knowledge**

So, we quickly realized that the best training was peer training. Only peers keep up with the state of the art in a given field. So, in an "agile enterprise" approach, we've sought to create learning communities, i.e. communities that, based on experience acquired in common, formalize and disseminate knowledge and innovation faster than the conventional training system can do.

## **The trainer: a facilitator and a coach**

Thus, we see organizations developing various peer learning processes internally, i.e. cooperative learning methods. The trainer, who has been a "knower", an expert, then the facilitator of a training process now becomes a facilitator and a coach.

What does this mean concretely? Well, for example, a trainer helps experts make a three-minute video to visualize some knowledge or a fresh innovation. Or a trainer supervises co-development groups, i.e. problem-solving and experience-capitalization groups, which are real learning groups, in which the trainer serves as a facilitator, to manage the process and people's participation.

## **The arrival of digital technology**

All this has been made easier by the arrival of digital technology, which has made it possible to do two things that could not be done before: on-the-job training and distance learning. And also deferred (asynchronous) training, which is a special case of the previous ones. Today, digital media allow for a very wide variety of training approaches. The current preferred combination is the SPOC (Small Private Online Course). It



combines virtual classrooms (project work), resource centers (videos, etc.) and social networks for learners.

### **A video database**

When someone registers for a training course, we tell him, *"It would be great if from the 20 videos available, you watch three of them relating to the subjects that interest you..."*.

What's the point? Firstly, we allow people to make their own choice when it suits them, Secondly, the format respects their attention span, which drops after two to three minutes: these are generally very short testimonies not exceeding four minutes. Thirdly, they can choose the order in which they watch them, which respects the spontaneous and impulsive way in which each person surfs the Internet, the order in which their interests and associations of ideas lead them...

The trainer/accompanist does not impose the course, but says, *"Visit this video bank and watch some of them in the order you want..."*. It works because it is combined with two other tools, the virtual classroom and the social network.

### **A virtual classroom**

There is plenty of software that allows people to meet in a very secure and participatory way within a group, each from their own workplace. There are 12 of us with a coach; we dialogue, exchange experiences and questions. The trainer/coach checks that people are comfortable and well-integrated, and that they take ownership of the subject. It's a place where we can start research and experimentation. But it's no longer a place for teaching: that's what videos are made for.

The virtual class schedules are fixed, for example on Wednesdays from 4 to 5 p.m.: on that day, the virtual class opens with all the participants and the trainer who leads it. Sub-groups can be formed to address particular points, or different projects. The trainer then moves from one group to another, listening, intervening, accompanying... This is the virtual version of the monitor or action

research groups of the face-to-face sessions.

### **A social network**

The third element is the social network. More and more social networks dedicated to training themes are being created. Today, in the context of a training course on time management, I could say to the participants, *"Well, I'm giving everyone an access code to a group on a social network that will be active for three months. You'll be able to exchange experiences and dialogue..."* And in fact, what's interesting is that people communicate by saying, for example, *"Did you see what Michel taught us there, can you manage to implement it?"* ... The other replies, *"Oh no, I didn't manage to do it!"* ... Another says, *"But yes, I did!"* ... They go deeper into the subject among themselves.

### **Collective intelligence**

The digital approach gives good results when you combine the three elements at the same time: video bank, virtual classroom and social network.

In an ultimate phase, some organizations no longer have a training service. Say someone in a particular department wants to

spend some time reflecting on one topic or another. Well, this time is allocated the following Wednesday. Volunteers log in and can exchange ideas. In the meantime, a video database has been created. People are invited to participate in it to explain their experience and vision. It's peer learning, through cooperation. This revolutionizes a lot of things: people are actors not only in their own training but in the training of others. We learn in teams, we learn in networks... It's very healthy because we don't undergo training that we haven't chosen, we choose both the content and the path. Everyone goes their own way...

Today we talk about collective intelligence, about a learning organization. I'm a little embarrassed because I have the impression that we're turning it into a watchword and that we're joining collective intelligence just like we join a religion. What I see above all is that there are organizations - be they associations or companies - that need to make progress. They realize that there is a demand, which may be accompanied by a certain amount of unease or suffering: people want to be more involved, people are looking for meaning... I'm talking about participation, collaboration, and

cooperation. And I position these three registers very clearly as being three progressive degrees towards collective intelligence. And in fact, that's what I propose on a daily basis, and that's how I've built all my tools for the time being. I didn't try to stick to the collective intelligence manuals, which are published every day...



Participation is already making people active. You can be perfectly participatory without being collaborative. At this stage, the idea is to set people in motion so that things move and everyone feels like they're taking action.

Collaboration starts when people start working together, as a team or a network. It's a higher degree because everyone doesn't just talk to the boss, they're active, they look at others, they discover complementarities, and also the meaning of what they're doing, and as a result there's convergence. Everyone feels

committed to the action, but not necessarily to the result.

Cooperation is when we move from co-action to co-responsibility. At this level, not only does everyone contribute to collective action, but also everyone feels committed and co-responsible for the result to be achieved. As a result, there's a common vision, a common goal, an agreement on a result to be achieved, and therefore a cohesion of the group based on the individual commitment of each person. Commitment and cohesion are the two keys that guarantee that the result will be achieved and used.

And here I come back to what I was saying about training. In a training session, we learn things but we don't necessarily want to implement them, or obstacles prevent us from implementing them. When, in a group, we've determined a result and implemented a cooperative approach to achieving it, everyone feels committed and motivated: change is on the way.



## DECIPHERING

# The Learning Organization

By Dominique B nard

In 1990, Peter Michael Senge<sup>1</sup> published a book entitled "*The Fifth Discipline*", which became a world bestseller. In this book, he presented the concept of the learning organization that he had developed with Chris Argyris, an American academic, social scientist and organizational theorist. Since then, the concept of the learning organization has been the subject of abundant literature. Numerous consulting firms around the world offer services on this topic, and much research has been done on related concepts such as knowledge management, the smart company, the qualifying company, etc. Since then, Peter Senge has founded The Society for Organizational Learning (SOL): <https://www.solonline.org>. SOL<sup>2</sup> offers programs, events and resources to promote the concept of the learning organization.

Is it a fashionable trend like those that often appear and disappear so quickly, or can the concept of the learning organization provide decisive and sustainable directions in the field of human resources, training and organizational management?

## ***What is a learning organization?***

In the face of the increasing systemic complexity of the world, Peter Senge believes that beyond surviving, an organization (company, association, NGO) must seek to become a "learning organization", i.e. an organization that constantly develops its capacity to build its future. For him, learning organizations are "organizations where people are constantly increasing their capacity to achieve the results they really want, where openness and new ways of thinking are cultivated, where collective aspirations are liberated and where people are constantly learning to look at the big picture together".

It is a question of inventing the "organization of the future", one in which the mode of governance would have evolved to better adapt to an increasingly complex world. To progress towards this goal, the organization must respect the strength of the human being, the importance of personal development and the desire to learn, the capacity for dialogue, the desire to work as a team.

It can also be said that a learning organization places a high value on individual learning and considers it a priority asset. It strives to optimize the learning potential of all members and teams in order to achieve the company's objectives.

