

## 8. *'Stages of concern'*

### *The five phases in learning a profession*

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WHEN ONE BEGINS A NEW LINE OF WORK or learns a new and complex skill, then one passes through five predictable stages of development. These phases are characterised by a specific concern, a care or preoccupation. Whether it is learning to drive for the first time, directing, training or playing the cello, the initial stage will often result in a feeling of despair. One tries to survive and to form an image from the many impressions as quickly as possible. After this turbulent first phase of survival, another four phases follow: the need to perform the task well, being attentive to the people around one, the desire to have more impact by improving and innovating and lastly, wanting to share what one has learnt and achieved. Based on the reactions of people, it is possible to ascertain which phase they are in and what kind of support they need.

I discovered the different phases in the learning process of a person who is starting on something new when I was designing a complete training course for trainers of a large company. The assignment was to design a course which would fulfil the needs of the trainers from the beginning through to the end of their careers. Based on countless discussions and task analyses with the trainers, it seemed clear that the nature of their learning questions were linked to degree of experience. They were quite simply busy with very different issues even when they were offering the same course. Thus the one trainer was mostly busy with the structure of the course and implementing suitable forms of work whilst the other had less need of something to hold onto and was more especially interested in the process which the participants underwent during the course. Other writers who make interesting classifications of phases in the learning process of experts are Dreyfuss (1986) and Ericsson (1994).

In this article, I describe the five phases and the concerns – the cares and uncertainties - which accompany them. Subsequently, I give an indication per phase of what a person in that phase actually wants. The reaction of a person in each of the phases is more or less predictable as also is the support which such a person needs. The generality of predictability with regard to a person's reaction and needs in each of the phases of the learning process makes it possible to provide a focussed training or coaching course. Thus a colleague or manager can get to the bottom of what their colleague or employee needs at that particular moment and can offer him (or her) the relevant support.

It is an important principle to design a learning path in such a way that it connects up directly with the learning questions and needs of the participant. We call this 'the psychological sequence'. By applying what is known about the 'stages of concern' to the choice of assignments and kinds of work given to the employee, one can link up with the psychological needs of that particular moment.

This contribution is aimed at the person in an organisation who is learning a new, complex skill as well as at those in the environment - the trainer, manager or colleague - who wish to provide support.

The five phases in development which are central to this chapter are:

- Phase 1 - Directed towards yourself: how do I survive?
- Phase 2 - Directed towards your task: how do I do it well?
- Phase 3 - Directed towards the other: people are important
- Phase 4 - Directed towards impact: and now everything has to be different
- Phase 5 - Directed towards the essence: how can I share this?

The phases are illustrated with practical examples relating to an employee, a trainer, an advisor and/or manager.

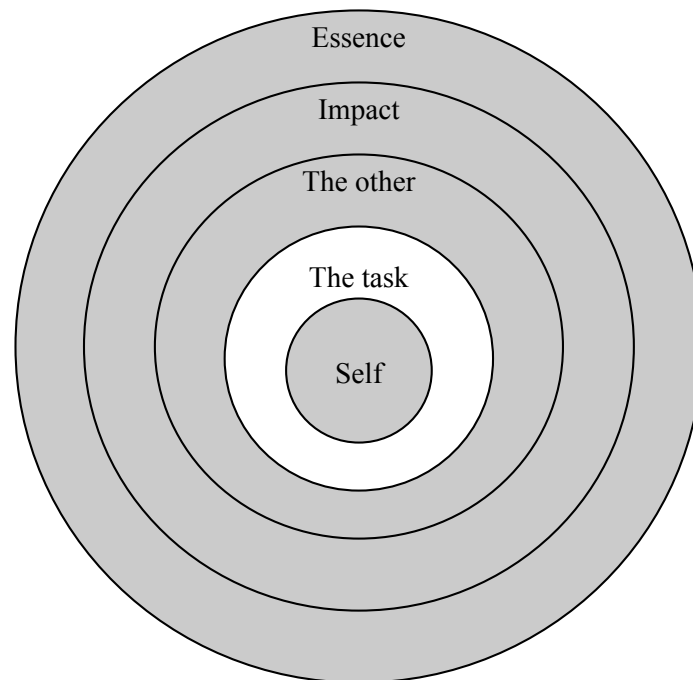


Figure 8.1 *Stages of concern*

## **PHASE 1 - DIRECTED TOWARDS YOURSELF: HOW DO I SURVIVE?**

What actually is a beginner? You could say that someone is a beginner when one feels like a beginner and this feeling manifests itself in fact when one finds oneself in a new situation. For instance, a new job whereby new people are also involved. At the start of such an intensive learning process, one is mostly busy with oneself and experiences strong emotions.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF HOW A BEGINNER FEELS**

The beginner is uncertain: "I don't understand what they want from me. I'll never remember that. What does that mean? Just now I'll be on my own. What must I do now? What precisely do they mean? What does that abbreviation mean?"

The beginner is too nervous to say something: "Which words should I use? How do things work here actually, what do they think of me? They probably think, what an idiot. If I have to speak with the customer just now, they will immediately see that I'm a beginner."

The beginner is afraid to make mistakes: "How was I supposed to do that again? It's not working at all. This is quite different to when they showed me. What else could go wrong if I don't do it right? How will I get through this? - my head is bursting. How will I remember this? I will never learn this!"

The beginner is fascinated by what he sees and experiences: "That is interesting! I must remember that. How do they do that? How is that possible?"

