

DYNAMIC JUDGMENT BUILDING®

A DYNAMIC MODEL

Polarity and rhythm as a key to the development of social organisms

Note: The content of this document is protected by legal copyright. You are allowed to download the document for study and private purposes. Commercial use is absolutely prohibited. To use (parts) of this document in articles, books or any other media is granted after permission of A.H. Bos- Ph.D.

Dr. Bos can be contacted at lexbos@dialogue.net

Contents:

- a. Introduction
- b. Path of knowledge and path of action
- c. The path of knowledge: percepts and concepts
- d. The path of action: goals and means
- e. Foreground and background
- f. Assessment in phases or as a dialogue?
- g. The key position of the underlying question
- h. The symbol of the lemniscate
- i. The significance of the emotional feeling
- j. Assessment and group-formation

a. Introduction

When people talk with each other, they usually exchange opinions. They think something about everything, something is thought as either right or wrong, something is beautiful or just ugly, something is fitting or wholly unsuitable. More often than not, they also have their views on what should be done and by whom to solve problems. All these opinions have formed the reality in which we now live and will also determine the world of tomorrow.

Whoever is concerned about the world in which we live should ask himself how the opinions underlying its creation were formed. To what degree were these judgments formed consciously and carefully? Could they perhaps be made more consciously and more carefully? In order to find out, we first have to define the meaning of the term opinion or, if you prefer judgment or assessment and the way in which we arrive at it. This subject will now further be elaborated.

b. Paths of knowledge and action

Forming a judgment is an inner activity. Expressing an opinion is not a phenomenon taking place outside me, but an inner ability made manifest. This means that one can learn to form an opinion, to make an assessment of things.

What do these judgments relate to, what is the focus of this inner faculty? They can relate to the past and to the

What do these judgments relate to, what is the focus of this inner faculty? They can relate to the past and to the future. Whenever I express an opinion on a certain situation or try to comprehend it, my judgment relates to the past. I am occupied with research. I am entering upon, what I would like to call, the path of knowledge. Whenever I express what should happen to solve certain problems, I relate to the future. I am occupied with action: I want to change the world. I am entering upon, what I would like to call, the path of action.

This is briefly shown in the following diagram.



My judgment may also relate to the present. In that case I express my experience of a situation here and now. I will refer to that in Section J.

In Section E I will demonstrate how the two paths - the path of knowledge and the path of action are related to each other, how they are interdependent and how synthesis of the two is fundamental to a conscious process of assessment. First, however, I am going to explore in more detail each of the paths separately.

c. The path of knowledge: percepts and concepts

In the previous section, the (provisional) outcome of the path of knowledge was called insight . What happens when a physician concludes his examination of a patient by diagnosing asthma; what happens when a management consultant traces an increase in red figures back to a bad liquidity position; what happens when a paleontologist recognises certain bones as being those of a dinosaur? In all those instances an opinion is expressed in the form of: this is. . . . or this is caused by Essentially, I express an opinion on the relation between an observation (percept) outside me and a concept (or framework of concepts, a theory or hypothesis) inside me. By my own reflection, I took these concepts from the range of concepts at my disposal (com-prehend something).

I may also have formed new concepts.

Concepts are invisible, I cannot see them, I can think them. The concept chair is invisible, it comprises an infinite range of chair possibilities. In the conceptual land-scape of my mind, the concept chair borders that of stool and easy-chair . When in the visible world an object appears that fits one of those concepts, the corresponding mental picture of a chair, a stool or an easy-chair arises in me. I recognise the concept in the reality and express the opinion: This is a chair . In the assessment process the observations may become more complex: an escalated conflict situation, a political problem aggravated by a variety of factors, a vague syndrome giving conflicting test results. The conceptual frameworks too may get more complex. In essence, however, the process of assessment is characterised by relating a percept, (observation) to a concept.

