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Dear Reader,

In 2006 LIM celebrates its 20th anniversary of designing and delivering programs using Action Reflection Learning. We thought it would be appropriate to share with our readers the history behind ARL, the Scandinavian origins, the evolution of the model from a leadership development design to an adult learning methodology that can be applied to a variety of learning interventions. True to its origin, the conceptual framework is a result of practitioners in action - reflecting to extract valuable lessons.

Enjoy the reading, and find your way to act.

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month
"Experience is the teacher of all things" *Gaius Julius Caesar* *Roman general, political leader, and first Roman dictator. (100-44 B.C.)*

LIM NEWS

20 YEARS developing your leaders while they develop your business

Issue 70	**The LIM Newsletter**	**June 2006**

ACTION REFLECTION LEARNING

By Isabel Rimanoczy [1]

Current adult educators have an array of options when considering what the best learning approach for a

given situation could be. Traditional lecturing, case studies, experiential learning, peer learning, self directed learning, action learning are some of the options. While the selection is often made in consideration of the specific context, the learning outcomes and the learners involved, it is likely that educators make their choices based on what they know or feel more comfortable with, and considering the expectations and demands of the organization they belong to.

Authors of adult education theories tend to present a conceptual framework that suggests what a better approach could be. The best practitioners, on the other hand, seldom follow the theoretical recommendations literally. Rather, when designing and implementing learning interventions they act following their best knowledge, which is a combination of experience and conceptual input, plus intuition. That combination is seldom converted back into a theoretical framework, leaving a gap between what "real life practitioners" do and what researchers and academic authors develop. Action Reflection Learning is a case in point.

The Origins of ARL

At the end of the 1970s, a group of academics from the University of Lund, Sweden, together with a number of line managers and several managing directors, plus consultants and professionals in the HR arena working in Swedish organizations, came together to create a movement of protest against the prevailing approaches and methods used in professional training. From this movement was created the MiL Institute.

Hitherto, management training was fully focused on teaching concepts, techniques and theories, and the preferred method was lectures and classroom courses. As Lennart Rohlin, President of the MiL Institute puts it, "Our ambition was to put leadership (instead of merely management) and learning (instead of teaching) in the forefront" (Rohlin, 1996). The group focused on the *content* of what was taught to executives, as well as on the best *process* to teach the new contents - as a matter of fact, they were searching for what would make the best *learning* for the individuals.

In terms of challenging the content, the thinking of this group was that the corporations needed more than just managers; it was leadership that was essential to address the changing requirements of the business context. They found further that the human dimension was missing from the development programs - the understanding of what it is like to work with people, not merely with processes, equipment and systems. The group looked at different contents that had to be learned - contents related less to facts and theories, and rather to developing new behaviors and attitudes.

At the same time, their strongly democratic and participative Scandinavian culture led them to query the values on which leadership was based. authority or influence?; control or empowerment?; majority rule or consensus? That meant that developing new behaviors was intimately connected with reviewing the values and assumptions underlying the current leadership practices, assessing their contradictions and consistencies.

But then, after analyzing the competencies they thought should be learned, MiL realized there was an experiential component, a pragmatic aspect of those contents. If leadership was about learning how to behave differently, how to be, how to act, how to think differently, then the classical teaching model was simply inadequate for the purpose. This avant-garde group came up with a different way of training, focusing on learning rather than on teaching. This difference consisted in bringing together groups of managers to work on real, current, organizationally significant projects, and in using the experience thus gained as the vehicles for learning these different behaviours, these new mindsets. Soon after, strategic partners like Ashridge Management College, London Business School, INSEAD and IMEDE (now IMD) joined MiL in this innovative approach.

The model that was created aimed at developing value-based leadership, converting the managers into

strategic 'actors' who could generate their own theories of leadership through individual and group reflection.

The "MiL Model" originated in this convergence of objectives, contents, values and processes for a new approach to management training was based on the action learning approach developed by Reg Revans in the '40s, where a group of people meet periodically to solve problems related to work. Each individual brings his own problem and the group members ask questions that help the individual to find his own answers (Revans, 1982). The main differences between action learning programs and the 'MiL Model' in the '80s were concentrated on the role of a project team advisor (later called Learning Coach) - which Revans advised against - the use of group projects rather than individual problems, and the duration of the sessions.