### **WHAT DOES THE BEGINNER DO?**

The beginner looks for certainty and something to hold onto. He imitates the experienced employees, copying their behaviour. He uses checklists and memory prompts. If a presentation must be made, he will for instance write everything out and, in order to have something to hold onto, will produce a lot of sheets.

The beginner wants very much to make a good impression. He worries about what the people around him think about him. If someone who he admires looks over at him, it is all the more difficult to ask for help. His performance may then suffer under the pressure. He very much wants to demonstrate what he is already capable of and is so busy with this that he can sometimes misjudge whether his contribution is suitable. Criticism is then extra hard to bear.

The motivated beginner has an impressive capacity to learn. Seldom in his life is he able to take in and process so much information. He is just like a sponge. The drive to survive is strong and that makes the beginner very alert. He is particularly focussed on information which will help him better to control the situation. In this phase, the emphasis is on 'keeping one's head above water.' The new employee is hardly concerned with the objectives and interests of the organisation.

## **WHAT DOES THE BEGINNER WANT IN THIS SURVIVAL PHASE?**

In this first phase of 'survival' the new employee wants to feel welcome. A beginner sometimes feels very awkward and useless. He feels very unsure about what he should do and especially how he should do it. Nothing goes smoothly, everything is as clumsy as peeling a potato with the wrong hand. It is then very pleasant if a place has been set aside especially for him and his things, if some effort has been made to put him at ease when he is introduced to people and shown around. The most important thing is that his new environment shows an interest in his experiences and his questions.

Being accompanied by an experienced colleague, a steady coach or buddy in the form of a colleague who has a thorough command of the profession is very important for a beginner. It must be someone who is able to explain what he does and sees and who finds it important to show a new colleague the ropes. It is preferable to ask a colleague who himself has recently been in the same shoes as the beginner. He can better understand the needs of the beginner and will give the explanation in a manner which is easier for the beginner to pick up than a very experienced colleague might. The combination has an even better chance of success if the two may choose each other.

Learning to see! Often a beginner is shown around or he accompanies experienced employees. Everyone expects that the beginner is taking in the information and understanding it. In fact, a beginner sees nothing. He only proves the notion that one only sees what one knows. So for a beginner it is difficult to recognise the aspects which will be relevant to the new task. He looks well enough but what he sees hardly has any meaning for him yet. The meaning is what must still be learnt.

Let's take a moment to consider this last point: if a beginner accompanies an experienced employee around the workplace, then the experienced worker should point out and describe everything to him. And this procedure will have to be repeated over and over because the beginner cannot suddenly digest, remember and apply all the new information. A lot of time is necessary before perceiving and giving meaning become automatic. Also language, commonly used abbreviations, jargon and the specific tokens of the company culture all come into this category.

### **Examples**

You are in training as a police agent and you are learning to patrol – you are walking the streets or sitting next to your colleague in the car. The colleague sees exactly what you see but suddenly he says "I don't trust this" and decides to take a closer look. From the enormous number of images, the experienced policeman is capable of filtering out the impressions which hold some sense of risk. According to experienced agents, a beginner needs about two to three years experience on patrol in order to develop this sense.

Or: Someone has just passed his driving test. He comes to a stop at the back of a traffic-jam and stares out of the window. Suddenly there is a bang; someone hits into him from behind. He is totally surprised by this rear-ender. This would be a

different story for an experienced driver coming into a traffic-jam. Out of the corner of his eye he would see in the rear-view mirror the car behind him approaching with too much speed. In a flash, he would check whether anyone was beside him and swerve out of the queue. The other car would just make it. The constant scanning by making use of mirrors, the development of a sense for danger, the habit of maintaining enough room to get away, these are all skills which only become automatic with considerable experience.

### **WHAT WILL HELP THE BEGINNER?**

An organisation can implement all kinds of simple measures to help the beginner employee. A number of these are elaborated below.

#### *Concrete examples and brief instructions*

Lists, maps, tips, clear instructions and examples based on the work of others help a beginner enormously. He imitates, copies and learns very quickly from examples and concrete tips.

For example: "Would you please make a report of this meeting? And would you like to first see a few reports made of the previous meetings?"

#### *Tasks and assignments*

Give the new employee tasks and short assignments which get him going and bring him into contact with the people and places where it is happening, where the procedures are visible and where contacts and discussions about these procedures are possible. Either as manager or colleague, examine together what is expected and reflect afterwards on the various moments of friction. This works far better than a course - this is not the time to send someone on an external training course. Sitting in a class or alone in a room with a computer does not help a beginner.

#### *Structure in the training period*

It is very pleasant for the beginner when to some extent (though not too much) structure is introduced in the first period. A beginner is seldom able to independently give form to his own learning and training programme. The experienced employee knows what is relevant and how everything fits together and which people can help you learn. Discuss the possibilities with the beginner. See if he is ready to already make some of the possible choices himself. And afterwards, discuss the choices made! When developing an introductory programme, it is important to realise that the developer has the tendency to put everything into the programme which is important to him in his own stage of concern. The first

assignments can be so formulated that the beginner is given the opportunity to approach people himself, to visit other departments and to find his own way through the building. A structured assignment is preferable in the beginning, for instance with references to sources and with a description of the learning result as well as tips about what he should be noting.

### **Example**

After his introduction, a young high potential is given the assignment to take a fresh look at the logistical procedure in the organisation and subsequently, to come up with a few recommendations. This assignment....

- gives him access to all departments and employees
- gives him insight into, for instance, receiving delivery of materials, production, orders, supply, transport
- immediately places him in an independent position.