### Key ideas of the learning organization

The learning organization is based on three key ideas:

1. Creating a climate that fosters learning at all levels of the organization;
2. Enabling individuals to become more effective and creative;
3. Seeking the continuous development of the organization and increasing its capacity to challenge and transform itself on a permanent basis.

### The five disciplines of the learning organization

According to Peter Senge, the learning organization is a place where:

- Individuals develop **personal mastery** by increasing their ability to create the results they desire.
- New patterns of thinking are developed through **systems thinking** and **mental models**.
- Collective aspirations are encouraged through a **shared vision**.

- Individuals continually learn to learn together through **team learning**.

The learning organization is therefore built from five "disciplines":

1. Systems thinking
2. Personal mastery
3. Mental models
4. The shared vision
5. Team learning

According to Corrine Eijel<sup>3</sup>, *"combined, these disciplines allow the emergence of individual and collective intelligence. They develop the capacity for learning."*

### Systems thinking

The discipline of systems thinking is primarily a mindset that focuses on understanding the interconnections between the elements of a system rather than on analyzing each element separately. It is about understanding the whole rather than the parts.

Systems thinking teaches us to:

- Perceive interrelationships rather than simple, linear links of cause and effect.
- Observe the process of change rather than a series of static images.
- Make connections between areas that are seen as separate.



1. PETER SENGE'S MODEL

- Represent situations as interactional dynamics.
- Recognize systemic structures that are continually reproducing themselves and know how to influence their functioning.

Systems thinking becomes all the more necessary as the world faces a complexity never before experienced.

*"Systems thinking is the discipline of seeing phenomena in their entirety. It studies interrelationships rather than individual elements, observing processes of change rather than static images."* Peter Senge.

**Personal mastery**

Personal mastery covers three attitudes:

1. Constantly clarifying what is really important to oneself (one's personal vision and intention) and defining a goal. The ability to focus on an ultimate goal is the cornerstone of personal mastery.
2. Analyzing lucidly one's daily reality.
3. Feeling a creative tension in the gap between the goal and the daily reality and finding in this tension the energy to move forward.

Through personal mastery, each person works towards self-improvement, and develops a desire to learn and a commitment to progress.

*"Personal mastery is the expression that my colleagues and I give to the discipline of personal development and learning. Individuals who enjoy a high level of personal mastery are continuously improving their ability to achieve the results they truly seek. The essence of the learning organization is nourished by a constant need to learn."* Peter Senge.

### **Mental models**

Through the experiences we live, we are led to build mental models, i.e. hypotheses, beliefs, prejudices and stories that we tell about ourselves, others, and organizations... We use these models, which are by definition simplifications, to approach reality and seek solutions to the problems we encounter. Acting as a prism distorting our vision, they determine what we see and profoundly influence our actions without us being aware of it.

In order to detect and bring out mental models, we must:

- Combine and balance our ability to explore and question reality with our ability to argue and clarify our point of view. Too often we are content to put forward our beliefs and opinions without taking the time to question the real facts.

- Distinguish between our stated theories (what we say and claim) and our applied theories (what we actually do).
- Question ourselves about how we move from observation to generalization ("conceptual leaps"). Too often, we interpret a fact that we have hastily observed and make overgeneralizations from it.

We need to learn to question and test our mental models to understand the impact they have on how we see the world and how we behave. We can then develop our ability to observe and change our thinking.

The culture of an organization is made up of the collective mental models of its members, therefore we cannot change the organization without probing its cultural *a priori*. This is why the discipline of mental models is the most powerful lever for profound change.

*"Mental models are postulates, generalizations, even deeply rooted representations or images that influence our understanding of the world and our actions. Very often we are not aware of mental models or their effects on our behavior."* Peter Senge.

### **Shared vision**

A vision is shared when the members of an organization share their diverse personal ideas of the common future and build from this a more refined and

stronger representation of the goal they truly desire to achieve.

The discipline of shared vision is about transforming personal visions into shared visions by taking into account the diversity of points of view in order to create a more global vision shared by all, and then measuring together the progress and gaps between the present situation and the common vision of the future.

For this to happen well, the actors must remain open-minded and accept the coexistence of several aspirations. The shared vision arouses enthusiasm and changes the relationship between an organization and its members: it becomes "our" organization. This appropriation encourages experimentation and risk taking.

*"For a vision to be truly shared, you and I must have the same image in mind, we must both feel committed to achieving it, not each on our own, but together. In this case, we are united, bound by a common aspiration. Shared vision is vital for learning organizations. It gives purpose and energy for learning."* Peter Senge.

### **Team learning**

The discipline of team learning is to develop an ability to work together in such a way that the talent of the team is greater than the sum of the individual talents. It is about taking full advantage of the intelligence potential of each member to develop

collective intelligence and learn together.

The discipline of collective learning requires mastery of expert discussion and dialogue.

In expert discussion, different opinions are presented and defended, arguments are exchanged, and each person tries to make his or her own opinion prevail while analyzing that of the others in order to reach a collective decision.

Dialogue is a free and open exchange on complex subjects; it requires listening carefully to others and putting one's own ideas aside for the time being. Through dialogue, a team reaches a level of understanding that cannot be reached by an individual alone. To nurture an effective dialogue, everyone must be prepared to question his or her own *a priori*, while considering others as allies.

*"... If a team succeeds in learning collectively, it becomes a microcosm of learning across the organization. In this way, its experience is likely to spread quickly throughout the organization, through individuals and other groups. ...] Team learning is a collective discipline, although it involves individual skills and competencies."* Peter Senge.

## ***Criticisms of the concept of learning organization***

Critics point to the difficulty of giving an operational definition of the concept of the learning enterprise. Some denounce its vague and ambiguous nature:

*"Vague ideas are generally impossible to implement but excellent to show".* Ortenblad, (2004)<sup>4</sup>.

Senge's model presupposes that the leader has a clear and formalized strategic vision, and that members of the organization spontaneously adhere to this vision. The five disciplines he proposes are often considered rather vague and their connection is unclear.

These criticisms are reinforced by the fact that many consultants and consulting firms use the concept of the learning organization without a clear and validated theoretical reference.

According to Hannachi (2018)<sup>5</sup>, many criticisms are based on misinterpretation.

- The learning organization is not a mode of organization; it is a dynamic based on general principles that can be arranged differently.
- The learning organization should not be confused with a training organization, i.e. an organization that takes a particular interest in

training. In the learning organization, training is only one variable among others.

- The learning organization is not to be confused with a qualifying organization that takes a particular interest in the development of professional competence and qualification. The learning organization does not see itself from the perspective of the individual, but from the perspective of the team and the organization. The focus is on collective learning in a cooperative dynamic with a view to organizing a collective progression of skills and developing a competitive advantage.
- Even if the learning organization is based on the existence of autonomous teams and a knowledge management system, this is not enough to characterize it. The learning organization is not only a system for capitalizing on experience and managing knowledge.

Many researchers have tried to describe the decisive characteristics of a learning organization. Ortenblad (2002)<sup>6</sup> emphasizes the following:

- Organizational learning: individuals learn as agents of the organization. Learning is closely linked to daily work activities; knowledge is created in and through work.

- The learning climate: efforts are focused on organizing work to create a climate that encourages learning.
- Organizational memory: everything that is learned is stored in the organization's memory. Bureaucratic organization is rejected in favor of an organization where information flows freely between people, across the boundaries of different departments.