The 'MiL Model' continued to evolve, as practitioners responded to clients' needs and restrictions, as well as to the needs and expectations of the participants. In an experiential and reflective learning mode, MiL practitioners tried out changing the number of sessions, the duration of the sessions, the type of projects selected, the role of the Learning Coach and the style of his/her interventions. By the mid '80's, the MiL Institute and its sister consulting firm, LIM, founded in the US, decided to jointly call this approach Action Reflection Learning, to validate and stress the importance of individual and group reflection in heightening awareness and in developing new frameworks for learning. (Rohlin, 2002). In hindsight, they may have been trying to give a new name to a new practice, that at that time was no more fitting the original action learning settings and specifications.

MiL and LIM continued the experiential learning mode, now exploring different contexts in which to apply the ARL approach: in academic environments such as a management development program at the Master's level for graduates of the University of Lund, Sweden, and the University of Belgrano, Argentina; in open programs for member corporations of MiL and in-company programs.

The ARL approach was also used to achieve a wide range of different outcomes. Examples ranged from programs to help executives become a better performing team, simultaneously helping them create new business strategies; facilitation in the integration process of mergers and acquisitions; individual coaching; programs for young high potentials; mentoring programs; leadership transition programs; organizational change programs; development of specific managerial and leadership competencies; development of leader-coaches; development of HR Business Partners; facilitation of performance appraisal processes; facilitation of teams working on a crisis; development of synergy in regional teams; development of Learning Coaches.

By exploring new contexts and contents, MiL and LIM tested the use of ARL beyond the original leadership development focus. This is where the initial signs of a transition from a leadership development approach to a learning methodology can be traced back.

ARL: A learning methodology

Evolved organically through the choices and savvy intuitions of practitioners, and transmitted in knowledge sharing processes, ARL became a learning methodology that incorporated elements of design and intervention that the practitioners adopted because of their efficacy. Research conducted by Drizin and Rimanoczy in 2005 indicated how those elements were actually rooted in theoretical frameworks, and in established bodies of knowledge that could be found in the literature of other related disciplines. For example, two of the elements of ARL used by Learning Coaches in their designs and interventions are 'guided reflection' and 'questions'.. These elements are rooted in a principle that can be described as "Knowledge lies within yourself" (referred to as the principle of 'Tacit Knowledge'), which has a long and established intellectual history going back to Socrates. That assumption or principle is what makes the element 'guided reflection' and/or 'questions' effective elements. If people didn't believe that individuals have tacit knowledge, then the guided reflection and questions would not be a resource of choice, or would be used for a different purpose, i.e. questions to check understanding. This happens in traditional training

models, where an "expert" teacher imparts knowledge to students and then asks questions to ensure they have understood.

A *tool* is an activity which the learning coach uses to introduce and apply an element. For example, a learning journal is one of many tools that can be used to foster the element of "Guided Reflection". A learning coach makes his/her own choices as to what tool fits best the moment. The choice will depend on their own resources, their experience in having used the tools and their creativity to develop new ones or to adapt them to the specific situation.

Table 1 illustrates the 10 principles and the 17 elements, as well as some examples of tools.

Table 1. Principles, elements and tools

PRINCIPLE	ELEMENTS	Examples of TOOLS
Theoretical Foundation	Implementation strategies	Implementation tactics
Relevance *Learning is optimized when the focus of the learning is owned by, relevant to, important and timely for the individual.* **Inquiry Learning, Wilson & Murdoch; Popular Education, Paulo Freire; Action Research, K.Lewin; Action Learning, Revans; Experiential, Dewey; Situated Learning, Vigotsky ; Practice Oriented Education, Raelin**	**Ownership:** **Taking ownership for one's learning**	Co-design; Personal Learning Goals; Expectations framed as questions
	JITL: Just in Time Learning (Just in Time intervention)	Various Concepts and Tools Learning Coach (LC)
	Linking: Connecting the concept with other contexts, generalization, application	Reflection question on how to transfer what was learned to other situations
	Balance Task/Learning	Project Real work/challenge Capturing lessons at individual and team level
Tacit Knowledge *Knowledge exists within individuals in implicit, often unaware forms, is under- or not fully utilized, and can be accessed through guided introspection.* **Mayeutic, Socrates; Reflective Method, Dewey; Inquiry Learning, Wilson & Murdoch, Grozner Popular Education, Paulo Freire; Action Learning, Revans; Psychoanalysis, Freud; Experiential Learning, Dewey; Action Science, Argyris; Critical reflection, Mezirow; Andragogy, Knowles**	**Questioning** **Guided Reflection**	Different tools (Reflection & Dialogue, Stop/Reflect/Write/Report) LC Learning Journal
Reflection *The process of being able to thoughtfully reflect upon experience is an essential part of the learning process, which can enable greater meaning and learning to be derived*	**Guided Reflection***	Different tools (For feedback, awareness of personal contribution, for