The beginner looks with new eyes. An organisation can certainly profit from that! Very simple inefficiencies and important inconsistencies which no-one worries about anymore are spotted without fail by the beginner. Or system aspects, such as the fact that nothing is done with remarks made by employees. The beginner also observes cultural aspects which have crept in and which have a negative effect on the company such as: 'Here everyone talks about each other and never to each other' or 'You only get criticism here and they never say that something is good'.

### *Reflective assignments*

In order to build in space and time for processing and rest, it is a good idea to ask the beginner to set out his experiences and to ask questions relating to these experiences. These experiences provide a good input for regular discussions with the mentor or manager.

The wishes and conclusions can also be used for a personal development plan (PDP). Then there is a more systematic implementation based on the motive of personal development. A personal development plan gives the employee a better grip on his own development and helps him to make his wishes for the future explicit.

### *Beginners together: danger*

When a group of beginners is constantly together, a safe, own reality forms amongst them in which the contacts with each other take precedence over immersing themselves in the new situation. This leads to a slower learning tempo. It can even give rise to an "us-them" feeling, not only in the beginners but also in the rest of the organisation.

### *Affirmation*

Affirmation is: letting the newcomer know that he is present and that he is noticed. A beginner always has an enormous need for affirmation. If nobody says anything to you or if you are ignored, you feel insecure. A personal greeting gives affirmation, making conversation, asking how the beginner is getting on, asking him to join in, sitting next to him at lunchtime, and so on. Affirmation also means: paying attention to what the beginner does and recounting the results. Mentioning what has gone well works the best.

### *Compliments and attributions*

For a beginner, what others think about him is very important. He very much wants to have an added worth. That is why compliments for good performance (even small ones!) are very welcome. Compliments have a lot of influence on the learning process. If someone is paid attention for specific behaviour then that behaviour increases. Attention is a powerful reward. In giving a compliment you name the appreciated behaviour and the effect that it had on you. By giving compliments to the beginner, one can encourage the behaviour that one wants to see.

An attribution is ascribing a personal characteristic to someone else (see also chapter 6 and 7). Attributions are self-fulfilling prophecies: people start to behave according to the characteristics which have been ascribed to them by their environment. For example: 'You picked that up quickly; I can see that you have an affinity with this kind of work'. Or: 'When I see you busy with the planning like this, it makes me think that you will become a good project leader'.

Positive attributions are self-fulfilling prophecies but negative attributions can be that too. They can exert an influence on the choices which are made during an entire career. In particular, attributions made by those people whom the beginner admires are the most powerful. An example of a negative attribution: 'Yes, I saw that right away; you will never manage to take authority in a meeting'. Or: 'I notice that you're the type to hold back; absolutely not a manager. To be a manager you need to have a lot of initiative'.

### *Critical feedback*

Many people feel the need for critical feedback and the beginner also asks for it explicitly. However, when this feedback is given it can quickly prove to be too much and the beginner does nothing with it. Feedback sometimes has a negative effect in that the recipient of critical feedback will subsequently avoid the situation in which the criticism was made or in which a sense of failure was experienced – and perhaps even also the person who gave the negative feedback. It is important to realise that the beginner employee in this stage already has his hands full with the job itself. There simply isn't any extra room for also making improvements to the

way in which he tackles the job. The performance of the beginner may be even worse under the gaze of a critical eye than when he is working alone. And what applies here is: when someone does not know something, then explanation is better than personal feedback. Naturally it is necessary to be clear if something goes wrong. Instead of feedback, the mentor can then rather give a transparent explanation or a demonstration of the how the work should be carried out and then allow the beginner to try again and to keep trying until he can do it well. It is important to end the learning process which accompanies performing a new task with a successful experience!

## **PHASE 2 - DIRECTED TOWARDS THE TASK: HOW DO I DO IT WELL?**

The beginner is no longer a beginner. He has built up a routine, a number of frequently performed tasks have become 'automatic', he has established contacts with the people at work, the habits and norms are known. There is once again space in his head for other affairs.

### **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOMEONE IN PHASE 2?**

Someone in this phase can be incredibly productive. He gets through piles of work and puts a lot of energy into it. He now thinks less about himself and the impression that he may be making on others. His attention is now more directed to the task at hand. The quality of his work is what is most important. This must be better and more beautiful than ever. The employee wants to prove that he really counts in his profession. This means that the attention he pays to the task is now strongly content directed and technical.

In this phase he brings variations into the learned routines; he makes actions more efficient, replaces clumsy aspects of the work, makes proposals for improvement. He finds it interesting to see what someone else is doing though not in order to imitate as in phase 1, but rather to see what the other does differently. He is competing with himself and with others to do things better and more elegantly. Now the time has also come to refine and make everything more attractive: fabulous projected images during the presentation, a large turnover in (routine)work, being able to sell everything, a beautiful filing system, a perfect planning.

In this phase, the objective and interest of the organisation are not the first priority.

### **Example**

The department which was developing the new consumer equipment was very focussed on doing it well. This resulted in beautiful equipment but actually too late for the market. Due to this, the competitor was able to obtain the largest segment of



the market with an earlier introduced product although this was of inferior technical quality.

In this phase, it sometimes happens that the young trainer will design lovely courses with modern work forms and an attractive course catalogue. But the trainer does not yet have a clear image of the contribution which he is making towards the objective of the organisation, what his role is in the company or of the actual product which he must deliver.