### ***A development of Peter Senge's model***

Watkins and Marsick (1997, 2004)<sup>7</sup> enriched Peter Senge's model to address the main criticisms expressed. For them, the learning organization is characterized by the fact that it learns constantly and uses this learning strategically, in a way that is integrated into the workplace. Its goal is to continuously improve.

It has seven main dimensions:

1. **Continuous learning:** the organization makes constant efforts to create continuous learning opportunities for all its members.
2. **Dialogue and questioning:** The organization seeks to create a culture of questioning, feedback and experimentation.
3. **Team learning:** Effective use of teams is based on a spirit of

collaboration and collaborative skills at all levels.

4. **Empowerment:** The organization strives to create a work environment in which members of the organization have more responsibility and authority to act while being guided by a shared vision.
5. **Systems Thinking:** It is used to connect the organization to its internal and external environments.
6. **Creating systems** to capture and share knowledge: Learning is based on a set of structures, procedures and tools to capture and share information and knowledge.
7. **Strategic leadership** for learning: Leaders must think systematically to help mobilize learning to create change and move the organization in new directions.

The Watkins and Marsick model provides a satisfactory frame of reference for developing a learning organization because it encompasses the majority of the attributes described in the literature. It takes into account:

- Systems thinking as proposed by Peter Senge.
- An approach to learning in its broadest sense.

- The strategic management of learning.
- The integration of all the attributes in a theoretical framework by specifying their interactions.

The learning organization can therefore be defined as:

- An organization based on an operating logic that promotes individual and collective learning in a global vision of continuous development where:
  - The knowledge and skills of each individual become better and broader;
  - The organization develops the capacity to question itself and to develop permanently.

The concept of the learning organization is based on a solid theoretical and multidisciplinary foundation. It concerns both companies and associations. It cannot be seen as a passing and ephemeral fad. It links the most recent contributions of research on learning with the most recent contributions of research on organizations. Finally, it brings to the forefront the value of cooperative approaches.

It seems to us that all organizational leaders, especially those working in the associative and NGO field, should give it their full attention.

## Notes

1. Senge Peter M. 1990, 2006, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Harmony Books.
2. The **Society for Organizational Learning (SoL)** is an American organization founded in 1997 by Peter Senge. It replaced the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT. Since 1999, SoL publishes its own journal, "Reflections". Its European Counterpart was the European Consortium for the Learning Organisation (ECLLO), established in Brussels in 1990. It was founded by several European multinationals as a response to the US orientated approach of Peter Senge with a special emphasis to the European complexity of regions, nations, history, tradition, etc. Its Journal "The Learner" and its electronic version "eLearner" were among the oldest publications in this field. SoL communities have emerged around the world, including in France, Sweden, and Singapore. Global coordination of SoL is done by the GASC (Global Association of SoL Communities), also known as **Global SoL**. <https://www.solonline.org>
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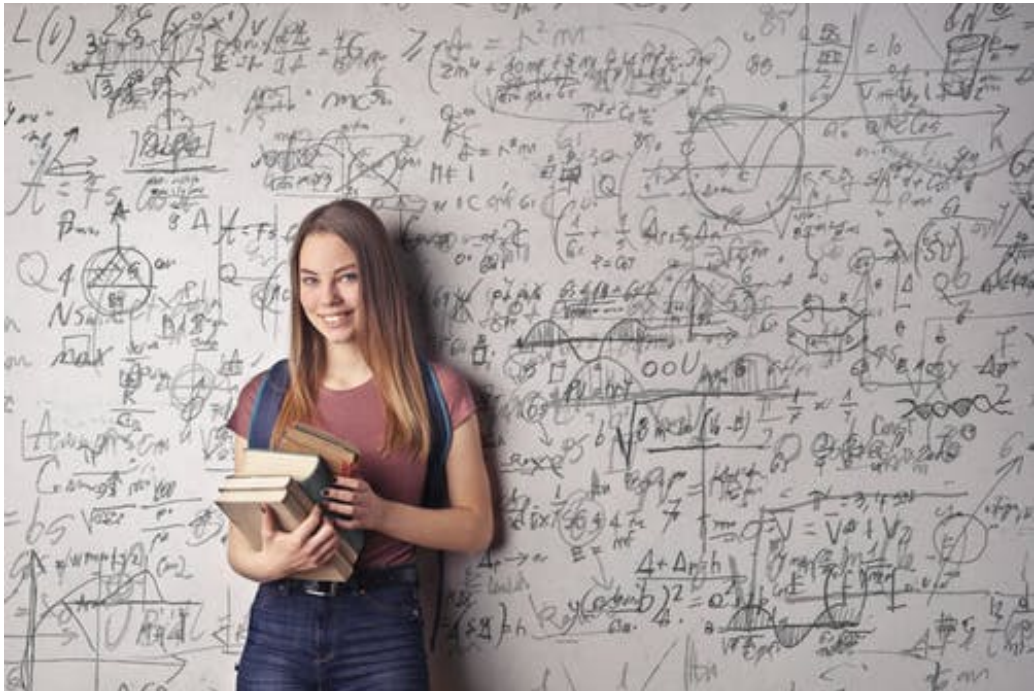
2. WATKINS & MARSICK MODEL



## DOSSIER

# How do we learn?

By Dominique B nard



## ***Teaching and learning***

Successful organizations are learning organizations, that is, organizations where learning is an integrated and facilitated process at all levels.

Training or teaching systems often focus on the goals of the organization and the role of the trainer or teacher. What matters is what the trainer says. Many people naively think that all it takes to

transmit a message is for it to be picked up and recorded in the listeners' brains. The popularity of visual presentations such as "Powerpoint" reflects this notion. Many organizations design their training systems as a series of courses supported by "Powerpoint" presentations.

Many distance learning (e-learning) systems are organized along the same lines: video

courses and visual presentations. But these presentations are only lectures with visual aids.

Information can be transmitted to a student; the student can memorize it, but, as we will see, in order to become knowledge, the information must be structured and reorganized based on experience. Knowledge is not the result of transmission; it is the result of construction.

Before embarking on a training strategy and developing training systems, organizations need to take the time to reflect on how people learn.

## ***Knowledge is built from experience***

David and Alice Kolb<sup>1</sup>, two American researchers, define learning as the process by which knowledge is created through the capture and transformation of experience.

They explain that when a concrete experience is enriched by reflection and transformed by action, the new experience thus created is richer, broader and deeper.

- Capturing experience is the act of capturing information from experience.