from a given situation. **Reflective Method, Dewey;** **Constructivism, Piaget;** **Change Cycle, Rimanoczy;** **Learning Cycle, Lewin's (Kolb);** **Learning Cycle, Boud, Keogh and Walker,** **Pearson & Smith;** **Critical Reflection, Mezirow**	**Feedback**	assessing need of change, planning)
Uncovering, Adapting and Building New Mental Maps and Models *The most significant learning occurs when individuals are able to shift the perspective by which they habitually view the world, leading to greater understanding (of the world and of the other), self-awareness and intelligent action* **Mental Models, Senge;** **Inquiry Learning, Grozner ;** **Creative thinking, De Bono;** **Critical Reflection,** **Mezirow;** **Transformational Learning, Cranton**	**Unfamiliar Environments** **Questioning*** **Guided Reflection*** **Exchange of Learnings***	Diversity in teams Unfamiliar environments Unfamiliar tasks Unfamiliar relationships Challenging questions Visualization, "What if" activities
Social Learning *Learning emerges through social interaction and, therefore, individuals learn better with others than by themselves.* **Social learning, Dewey;** **Inquiry Learning, Grozner;** **Social Learning Theory, Bandura;** **Communities of practice, Lave, Wenger**	**Exchange of Learnings***	Learning Partners' Debriefs Reflection & Dialogue
Integration *People are a combination of mind, body, feelings and emotions, and respond best when all aspects of their being are considered, engaged, and valued.* **Appreciative Inquiry, Cooperrider;** **Inquiry Learning, Grozner, Aaron T. Beck,** **Martin Seligman;** **Spirituality, Tisdell;** **Integral psychology, Wilber**	**Appreciative Approach**	Positive body language of LC Active Listening tool Value the strengths of individuals, Celebrating
	Safe environments	Norms; Contracting
	Holistic involvement of the individual	Activities that include/allow emotions; Mementos; Personal Introductions, R&D
Self Awareness *Building self-awareness through helping people understand the relation between what they feel, think, and act, and their impact on others, is a crucial step to greater personal and professional competence.* **4Mat, McCarthy;** **Learning Styles, Kolb;** **MBTI,Myers Briggs;** **Emotional intelligence, Goleman;** **Humanistic psychology, Rogers, Maslow**	**Learning and Personality Styles**	Framing Designs respecting diverse styles MBTI, ECI, Firo B
	Coaching 1-on-1	
	Guided Reflection*	Learning Journal, Personal History
	Feedback*	

Repetition and Reinforcement *Practice brings mastery and positive reinforcement increases the assimilation.* **Behaviorism, Watson, Skinner;** **Appreciative inquiry, Cooperrider;** **Emotional intelligence, Goleman**	**Sequenced Learning**	Sequenced Design Different activities to check on application, transfer
Facilitated Learning *A specific role exists for an expert in teaching and learning methods and in techniques which can help individuals and groups best learn.* **Reflective Method, Dewey;** **Constructivism, Piaget;** **Inquiry Learning, Grozner;** **Proximal Development, Vigotsky;** **Action Research, Lewin;** **Action Science, Argyris & Schon**	**Learning Coach**	Roles of a LC: Reflector Teacher JIT Coach Facilitator Designer
Systemic *We live in a complex, interconnected, co-created world, and, in order to better understand and tackle individual and organizational issues, we have to take into account the different systems and contexts which mutually influence one another and affect these issues.* **Von Bertalanffy, Senge**	**Five System Levels**	Different outcomes defined. Different processes, concepts and tools to address those outcomes. Different designs/ activities to address those outcomes **Key Lines:** **Personal:** Processes to include feelings and personal stories, to include the "whole" person: mind, soul, body **Professional and Team**: Tools/techniques and knowledge required for the efficient work on the project **Organizational:** Processes and workshops to deal with organizational challenges, i.e. change, mergers, transfer of learnings, culture etc **Business:** The project/ challenge to work on

(*) Asterisks indicate the elements that are related to more than one principle.

Final remarks

Having outgrown its original purpose as a learning design for leadership training, ARL became a learning methodology rooted in the common sense of practitioners, and a practice which brings together a number of valuable conceptual frameworks, that hadn't been presented together before. The significance of those frameworks is that they allow practitioners to make more conscious choices when using tools, and help guide the design process of learning interventions. By creating awareness of the underlying assumptions, practitioners are able to test, challenge or innovate using the conceptual framework, which is how knowledge can be built and transferred for progress.

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[1] Special thanks to the contributions of Paul Roberts, PhD., and Boris Drizin, PhD.