When it comes to assignments, the young advisor will draw up a plan on his own or make a nice memorandum with recommendations. Creating support and involving colleagues is difficult and costs too much time. The deadline must be met. The future of the memo and its implementation play a lesser role.

The employee is not yet really ready for leadership. If he indeed gets the job, he will carry it out in a fairly instrumental and task-directed way: 'How can I manage to get them to do what they are supposed to do?' The beginner leader very much wants to explain to others what they should do and gives them feedback when it doesn't go well. He himself prefers to have a mentor who understands the profession; if this is not the case he may sometimes find it difficult to have respect for the mentor.

There are plenty of people who find it important and pleasant to pay a lot of attention to the content and quality of their work. They want to be able to continue concentrating on it and consciously do not take the step to phase 3 in which more attention is expected to be given to the people and process-related aspects of the work. They see themselves as real professionals and develop their knowledge further. Such professionals remain fascinated by the stubborn reality and by how they can get a grip on it. They can achieve a high level of expertise. There are however also those for whom the attractiveness of the work starts to decrease as it becomes more and more routine. The challenge disappears and they go in search of new challenges.

### **WHAT DOES SOMEONE IN PHASE 2 WANT?**

Someone in phase 2 wants a lot of job-orientated feedback. The employee is open to it and very much wants feedback about the way he has carried out his work. He wants to know what was well done, what went wrong and on which points he could improve his work.

Help in extending the repertoire is welcome. He now very much wants to take a look at how more experienced colleagues work and also at other places. Thereby he takes special note of what is different and in this way extends his repertoire: new methods, similar problems with different solutions. At this time he also becomes extremely interested in learning instrumental interview skills. For instance: if he is going to be managing, he wants to learn interview models for his new tasks, such

as function interviews, assessment interviews, sick-leave and disciplinary interviews. He will be giving feedback to others and wants to become better at this.

Simulations and role-playing are popular and serve the purpose of being able to experience how things work as well as having fun together. The employee in this phase however neither gets around to gaining self-knowledge or reflecting on his own norms and values.

The need for a training course increases. The employee learns a great deal and with enthusiasm. This phase of eagerness to learn is the ideal time for training courses. At this stage of his development, the employee wants to learn skills which he can use himself in his work because the most important objective is to work together and do so even better. The training course should therefore be both practical and immediately applicable. It must be solution-orientated and skill-orientated such as project management, time management, financial knowledge, computerisation and computer use, professional content-based courses, etc. A trainer wants to learn many work forms and good presentation techniques, how to write out learning goals, design tests, lead a group discussion etc. The manager in this phase is mad about models. He will tempt the course instructor into giving a series of handy tips and tricks. Literature which can directly be applied is also consumed like candy.

#### **WHAT WILL HELP SOMEONE IN PHASE 2?**

How can the manager or colleague support the employee in his further development during phase 2? A few examples:

##### *The opportunity to build up a routine*

A feeling of certainty in this phase flows to an important extent from the pleasure which the developing employee takes in the fact that he has mastered a few specific tasks. This command arises particularly when the work is repetitive. A frequently repeated job, a set sequence of actions which have become ingrained, provide a feeling of working nicely. The employee is as it were in competition with himself: each time it goes a little better. Repeatedly improving the performance of a task leads to 'flow', the euphoric feeling which you experience when you are concentrated and in competition with yourself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1999). That is why it is important that from the start, a number of tasks occur very regularly in the course.

##### *The opportunity to train new people*

The developing employee now has such a command of his work that training a new colleague provides a form of recognition and processing for himself. Moreover, he is still so close to his own beginner period that he is well able to empathise with

what the newcomer is going through. Furthermore, his actions are not yet so automatic that it is difficult for him to explain how it must actually be done. This is why on-the-job coaches who are themselves in phase 2 are often better for a beginner than experienced professionals. Take note that for the new task of 'training and coaching a beginner', the employee will once again find himself briefly in phase 1, 'survival'. Guidance from a more experienced coach is therefore welcome.

#### *Protection from a managerial task*

Someone who feels absolutely at home as an expert in his profession and who is passionately busy with the subject matter sees the task of managing other people as a crime. If he has to pay attention to others, that takes him out of his concentration; it irritates him that these people are not self-directing as he is himself. Sometimes people attempt to avoid the automatic promotion to manager by starting for themselves.

#### *Intervision*

Working in a disciplined manner in a group of colleagues on practical problems is an excellent learning situation for the employee in this phase. His repertoire is broadened by the experiences of colleagues. The intervision methods provide structure and security. As the developing employee gains more experience with intervision, the more his problem-solving skills will increase. The intervision methods contain a systematic way of thinking about problem-solving. Repeatedly applying these methods ensures that the employee masters these systematic methods of solving problems.

### **PHASE 3 - DIRECTED TOWARDS THE OTHER: PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT**

Once the employee has a good command of the tasks, he becomes curious about others and about the process. What moves others to be busy and what keeps them busy now becomes interesting to the employee. He wonders why people react a certain way and how they could improve their performance in their work. Someone in this phase often has a number of people around him who he is managing, for instance in a project.

#### **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOMEONE IN PHASE 3?**

The person concerned now sees that the process-related aspects of the work have a great influence on the outcome and perhaps an even greater influence on the atmosphere and the well-being of people. He wants to discuss these process-related aspects with others and becomes interested in their motivation. He wants to know how they are doing. And thereby he also now wants to reveal more of himself to the others. He wants the others to be contented and motivated, he wants the atmosphere to be pleasant.