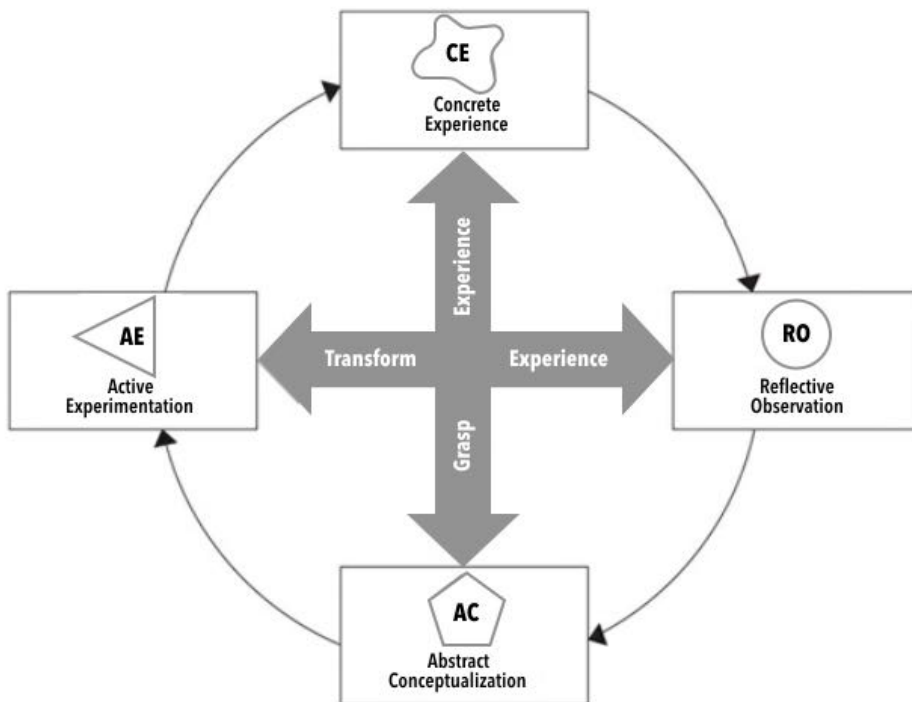
- Transforming experience is the way individuals interpret that information and act on it.

## **The learning cycle**

The learning cycle has two modes of capturing experience: Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC); and two modes of transforming experience: Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE).

As shown in Figure 1 overleaf, throughout the learning cycle, the learner experiences (CE), observes and reflects (OR), thinks and conceptualizes (CA), and acts on the new concepts he or she has established (AE). Concrete experience is the basis for observations and reflections; these reflections are assimilated and transformed into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn.

This process of experiential learning, which is described by a recursive circle, or spiral, is radically opposed to the traditional model of learning which describes a linear process in which the information transmitted by the teacher to the learner is simply stored in memory.



1. THE LEARNING CYCLE

The learning cycle model implies two things:

1. **Learning is continuous;** the learner cannot be seen as a blank page. Any person enters any learning situation with more or less articulated ideas about the subject to be studied. The role of the educator or trainer is therefore not only to implement new ideas but also to eliminate or modify old ones. Learning is enhanced if the educational process begins by bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, in order to examine and test them, and then by

integrating the new and more refined ideas into the person's belief systems.

2. **Learning is a construct.** Information can be conveyed, but knowledge is constructed. Piaget observed that children construct knowledge through two distinct but inseparable processes of adaptation: accommodation and assimilation. Assimilation occurs when children incorporate the observations they make or the information they receive into concepts they already possess (new experience is incorporated into

pre-existing knowledge), whereas accommodation occurs when an individual adapts his or her concepts based on the observations he or she makes or the information he or she receives (pre-existing knowledge is transformed by new experience).

### ***Guiding the learning cycle***

The role of the educator, or trainer, is therefore to "guide the learning cycle", i.e. :

- Propose situations that bring about enriching experiences;
- Facilitate observation and reflection based on this experience;
- Help learners to construct new concepts based on this reflection;
- Encourage learners to identify new implications for their future action from the experience.

### **Propose situations that are conducive to experience**

One of the most important roles of the trainer is to propose situations that are experiential and relevant to the selected learning objectives.

These experiences are supported by different methodological tools: group discussions, case studies, role-playing games, simulation games, etc.

### **Facilitating observation, reflection and conceptualization**

The key to facilitating the next two stages of the learning cycle - reflective observation and conceptualization - is cooperation, i.e. teamwork. Interactions within the team facilitate the questioning of each other's mental patterns and lead to a new perspective on the situation.

### ***Experiential Learning and Neuroscience***

We have seen that learning comes from experience. Recent advances in the neurosciences have corroborated the results of research in the educational sciences.

According to James Zull<sup>2</sup>, an American biologist specializing in neuroscience, knowledge lies in networks of nerve cells, neurons, which are built up in the neocortex from experience. Learning from experience leads to the growth and modification of connections between neurons (synapses) and the creation of new neural networks.

Zull has shown that the learning cycle stems from the very structure of the brain: concrete experiences pass through the sensory cortex,

reflexive observation involves the temporal integrative cortex, the creation of new abstract concepts occurs in the frontal integrative cortex, and active testing involves the motor cortex (see figure 2 below).

Zull argues that real motor and sensory experiences that involve all the senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch) are best for learning.

Action closes the learning cycle and reconnects the process that has occurred inside the brain with the outside world.

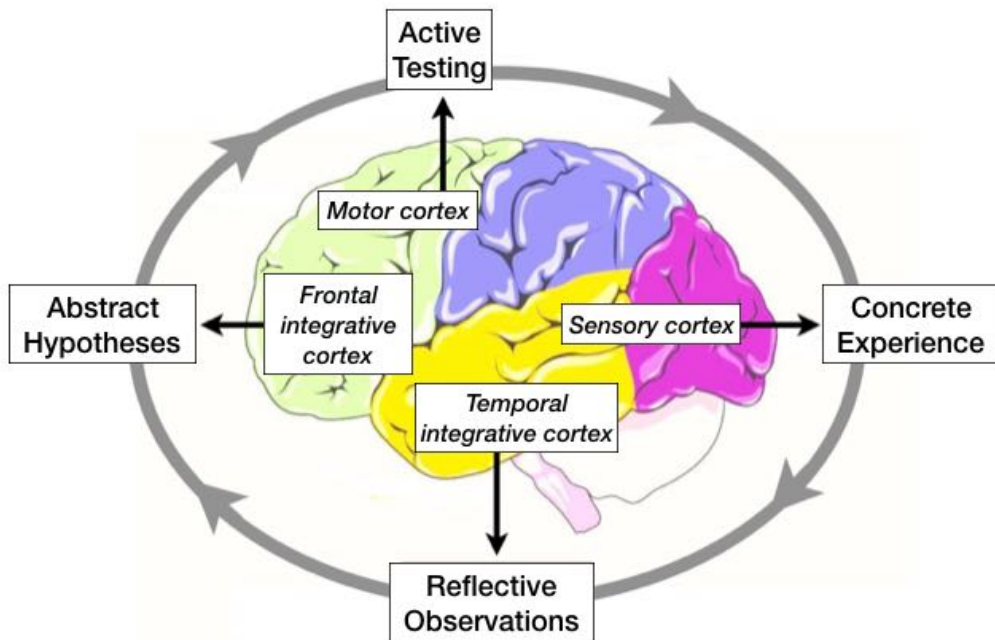
New experiences occur and a new cycle begins.

### The question of memorization

The issue of memorization is crucial in learning. It can be said

that learning is only effective if it is retained in our long-term memory. If nothing is changed in our long-term memory, nothing has been learned.

Two researchers, Specht and Sandlin<sup>3</sup> compared the retention of learning between two groups of students in an accounting course relating to a loan decision. One group used a traditional lecture method, while the second group used an active experiential learning method based on role playing. Immediately after the course, there was no difference in learning retention between the two groups. However, six weeks later, the results of the "lecture"



The experiential learning cycle and brain areas

group had decreased significantly, showing an 18% drop in concept recognition and a 54% drop in problem solving. The performance of the "role-playing" group had remained the same in terms of concept recognition and had decreased by only 13% in terms of problem solving. Numerous experiments confirmed these results. It can be concluded that rich experiences that activate vivid sensory perceptions, attention and emotions, and that require active participation are more likely to promote long-term knowledge retention.