When someone finds himself in phase 3, he once again feels like learning – but this time it is more directed at the process-related aspects of the work: team management, interview techniques, conflict resolution, addressing, managing, coaching. He becomes interested in models which help you better to understand and classify people such as the Enneagram, or the team roles of Belbin.

When the developing employee is involved in organisational issues, he will exert himself to successfully implement the plans and take his own measures for this. He will organise work conferences, he will involve employees in the development of the plan, carry out pilots and hold motivation sessions in the company.

If he is working in a team, then the employee in phase 3 will invest time and energy in the alliances between the group members. He will also want to represent them to the outside and will defend them. He wants to have a say in the selection of new team members. If new people join the organisation he is very willing to show them the way. He will also watch out for the well-being of the newcomer and will, when necessary, arrange this and that for him.

### **WHAT DOES SOMEONE IN PHASE 3 WANT?**

The employee now wants to have a boss who is people-orientated. Content or managerial power alone are no longer enough to gain his admiration. He wants to have grown-up contact with his manager and is not prepared to follow orders merely on the basis of authority. He is no longer so easily impressed by status.

Someone in phase 3 also examines himself and asks himself: ‘What am I really like, what are my strong points and my weak points, what do I actually want?’ He wants person-directed feedback.

Often, he organises his own feedback by participating in an intervision group or participating in a work group with professional colleagues from other organisations. He also wants regular personal attention from his manager, in particular with regards to his personal development plan. He starts to doubt himself, his habits and the preferred patterns which limit him. He often does not really know what he actually wants from his work but can sense that he will lose interest if it continues as it is now. Relationships with colleagues and those at home are in need of an evaluation. This is often the reason for looking for a personal coach.

A mechanic starts to take more interest in the people who work with the machines which he services. In this phase, managers lose their need to bring

everything under strict control. In their contact with groups and clients, they become far more interested in the issue and the underlying needs.

For a trainer, every course now becomes unique: the group is the point of reference. In phase 3 he will pay more attention to how the group is made up, how he can involve the participants in the process and how he can manage the process. Merely getting acquainted, arranging this and that and making agreements and then getting to work is no longer enough. In the group, experiments are carried out with new work forms such as brainstorming, presentation techniques, creativity techniques, games and simulations. A lot of work is carried out in sub-groups and buzz groups (a work form in which an issue is first discussed in pairs before an answer is reported back) as a way of intensifying the discussions in the larger group. Attention is paid to important moments and successes are celebrated.

A more intensive contact is formed with the group and the content follows automatically. Due to his increased interest for the other, the trainer now wants to pay attention to activities which will bring the members of the group into deeper contact with each other and which can lead to greater intimacy between them. He stimulates the exchange of personal feedback in the group. Friction can now arise if the stage of concern of the trainer or manager does not match with the objectives of the group. Because of his personal interest in the people within the group, he very much wants to contribute to solving their problems. He sees that they often cause their own problems through their way of communicating with each other or through their own convictions. He can now see that their problems are often deeper and of a more personal nature. He carries out personal interviews. If his self-confidence grows then he also wants to do coaching.

### **WHAT WILL HELP SOMEONE IN PHASE 3?**

Below are a number of suggestions for supporting the person in phase 3 of his learning process.

#### *More time for the process-related aspect*

In this phase of the learning process, someone no longer allows himself to be so pressurised into producing a great deal of work. He knows that it takes time to carefully give form to the process. He is convinced that people must come up with the solution themselves and that if this is not the case, you will lose a lot of time later in the project due to unnecessary resistance. Or, you will 'lose' people because as a manager, you have only paid superficial attention to their problems, ideas or interests.

#### *A role in decision-making*

Someone in phase 3 really appreciates being able to play a part in representative bodies. He can sometimes strongly identify with a certain group and will utilise the skills he has learnt for their benefit.

### *Training*

The trainee in phase 3 wants to learn more about himself and also about how other people operate, what drives and motivates them, and how one can be a valuable colleague or manager. He wants to learn a coaching style of management, he wants to learn to master a more qualitative and creative form of process management. If he enters this phase enthusiastically then he can be quite eager to learn. He will follow one workshop after the other and also personal growth training. He will often invest personally in literature and training. During the training course, he wants personal feedback and he will also lay claim to practice time. He is irritated by instructors who fill the lesson with talking and think that they know it all better. He really wants to exchange experiences and insights and wants to learn in a more experimental manner. However, merely being separated into groups is not entirely the idea; he also wants feedback from the expert relating to his own, specific approach and behaviour.

### *Working with people*

The quality of the relationship is now important for the developing person. He is less interested in producing a lot of work. Status and position in the field lose something of their power to attract. The person concerned does however want to be taken seriously, receive recognition and have influence. He will be motivated to extend his work with tasks which are specifically directed at involving people in processes and at improving collaboration and the atmosphere. If someone in phase 3 becomes more experienced in managing processes then he can also tackle larger, more complex and potentially damaging tasks.

### *The opportunity to coach people*

The desire to be there for people often leads to the role of coach. Someone in phase 3 can really pay attention to and take time for the problems of another without directly having to come up with solutions. He can often combine this very well with a management task and is then really a 'people-manager'.

### *A personal coach*

He often no longer wants a coach for himself within the organisation. In phase 3 he has become interested in figuring out how he operates himself and can thereby

have very clear objectives for change and wants to keep this outside the work environment. He gives form to his own development process within the organisation by thinking about the future and setting out a personal development plan. He does want to attune this to others, in particular with his boss.

#### **PHASE 4 - DIRECTED TOWARDS IMPACT: AND NOW EVERYTHING HAS TO BE DIFFERENT**

Someone in phase 4 sees the complex inter-relationships of many factors both within and without the organisation. The training is seldom plain sailing. This kind of insight is achieved through many, often very frustrating experiences which he has gained through enthusiastically working on new ideas and through sometimes years and years of investing in projects which nevertheless fail. Hereby not only has his know-how grown but also his intuition and implicit knowledge about the behaviour of people and organisations.

#### **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOMEONE IN PHASE 4?**

Someone in phase 4 can now manage more complex and more extensive projects and thereby wants access to all relevant parties. He can now also stipulate well-defined conditions before enthusiastically responding to proposals. He wants to make a difference and now knows how to do that. He is dying to finally approach the situation from a new and broader perspective and to achieve a real change.

The manager in phase 4 has a larger group of people to lead. It is no longer possible to pay everyone sufficient attention. He learns to delegate and think strategically. He sets about inspiring and shaping the leaders in his own employ and succeeds in forming them into a closely-knit and swinging team.

Modern developments, new forms of knowledge dissemination, knowledge sharing, utilising the possibilities of computerisation and the accompanying organisational changes and their impact on the organisation now become the areas of concern for the manager. He wants to learn to understand the consequences of the present developments on the organisation and to apply these visions in policy-making and development. Training courses lose their importance as implementation methods for renewal. He sees quite different and more effective ways of influencing organisation and improving competencies than courses.

He is aware that people will apply themselves optimally if they can themselves contribute to the development and choice of the strategic solutions for organisational issues which have been signalled. The manager in phase 4 implements far-reaching innovations, such as a personal development budget for the employees whereby the employees decide themselves how they will spend it. Setting out core competencies together with the employees and imbedding these in the functions and control procedures of the organisation forms an important objective. The manager takes the lead in far-reaching changes and innovations and involves key figures in the organisation. He takes care of his network, requests

services and offers services in return and is able to see the organisation and the suppliers and the customers in terms of a system.

For a trainer in this phase, an advisory role or the position of Head of Training and Knowledge Development is attractive. He includes important social developments in his ideas about his profession and is thereby able to predict the forthcoming trends and implement innovations. It is now of great importance for him that the efforts put into learning and training should make an essential contribution to the organisation and this determines the direction given to the setting up and implementation of projects.

Based on his rich experience, he can playfully formulate his vision. Because this vision is real and based on his own experiences and convictions, he is also able to really inspire others with it. He is sensitive to status and recognition, not only as a mark of regard but also because these help towards the realisation of the ideas which he has about how things should happen.

When things go well in this phase, the person concerned is visible in the organisation and his career can really take flight. The room to experiment with new approaches expands quickly, budgets and responsibilities grow. The outside world will also start to notice him. Head hunters will call, he will receive attractive offers both from within and from without. Talented colleagues will participate in his projects and due to the added quality they bring, the projects will run smoothly.

There is a risk that all the attractive offers and the extra work will form an overload which will leave hardly any time for reflection and the relationship with people which is what life is really all about. A small mistake with huge consequences is just waiting to happen. If this proves to be the case, there is a chance of a short but severe setback. All of this is often already coupled to a growing problem with accepting authority from others. If someone in phase 4 is assigned tasks which he has his reservations about, it becomes unbearable for him to have to carry them out. That is not to say that he will never again accept direction. Direction and advice from people who he respects and who have more to offer than merely content-related expertise continue to be welcome.

#### **WHAT DOES SOMEONE IN PHASE 4 WANT?**

Below you will find a number of suggestions for supporting someone in their learning process in this phase.

*To have the conditions that he stipulates taken seriously*

It goes without saying that someone in phase 4 wants colleagues, fellow professionals and the management to take an interest in his insights and he also wants more influence regarding the content and form of the work which falls under his responsibility. He stipulates conditions for the projects in which he is involved.



This requires a boss who is able to respect the expertise of the employee and who is receptive to his insights.

*Being allowed to experiment and therefore to make mistakes*

During this phase in his learning process, the person concerned needs to be able to apply new insights and he badly wants the support of directors who consider the experiment to be important. Because an experiment can by definition fail, he wants to have space and support for this.

*Development is a must*

Someone in phase 4 can develop an enormous resistance to work which he is forced to perform and which he is good at but which he doesn't really regard as being relevant either to the organisation or to his own development. He may lose his motivation and even get a burnout. He wants an organisation which is large enough (not always only in the sense of actual size!) and interesting enough to spread his wings. He wants a challenging or innovative assignment which covers relevant needs of the organisation or the market. If the possibilities for growth in the current organisation have run dry for him, then he will start to show interest in moving on.

It is for this reason that people sometimes return to an organisation where they have worked before. For instance, after they have chosen in phase 2 to continue independently or have chosen to look for another company where they could learn more. The previous organisation becomes once again interesting because the new skills and insights which have been gained elsewhere can now be utilised to effectively deal with problems which were experienced back then. The previous employer can now offer them more interesting chances and can give them more complex assignments which fit with their need to do things which really have an 'impact'.

*Additional learning and contribution*

For people in phase 4, a training course by itself is no longer sufficient for gaining new insights and for learning new skills. Everything has already been heard and seen before. Someone in this phase often chooses conferences with a high news-content. There he picks up a few new ideas and translates them rapidly to his own situation. Sometimes, the exclusive, highly expensive foreign management courses are attractive because of the recognition, increased status and opportunity to build up an international network which they offer. After a number of original and much talked about projects, he may himself be invited for interviews and appearances at congresses.