### **You learn not only with your head but with your whole body**

The importance of experience in constructing knowledge is explained by the fact that learning occurs not only in the brain but involves the whole body. To learn, we rely not only on the integrative functions of our brain, but also on our sensations, our movements, and our emotions. We need to break away from a dualistic notion that opposes body and mind and makes the mind reside only in the brain. Rather, we should consider the mind as distributed throughout the body and in constant interaction with the environment through sensation and action.

Hannaford<sup>4</sup> argues that learning is heuristic and involves the whole body: "But we have missed a fundamental and mysterious aspect of the mind: learning, thinking, creativity and intelligence are not processes of the brain alone but of the whole body. Sensations, movements, emotions and integrative brain functions are rooted in the body. The human qualities we associate with the mind can never exist separately from the body."

Kolb notes that in the modern world, learning is generally understood as a purely mental activity. As a result, learners are asked to remain quiet and attentive while being bombarded with visual and auditory information. On the contrary, in ancient societies, such as today's indigenous communities, children of all ages have wide access to all the community activities in which they will later be required to participate. They therefore learn directly from their ongoing experience, through observation, collaboration and the ongoing support of others. Ethnologists such as Barbara Rogoff<sup>5</sup> have noted that children in these communities are more attentive and cooperative than western middle-class children.

## ***Team learning***

Kurt Lewin<sup>6</sup>, an American psychologist, highlighted group dynamics in the 1940s.

From this work, three key ideas emerged that framed research on experiential team learning:

1. the central role of reflective conversation;
2. the theory of functional leadership; and
3. the process of experience as a driving force for team development.

### **The reflective conversation**

To learn from a common experience, teams need to create a space for conversation where members can share their observations and reflections on the experience.

By sharing the different ways in which members have lived the experience, a team can develop a composite image of itself, the executive conscience, that integrates the different perspectives and viewpoints of the different members. By considering these different points of view with respect and interest, members can help each other to question their mental models and come to see

the situation from a new perspective, thus opening the way to more original and effective solutions or the development of new concepts.

### **Sharing functional roles**

It was long believed that leadership was an individual quality and that teams should be led by a single leader, but in 1948, two researchers, Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats<sup>7</sup>, discovered that groups with a certain maturity practiced shared leadership.

At the beginning of a team's life, members divide up individual roles that are aimed primarily at meeting their personal needs. Over time, however, they manage to define new roles oriented towards co-responsibility in leading the team. Some roles are focused on the accomplishment of the task, such as information gathering, coordination, criticism and evaluation; other roles are focused on the construction and maintenance of the team, such as encouragement, finding compromises, setting standards. In this way, members manage to define and adopt roles that are less familiar, and less dependent on their personalities, but indispensable for the good of the team.

## Team development according to the cycle of experiential learning

Theodore Mills<sup>8</sup> describes team development as the attainment of an increasing capacity to learn from experience and distinguishes five successive levels of development:

- **Immediate satisfaction.** In the first stage, members look within the group for a way to satisfy individual needs and desires (gratification).
- **The search for lasting gratification.** Second, individuals develop informal strategies within the group to maintain gratification over time.
- **The pursuit of a collective goal.** In the third stage, the group focuses on developing a collective goal. At this stage, the group becomes a team. Members need to develop more formal strategies to identify and achieve a common goal, move from individual to group learning, develop methods of coordination, and develop mechanisms for adapting to changing external demands.
- **Self-determination.** In the fourth stage, the group no longer simply adapts to changes in the environment, but makes self-

directed changes according to its stated goals. Although external constraints are not completely eliminated, the group develops the freedom to set and pursue its own goals.

- **Growth.** In the fifth stage, the team can pursue multiple goals, create high levels of innovation, and influence different areas. At this level, team members assume a leadership role by following the experiential learning cycle: "They experiment, observe and evaluate the realities of the current situation. They act and evaluate the consequences of their actions on the group's ability to cope with immediate and future demands. All team members can take on the role of leader and form what Mills calls the executive system.

### Executive consciousness

Executive consciousness guides the team's learning and enables it to learn and act to effectively meet the challenges of its mission and the environment. A team, which does not have a clear sense of self, navigates blindly. The team's executive consciousness monitors and controls learning: based on experience, it develops a learning model that it implements and controls in subsequent situations, it

then learns from it through follow-up and finally improves it (see figure below).

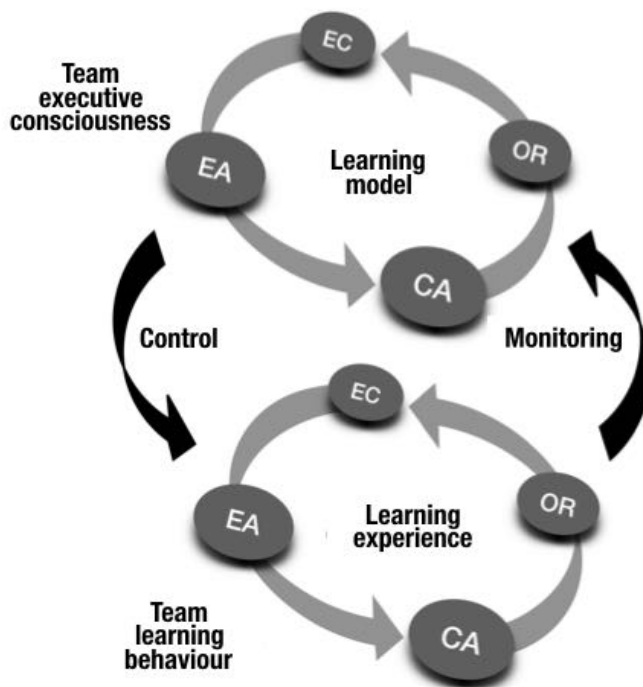
Much research has shown that in their learning behavior, teams follow the process of experiential learning and that team learning - i.e. cooperative learning - is more effective than individual learning.

In the Reflective Observation (RO) phase, team members discuss what they have observed; they gently but persistently question

each other, and challenge their usual points of view and ways of thinking (mental models).

In this way, they come to a mutual understanding and can work out a better conceptualization of the situation together; this is the stage of abstract conceptualization (AC).

They then undertake the joint planning of an action stage, active experimentation (AE).



**Executive consciousness and team learning**

Finally, there is coordinated action: the concrete experience (CE).

Team learning is more effective because team members help each other to step back from the action in order to observe and reflect more deeply by challenging their usual mental models. Together they can therefore develop stronger concepts and prepare more effective actions. Through cooperation, team learning provides access to meta-reflection, that is, the ability to reflect on one's own way of thinking, in other words, learning to learn.

## Notes

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9. Mills, T. (1967). *Sociology of small groups*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
10. Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. New York, NY: International University Press.

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**NOVEL**

# The feast of the Agonyclites

By Michel Seyrat

*To Alexandre Breffort*

Thus lived the inhabitants of the City of the end of the 21st century, which rose on either side of the fully vitrified Var River.

They lived in areas protected by padded zircon fences. Aerators with a globular function provided everyone with a regenerative fluid. The city dwellers spent one identical day after another in an animismatic biosphere with variable symmetry.

On either side of their heads, which had become ovoid, electromagnetic earpieces protruded gracefully to infuse ultra-rhythmic waves that carried messages in tune with the times. Every nanosecond, an impulse titillated the membranes, which gradually from start to finish transmitted the teletype information in multiplex by ultrasonic chirping.

In the center of the egg-head, a mask with pneumatic effects



covered the nasal orifice and pumped out the undulatory waves that saturated the atmosphere. Staphylococcal fumes filtered mephitic gases and essential vapors crystallized corrupted ether.

Above the mask, where the eyes were located, two phosphorescent spots opened up to the luminescent rays which, by stratospheric regulation, irradiated infrared and ultraviolet rays, while the infrasemantic flat screens chatted non-stop, day and night, influenced by a direct current without alternating current.

Between mask and chin, the mouth split under the pressure of an artificial jaw with a double electrode that caught or sucked to feed the old body apparatus. Sometimes the slit would widen or narrow under the effect of feelings with episodic and transient variations.

The quintessentially nourished body mass could glide softly over turbocharged skates that spun with a muffled noise at or near equisonic speed.

Each resident thus connected, piped and connected by short waves or by tubular pneumatics, received both the necessary and the superfluous in a continuous flow, and emitted at high frequency. On dancing days, he regenerated himself through epicyclic tremors.

The city was square. In the large central square, only the roundabouts decorated in yellow were rounded. Relationships were stiff, rare, dry and battleship-like. Parties were orderly, neon lights banded the leaden sky with artificial fires. The young men, after consulting their azimuths, would connect in a flash and melt into thermostatic impulses.

Thus sheltered, nurtured and enclosed, these city dwellers had

everything they needed to be happy; they produced without difficulty, consumed without joy, fell asleep without dreams, loved each other without passion, grew fat without fat, died without pain, and vanished without a trace.

But on that day, an amazing fluid floated in the evanescent air, the freshness of ultra-yeast caressed the follicles of the overhead camshafts and three-phase sounds jumped from diode to diode. Forgotten waves seemed to emerge from the voids of space-time...

Something was happening!

A new wave of Agonyclites was reaching the City, coming from the whitened peaks that radiated out into the distance.

It had been many springs since we'd seen them! The older ones knew that this phenomenon had already happened in the past, in the season of renewal.

Some city dwellers were clamoring in their protected areas, fearing great unrest; others were preparing for a fierce fight; others were preparing for exchanges - what to receive and what to give?

The agonyclitologists spread all their knowledge through the networks; the agonyclitophobes

prophesied the worst evils; the agonyclitophiles foresaw a bright future.

Meanwhile, the Agonyclites arrived walking and singing.

Their faces, stripped of all accessories, showed their feelings, which one was astonished to be able to discern so easily.

The Agonyclites still had full use of their legs. They lived standing, spoke standing, ate standing, loved each other standing, walked with equal steps and danced in many ways. They would only lie down to sleep, although some rare initiates managed to sleep standing up after long exercises.

In the past, they used to come more often. Some said that the city had been so locked up that no one could enter; others suggested that the Agonyclites had been so badly received in the past that they had turned away. But today, carrying heavy bags and dragging overloaded carts, they had stopped in the Grand Square with visible satisfaction.

The Agonyclites seemed to have a plan.

Without worrying about the bans flashing on the strobe lights or the big crystallomorphic fly eyes spying everywhere, they unpacked

their gear, spread their bundles, set up their trestles, put up their easels, and constructed their stage. The straight Grand Square became deformed as they took over.

A resident from the hills arrived on his scooter with magnetic skates and asked what this circus was all about. An Agonyclite told him that it was a circus to entertain children.

- "As if the children had time to have fun", exclaimed the civil servant, "with all that they have to learn to know how to use their extra-sensory functions, to master systemic orientations, and to integrate classifying categories!"
- "Don't worry," he replied, "playing teaches children a lot. It teaches them how to live."
- "Live, live, that's a good one," an inhabitant cried from his balcony, "we already have so much to do just to exist and you want to teach us how to live!"
- "For you I don't know, but for the children, it is still possible."

As turboprop-propelled skates and hydraulic skates poured in, the Grand Square hummed with the sound of engines and the exclamations of the inhabitants asking:

- "But what are you doing? Why are you here? What do you want from us?"
- "To banquet and feast!"
- "A banquet! That disgusting old thing! What a horror! Our nourishing fluids fill us up enough!"
- "Feast! How tired we are! We've got our intradermal scheduled stimuli galore!"
- "Talking and sharing!"
- "Talk? But with whom? And about what? Everything has already been said!"
- "Share? But everything is in its place; sharing means disturbing!"

While the inhabitants were left wondering, the Agonyclites had unpacked their goods and set up a long table covered with exotic, multicolored, freshly picked produce. Those who were not busy setting up the banquet had started talking to each other, standing on their legs. The noise of the conversations became louder, some of them lively. Sounds that were not artificial were gradually spreading over the Grand Square, sounds produced by strange machines made of old wood, shiny metal, thin strings, pierced tubes...

Meanwhile, in the circus enclosure, the children were regaining strength in their legs, strength in their arms, cunning in their brains, and the camaraderie of alliances...

They were playing!

Gradually the inhabitants ventured to the windows; the less fearful ones removed their shackles to approach the curious caravanserai that invaded the Grand Square.

And the Agonyclites set up the banquet in the middle of the party, a banquet without pomp, a banquet of simple dishes, a banquet of nature and gifts. Very old residents, who knew what was laid out before their eyes, served themselves enthusiastically. Some asked how to go about it.

One prominent looking citizen exclaimed that the poor Agonyclites lived in the past. Another complained that they were preaching disorder. Another muttered that they were covered with germs... But they came and went, walked and danced, talked and sang, smiled and held out their hands, drank and ate!

They would say:

- "We don't live in the past, we love the present that doesn't last long, and prepare for the future that comes so quickly;

Let's prevent conflicts, let's cultivate peace; we respect your life, we live our own, let's evolve together".

- "Leave us alone, go wherever you want, you can see that our differences are too great."
- "But look at all our similarities! We're definitely standing, moving, open, our hands outstretched, and without weapons or armor. You can do the same."
- "Who the hell are you?"
- "Humans, like you."
- "And where are you from?"
- "From the same Mother, the same Earth, as you."
- "And ultimately what do you want?"
- "To live together."
- "But how?"
- "As brothers!"
- "You go, you come, you are from nowhere, we are from here, we do not move, our brothers are here, and not elsewhere!"
- "Our species became human by standing up and moving forward. It is by standing

upright that it continues to develop its humanity. Standing, we can see further than kneeling. Walking, we see the world's diversity. That is why we are Agonyclites, not just to feast and banquet."

Now the banquet had attracted more and more city dwellers who were discovering forgotten, unusual, unknown dishes. The dandelion terrine was next to the cabbage koulbiac, the tarragon clafoutis competed with the swede galantine, the children enjoyed stewed gum balls or roasted marshmallows... The semolina flair with raw fruit puree was a great success, we nibbled falbalas and croquettes, drinking nectars of all colors...