## **PHASE 5 - DIRECTED TOWARDS THE ESSENCE: HOW CAN I SHARE THIS?**

The person in phase 5 can take a step back to ponder the meaning of existence and what life is really all about. Money and status become less important. If this phase is reached, one is usually somewhat older, going on 40 or 50 years old. The capacity to endure decreases or changes. Energy appears to not be inexhaustible. The possibility for a change towards greater mildness and wisdom now presents itself.

### **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOMEONE IN PHASE 5?**

The employee, trainer or manager now wants others to be able to benefit from what he has achieved. He wants to share his knowledge and experience and orientates himself more towards advising, preferably in combination with coaching. The desire to share knowledge can also be satisfied by writing down the acquired insights. Or in a more direct way, by passing these on to others in all sorts of courses. In this way, being in competition or the need for one's own space give way to the desire to facilitate talented young people; for instance by giving them access to his own network. The person in phase 5 aspires to having a role in the community whereby he can enjoy the additional worth his extensive experience lends him, such as in governing boards, universities, colleges and advisory boards. He may accept a chair or university appointment and there make a contribution to research and education. Also, he may wish to exercise influence in the community by taking on a political role. International developments and the necessity for international collaboration and co-ordination can inspire him to make a contribution in these fields.

The person in phase 5 sometimes makes far-reaching decisions with the aim of giving the rest of his life form in a manner which more fully agrees with what is essentially important to him. This may also apply to his personal circumstances. He is no longer willing to make compromises. Sometimes he will break radically with the situation in which he has lived up until that point and will choose a completely different context in which to work. He may choose to start for himself. He wants to do the work in his own way and make really relevant contributions. It is now important to him that the people with whom he works believe in something and that the issues which are brought to him are relevant. He no longer wastes time in refuting unconstructive critical questions, discussions and hair-splitting. Instead, he enters into dialogue with others and goes in search of synthesis and synergy.

Passion and involvement are the driving forces. Someone in this phase often becomes milder and wiser. Impassioned indignation and hard judgements give way to recognition, acceptance and understanding. Acceptance and respect for one's own personal limitations and peculiarities also increase. Someone in phase 5 can allow himself to be imperfect. He is better able to withstand expectations and demands from the environment and can, driven by the deeply felt certainty he has regarding the real meaning of things, be exceptionally courageous and steadfast.

## **WHAT DOES SOMEONE IN PHASE 5 WANT TO HELP THEM IN REALISING THEIR OBJECTIVES?**

A few examples and measures which can help someone in phase 5 of their development to achieve their goals.

### *Setting oneself free*

The pressure of a great number of responsibilities and tasks will have to decrease. Someone in phase 5 wants room for reflection and for working on truly relevant subjects. This is very difficult, especially for people who maintain high norms for themselves and who staunchly believe that 'an agreement is an agreement'. It would now appear that the ability to disappoint people is often the only way to set oneself free. In other words, only then will things quieten down. Saying 'NO' seems paradoxically enough to simply make someone even more attractive!

### *A personal coach*

If someone in this phase finds it very difficult to cut himself loose then it can be helpful to work on this with a personal coach. Through questions, exercises, visualisations, such a coach can bring someone into contact with the wishes he has, often unexpressed, for the future. Someone in phase 5 can also go in search of a personal coach who can guide him towards a more spiritual awareness.

### *Training*

Someone in this phase is completely self-driving. He goes in search of his own instructors and literature and attends meetings and congresses which are relevant for him.

### *The opportunity to be of importance to others*

Through his extensive life experience and professional knowledge and through his ability to take a distance, someone in phase 5 can mean a great deal to others. The solution orientated attitude is passé. The interest and the respect for the more fundamental choices and values in life take precedence.

### *Support from the organisation to pursue personal objectives*

Large organisations in particular are very willing to support employees in their wish to be more involved in socially relevant issues. Naturally, there is a case of

own interest here since it is attractive for a company to be able to produce a professor, to have an employee on an advisory board of the government or to have an in-house advisor/mentor/coach. In this way both interests can be served.

### **HOW DO THE 'STAGES OF CONCERN' WORK?**

I have described the five phases together with the respective concerns, cares and uncertainties which accompany them. In this paragraph, I want to take some time to consider three questions which have to do with passing through the 'stages of concern':

- Does everyone always go through these phases?
- Why does someone appear to stop his development in a particular phase?
- How quickly does someone go through the phases?

### **DOES EVERYONE ALWAYS GO THROUGH THESE PHASES?**

Yes and no. It is not so that everyone always goes fully through all five phases in everything that is learnt. The development process can stop somewhere along the way. This can have a positive reason, for instance that someone continues to operate very contentedly for a prolonged time at a particular experience level. In other instances, there is a case of blockage and someone gets stuck. There is a parallel between the descriptions of life phases and motivation levels such as the motivation levels of Maslow whereby an individual strives first of all for the satisfaction of physiological needs, thereafter for the need for security, the need for belonging and love, the need for esteem and the need for self-actualisation. He too points out that not everyone reaches all levels and that one level of needs must be satisfied before one can move onto the next level.

### **WHY DOES SOMEONE STOP HIS DEVELOPMENT?**

Certain factors can influence the passage through the phases. There is after all more to the life of a person than work or learning new skills; children for instance, or an intensive circle of friends or a sideline. In short, the priorities lie elsewhere.

It can also be that the person indeed wants development but that the environment does not facilitate this or even works against it. Another reason can be that the person possesses insufficient capacities or other capacities than those required for the realisation of the next level. Or, that the phase in which he finds himself brings so much money and so many advantages that these form a 'golden cage'. Remaining in the current phase then offers psychologically far greater advantages such as status, security, acceptance, sense of belonging, physical wholeness. But, the person may also be wounded, disillusioned and washed out which prevents him from any longer finding the courage to take on new challenges.

## **HOW QUICKLY DOES SOMEONE GO THROUGH THE PHASES?**

The speed with which someone goes through the phases can vary greatly and is dependent on the complexity of the task, the possibilities of the person and the urgency of the learning situation. With complex skills such as playing an instrument, going through the 'stages of concern' may take an entire lifetime. And what to think about the learning process of a young manager who when he was 26 was given the responsibility for a group of 250 employees, when he was 27 got an additional 275 due to the illness of a colleague and shortly thereafter was asked to get rid of 200 jobs and lay off people from his group to cut costs. After this experience, he changed jobs because he now wanted 'to do his work nicely for once'. Such a person barely gets a chance to go through the phases and is constantly busy with survival.

## **APPLICATIONS OF THE 'STAGES OF CONCERN' - EXAMPLES -**

This chapter closes with two concrete activities in an organisation where the application of the 'stages of concern' can make an important contribution. These activities are related to succession planning and the designing of learning paths.

### **PLANNING THE SUCCESSION OF EXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES**

An organisation needs a minimum number of really experienced people. Given that people go through phases in the development of their profession and that these developments require a lot of time, is a very relevant insight for the planning and manning of an organisation. Often, new employees can only replace the experienced people after years of learning and on-the-job training. And the contribution of experienced employees is still very important for the success of that training. If there is already a shortage of experienced employees, then they often cannot be freed in order to support their new colleagues. As a result of this, the new colleagues do not receive the necessary input and feedback which they need in order to grow and reach the next level. This can lead an organisation into a painfully vicious circle.

You can compare this to the problems faced in the health sector where the government would very much like to increase the number of employees. The training courses would be able to deliver more people but a bottle-neck is created by the fact that there are not enough experienced colleagues to train them on the job. So insight into the sequence and duration of the 'stages of concern' is an important aid to timely, well-directed investment in the succession or addition of the experienced employees.

## **DESIGNING TRAINING COURSES WITH THE HELP OF THE 'PSYCHOLOGICAL SEQUENCE'**

For designers of learning and on-the-job training courses, the 'stages of concern' are a source of inspiration to link up with the most urgent learning needs of the participants. This design principle is called the 'psychological sequence'.

### **Example**

If the participants of a course are afraid of aggression from the public, then you start with teaching them how to respond to aggressive incidents (survival) and not with all kinds of interview techniques and basic skills (wanting to do things well). The need for these aspects follows automatically if the participants want to go more deeply into things. The moment that the question arises is the right time for the trainer to provide a response.

Designing a training course which closely matches the phases in which the participants find themselves demands from the designer that he identify with the concrete preoccupations of the people for whom he is designing the course. The trap for the designer is that he projects his own concerns onto the participants and thus creates a course which would answer his needs or those of his client in that situation. This could explain why so many organisations put desired changes and innovations (phase 4) into training courses for beginners before these have actually been implemented in the organisation. Innovation via beginners however doesn't work because it is well nigh impossible for beginners (phase 1) to oppose the experienced people.

### **An example of three concentric circles in a training course**

When a training course is extensive, then the design will have a concentric structure in which the 'stages of concern' are recognisable.

#### ***The first circle***

A concentric course begins with the skills and subjects which the participant needs the most. The participant wants to spend a great deal of time in the relevant work environment so that he can gain experience by working alongside and observing. That is why the participant first learns the skills and knowledge which will give him access to these workplaces, such as safety rules, procedures, technical jargon, etc. Thereafter, the participant learns a number of skills so that he can quickly be given some of the work. These work-related skills are selected according to the 80/20 rule: first the 20% of the skills which will be used 80% of the time. Of these, the participant first learns the most simple skills. As soon as he has mastered these he can be put to work. This way, the process of gaining experience in the workplace quickly gets underway which stimulates the learning process. Structure, directional assignments and explanations from on-the-job coaches make this phase more effective.

### ***The second circle***

If the participant of a course starts to ask questions about why the tasks must be performed a certain way and is interested in personal improvement, then the more complex skills and the theoretical background can be addressed. With routine skills, attention can be paid to details to improve the quality. The less frequently used skills ( the 80% of the skills which are used for 20% of the time) are now taught. The participant is now open for information about the organisation and the effect of his own work on the work of others in the organisation.

### ***The third circle***

The participant is now more self-directing in learning. He learns to manage situations which occur infrequently and he can specialise. He learns to know the organisation as an entity and learns the effect that his work has on the end product, the customers and the clients.

Pre-knowledge and earlier learnt skills have an important influence on the intensity and duration of this part of the course.

### ***What does knowledge of the 'stages of concern' offer you?***

Insight into the 'stages of concern' make it possible to better understand what is really taking place in people who are learning. What you may have formerly regarded as a personality trait in someone, you may now consider to be a passing concern or uncertainty within a more lengthy process. Last but not least, this knowledge can give you more insight into yourself and that can help you to make wiser decisions with regard to setting out your own working and learning processes.

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