The party was also in full swing, flutes and tambourines, violins and accordions played slow bourrees or wild sardanas, the orchestra played boleros and foxtrot, bossa nova and boogie-woogie, and to the rhythm of salsas and lambadas, the townspeople regained the use of their legs...

The feast of the Agonyclites invaded the city to the dismay of the grumpy, whingers, selfish and misanthropic people who tried to stem the tide of life and hope. In the city, hemmed in by its metal belts, bursts of laughter

resounded. Rather than spying on each other, the townspeople were talking to each other. And those who wanted, again and again, to hunt Agonyclites to preserve the pure unity of the City, felt that they were barely listened to... Other words were now being said, other gestures were being made, minds and hearts were opening. Many felt pins and needles in their legs.

Some Agonyclites settled in there; others buckled up again to set off again; some citizens were standing upright.

Something like a tide of humanity was spreading in phosphorescent mist and invading pipes and circuits... Something like a farandole rhythm, a taste of warm pie, the look of a colorful crowd... Something like a sunrise on the first morning.

Something fraternal...

Adventists share this expectation of what is to come. Standing is always symbolic of an active freedom that refuses to bow under the yoke.

2. Alexandre Breffort (1901.1971) is one of the great storytellers of the 20th century. For *Le Canard Enchaîné*, he wrote more than 800 tales between 1933 and 1958. He is also the author of *Irma La Douce*. One of his tales about grandfather ZIG ("A Scientist") inspired the beginning of this fable.

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## Notes

1. AGONYCLITE. s. m. & f Agonyclites, Agonoclitia. One who never bends his or her knee. This word is made up of the private **α, γόνατο**, the knee, and **Κλίνω**, I bow, I bend. This name was given in the 7th century to certain heretics who never knelt and did all their prayers standing up. (Saint John Damascene, *Of Heresies*, chap. 91). The Agonyclites resisted liturgical sophistication and showed that the right stance of the believer is standing, ready to go when the end in nigh.

## MEETING WITH...

# Richard Amalvy



*Richard Amalvy is an international consultant (strategic design, public affairs). A former strategic advisor for the OECD, he has been a consultant for other intergovernmental organizations (World Bank, IAEA), and a leader of global civil society organizations (European Youth Forum, World Organization of the Scout Movement, NGO Conference at the United Nations). He lectures at various French universities (institutional management, standards and religions, branding). With Dominique Bénard, he recently developed a coaching offer for leaders on the theme of the learning company.*

***Richard, you've developed training proposals inspired by the concept of the learning company. Can you briefly present them?***

An organization is said to be a learning organization when its culture, behavior, operations and structure promote intelligence and collective learning. The training we offer allows us to reimagine the company as a social body where intelligence and collective learning lie at the heart of a shared project,

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involving all stakeholders, both internal and external. Through a systemic approach, the aim is first of all to reduce complexity by freeing ourselves from the mental schemas that often predominate and that prevent us from seeing what needs to be seen. We propose to liberate collective intelligence through learning and conversational leadership that encourages the creation and sharing of knowledge in a learning community. All this contributes to strengthening the company through a dynamic talent management process.

***In this offer, we discover a particular proposal called Sailing and Leadership. You propose to use the metaphor of the sailboat to explore company life.***

"Changing course", "taking the helm" - the language of leadership borrows a lot from maritime vocabulary. We invite leaders to embark on an old-style yacht to create an unforgettable team-building experience. Imagine four partners from a startup, a law firm, or members of a company's management board, embarking for 48 hours at sea. Through pre-launch briefings, executing maneuvers and debriefings, they'll test the solidity of their project and their group. Confronted with the

elements, the unexpected and the confined space on the boat, we offer them a highly emotional experience, allowing them to practice taking risks together. It's a unique opportunity to acquire deeper knowledge of oneself and others.

Our job as coach and skipper is to place them in a safe environment, physically and emotionally, to reveal the qualities and behaviors needed to exercise leadership through learning. With feedback after each maneuver, they commit themselves to continually improving relationships. We've hybridized a method whose key words are cooperation, trust, commitment and sharing. It's an



invitation to become actors in the learning process. The participants benefit more than if they attended a lecture on leadership, which exists elsewhere, particularly in universities. Through the debriefings of the maneuvers at sea, they analyze the postures, attitudes and behaviors of themselves and others in the group. These are simple things like mutual respect and active listening. Finally, we ask them to analyze the quality of their conversations.

***You talk about "conversational leadership", can you explain what this term means?***

Leadership is conversational in that it allows us to enter into essential, crucial, even difficult conversations. On a boat, you don't have time to use polite phrases, you need to be able to communicate in a simple, direct, concise and sometimes even abrupt way. The culture of conversation encourages trust and close working relationships. This leadership emphasizes conversation as an ongoing relationship between all members of the organization. Conversation seems to be the easiest way to share information, but good conversations require a little more

effort than we are used to making in order to get results.

***In a way you network the brains!***

We experimented with each other to design this program. We started a conversation that involved deeply reflective listening, awareness, suspending habitual mental models and building shared meaning through dialogue and exchange, as opposed to confronting certainties. You don't start conversations to convince but to understand. In a way, our brains are connected.

***In the "dossier" part of this issue, we explain that as early as 1948, two American researchers showed that leadership was not an individual quality as is too often believed and that groups with a certain maturity practiced "shared leadership" - is it the same idea?***

Nowadays, the model of the charismatic leader is struggling to survive. The old command-and-control methods no longer work. We're in an era of shared leadership in which conversation plays a prominent role. When we say "shared", it's not a question of evading responsibility, but on the contrary, of reinforcing the notion of responsibility by understanding the necessary solidarity within a team. Life on the boat, for 48

hours, gives each person the opportunity to play various roles and to interchange them in order to be able to appreciate each other's responsibility. Participants can thus experience the concept of shared leadership. Through immediate feedback, the team builds itself, grows in maturity and develops an executive awareness, a common awareness of the difficulties and issues faced, shared roles, and decision-making processes. This is where collective intelligence appears and develops, through the ability to question and learn together.

***In a recent book, Béatrice Arnaud and Carine Ejeil highlight the notion of learning. Learning is a neologism that defines a conscious dynamic attitude that allows a person or a group to increase their ability to deal with complex situations and to learn in a voluntary process involving movement towards the unknown, desired progress. What do you think of this concept?***

In the training sector, we're experiencing this paradigm shift. As Michel Payen explains in his article, we're no longer in an era when the expert trainer can claim to bring in from the outside all the methods and means that are likely to solve all the problems

encountered. Like Philippe Missotte, who recounted his experience in a previous issue of this magazine, I believe in the virtues of endogenous development. This principle of development also applies to companies thinking that the main resources, knowledge and know-how are already there and that it's enough to make them emerge. This is where learning-focused and conversational leaders have a crucial role to play.

Let's take the example of a group of managers invited to spend several days developing a strategy for the company. The top manager decides to step aside, talking about the trust he or she has in the group. That's good. But not being part of the development, the manager risks being left out at the end of the process. He or she may decide, at the end, to enter the process after having validated it. But this will be without having been through the group experience, its doubts, its revelations, or thought processes.

Without being a learning-focused leader, the leader runs the risk of becoming a "leader-brake". The worst thing is feeling in a weak position due to a lack of information when seeing the process underway in the group

that he or she has commissioned as a leadership challenge. The leader is the one who is fully engaged in the learning process in the first place. There's no pedestal, and the leader becomes integrated into the group along with the others.

***In an organization, be it a company, an administration or an association, many forces counter the individual or collective capacity to learn.***

This attitude can be compared to deviating from the notion of power. We've all experienced the abuse of power by withholding information. Well, some abuse power by not providing the means to foster the development and sharing of knowledge. In this day and age, we don't just value human capital, we value the information capital that people previously produced and enriched. This is essential for a company.

***You're also a lecturer at several universities. Do you use similar methods with your students?***

I'll tell you about a course for students in their third year of a bachelor's degree in web communication, for whom I was in charge of giving classes on informational intelligence. These young people are preparing to

become web managers or community managers. They'll be the communication nodes within the information and knowledge production and sharing networks in which they'll operate.

The Internet is dominated by conspiracy theories, fake news, trolls and hoaxes. It's difficult to accept that in their future communicational functions, these young people will be subjected to anything that abolishes critical thinking. So, out of 30 hours of classes, I devoted the first four hours to teaching critical thinking and systemic thinking. We analyzed the difference between information and communication, and between communication and propaganda, so that they'd understand key concepts in the field of information and communication. I drew up a syllabus that provided different sequences over 30 hours for three months, which facilitated a progressive awareness through practical research confronting them with reality. From the outset, I warned them that the experience might contradict their own beliefs, the beliefs of their relatives, family or friends... And little by little, over the duration of the teaching, locks were broken.

***It's very interesting what you're saying, because in his book "The experiential educator", Kolb says that to help people to learn, we must not only present them with new things, but also help them get rid of false or useless knowledge that clutters up their brains...***

Yes, and instead of giving them a theoretical course on information processing, I gave them the information and key words that enabled them to go on the Internet and to the university library to do their literature search.

***So you put them in a situation where they had to learn on their own through an experiment?***

Exactly! The first step in the exercises was to work in small groups of two to four students to source information, confront it and verify it, like investigative journalists. The first step was to discover and understand a subject. Then, they had to format the information in a projectable format. That's the second stage in knowledge acquisition. And finally, they had to restore the information by sharing it with the rest of the group. That's the third stage in assimilating the knowledge produced. Finally, they learned to discuss the results of each group. They discovered that the rule of the game for learning to debate is

that we don't debate to convince but to understand and learn.

***Yes, and there you've found one of the main constants in experiential learning. When you asked the students to explain to others what they'd discovered, you led them to reorganize and better master the new knowledge they'd acquired. Kolb explains that one learns well by teaching others...***

Exactly... And the final evaluation of each student showed that in doing so, they'd really acquired solid, long-lasting knowledge and skills in the field of information processing. The key was that the scope of the documentary research was also its purpose.

***What you've explained shows that, more and more, the trainer must be a coach capable of encouraging and helping people to step outside their comfort zone, to jump into the experience and build new knowledge on their own.***

Yes, theoretical and methodological inputs are needed to prepare people to make new discoveries, but, above all, there are fields of experience to be opened up to acquire new knowledge. Accompanying them plays a crucial role. In order to be able to mobilize notions and



concepts, it's good to experiment with them.

***In order to develop the capacity for learning within an organization, isn't coaching more important than training?***

Yes, as long as the word coaching is well-defined and corresponds to a specific method. In the book "Coaching for Performance", which you told me about, John Whitmore defines this method using the acronym GROW: Goals, Reality, Options, Will. It's about helping people to: 1) define goals to be achieved; 2) analyze the reality in which they are and measure the gap that exists between this reality and the goals they've set for themselves; 3) identify all the options that exist to fill this gap; 4)

finally, choose an option and commit to action to achieve it.

***What conclusion would you like to add to our dialogue?***

The new information/knowledge society requires autonomous and responsible individuals, capable of mobilizing their critical spirit, with a systemic perception of the world, to be able to find solutions to the problems they face. I believe that innovation stems more from this than from the race for competitiveness and growth. Moreover, it's useful in responding to the systemic challenges of today's world: environmental protection and climate change, the fight against poverty, and conflict management.

***Thank you, Richard.***



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**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

# About the industrial age school

**François Leboutoux (Paris region)**

François Leboutoux wrote to Dominique Bénard about the dossier for issue 3 of the magazine

Let us be clear: I do not share the general inspiration of the dossier. And the reference to Scouting, in terms of helping schools to invent their future, does not seem to me to deserve the importance that each of the writers in turn attaches to it. Moreover, the review that you yourself carry out in the chapter on 'cooperative pedagogies' underlines this sufficiently. But this is secondary.

The essential thing, in my opinion, is that the school's mission is to teach, which can never be reduced to a simple distribution of knowledge. Its objective: to form a well-made head, not a full head. It has to do this by paying constant attention to each child, to each young person. That is its primary mandate. Moreover, because the school (when I say school, I mean the whole process from kindergarten to university) is also a place of collective life, it contributes (like the family, like youth groups or movements...) to the formation of



character, to mutual respect, to the protection of the environment, and so on. It does this by involving young people in the decisions that concern them.

For this reason, I do not see the point, still less the necessity, of putting an end to what you call the school of the industrial age, the progression by juxtaposed disciplines and according to identical lines, as long as the teachers endeavor, by adapting rhythms and requirements on a case-by-case basis, not to leave any of their pupils by the wayside. Here, like in sport and in Scouting, I believe in the value of effort as well as in experimental trial and error, in the

place of co-operation as well as competition, knowing simply, once again, that the aim is to enable the subject to master a certain amount of knowledge that can be mobilized day by day in his or her own life.

I would like to add that I do not appreciate the photos and caricatures you have chosen to illustrate the Jules Ferry school. I do not think that it has been more subjected to the demands of industrial capitalism than the models that claim to free us from them today. As for the rather disheartening results that France has been obtaining for some years in international surveys, they do not refer back to the school of the industrial era, but to a system in perdition where what remains of it is struggling as best it can under a deluge of pedagogical instructions that have not stopped flooding in over the last 30 years.

In conclusion, I agree with you that it is time to roll up our sleeves. As long as there are students in the 6th grade who can neither read nor write, you and I are in the same boat. I don't know if your magazine has a "Letters to the Editor" section: if it does, would like to give you permission to publish my message... and to reply to it.

In friendship, and maybe see you again soon!

François Leboutoux

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*Answer by Dominique Bénard*

Dear Francois,

I understand and I accept your criticisms. The analysis of school in the industrial age is undoubtedly excessive, which is what led me, moreover, to ask Michel Seyrat to write the editorial in order to present a different point of view.

I let myself be carried away by the analysis of an American author, Peter Senge, without critically reflecting on it. This is a good lesson for me. From now on, the column "Deciphering" should really be a deciphering, i.e. the critical analysis of a theory or an approach.

However, it cannot be denied that shortly after the institution of the new school system, at the end of the 19th century, the New School Movement set out to challenge it and develop different educational approaches, whose points in common with Scouting's pedagogy are striking.

To participate in the readers' letter, send an email to:

**[approchescooperatives@gmail.com](mailto:approchescooperatives@gmail.com)**