In popular parlance expressing an opinion means saying what you think of something: I find this funny, I find that improper, I find that menacing. Such statements can be considered as preliminary stage of a mature judgment. This is

shown from the fact that the statement concerns a relation: the relation of myself to a phenomenon. Such an emotional relationship can be an obstacle towards a genuine judgment. My statement reveals more about myself than about the phenomenon, and has the character of a prejudice. However, this emotional relationship can also pave the way towards a deeper cognitive judgment, if I manage to objectify my emotional judgment with respect to both sides of the polarity: my observation and my concept. Likewise, this emotional relationship can lead to a better judgment on the path of action, if I realise that my feelings spring from certain intentions and prospects.

Judgments on the path of action may also bear on the relation between two concepts. Philosophically speaking, the statement: Man is a mammal is a cognitive judgment, although no observations are involved.

A narrower concept is placed in the wider framework of a more comprehensive concept. This cognitive activity is allied, if not similar, to relating a restricted observation to a more comprehensive concept.

c. Paths of knowledge: percepts and concepts

In the previous section, the (provisional) outcome of the path of knowledge was called insight . What happens when a physician concludes his examination of a patient by diagnosing asthma; what happens when a management consultant traces an increase in red figures back to a bad liquidity position; what happens when a paleontologist recognises certain bones as being those of a dinosaur? In all those instances an opinion is expressed in the form of: this is. . . . or this is caused by Essentially, I express an opinion on the relation between an observation (percept) outside me and a concept (or framework of concepts, a theory or hypothesis) inside me. By my own reflection, I took these concepts from the range of concepts at my disposal (com-prehend something).

I may also have formed new concepts.

Concepts are invisible, I cannot see them, I can think them. The concept chair is invisible, it comprises an infinite range of chair possibilities. In the conceptual land-scape of my mind, the concept chair borders that of stool and easy-chair . When in the visible world an object appears that fits one of those concepts, the corresponding mental picture of a chair, a stool or an easy-chair arises in me. I recognise the concept in the reality and express the opinion: This is a chair . In the assessment process the observations may become more complex: an escalated conflict situation, a political problem aggravated by a variety of factors, a vague syndrome giving conflicting test results. The conceptual frameworks too may get more complex. In essence, however, the process of assessment is characterised by relating a percept, (observation) to a concept.

In popular parlance expressing an opinion means saying what you think of something: I find this funny, I find that improper, I find that menacing. Such statements can be considered as preliminary stage of a mature judgment. This is shown from the fact that the statement concerns a relation: the relation of myself to a phenomenon. Such an emotional relationship can be an obstacle towards a genuine judgment. My statement reveals more about myself than about the phenomenon, and has the character of a prejudice. However, this emotional relationship can also pave the way towards a deeper cognitive judgment, if I manage to objectify my emotional judgment with respect to both sides of the polarity: my observation and my concept. Likewise, this emotional relationship can lead to a better judgment on the path of action, if I realise that my feelings spring from certain intentions and prospects.

Judgments on the path of action may also bear on the relation between two concepts. Philosophically speaking, the statement: Man is a mammal is a cognitive judgment, although no observations are involved.

A narrower concept is placed in the wider framework of a more comprehensive concept. This cognitive activity is allied, if not similar, to relating a restricted observation to a more comprehensive concept.

d. The path of action: goals and means

On the path of action too, the process of assessment involves a statement on a relation. As an acting human being I set my goals, I look for ways leading to these goals and for the means to achieve them. At the end of section B, the outcome of the path of action has been indicated by the term: plan of action . The term implies a judgment: by these means I will and can achieve those goals, the goals fit the means and the means are adequate with respect to the goals. On the path of action I express a judgment on the relation between the goals and the means. This relation may be widely divergent. The following extremes can be distinguished:

- I am shooting at sparrows with cannons, in other words, the means applied bear no relation to the goals set
- I am emptying the sea with a spoon, in other words, the goals bear no relation to the means applied
- I am justifying the ends by the means, in other words, I select means which by their achieved
- I am desecrating goals by the choice of my means, in other words, for the sake of using certain means (e.g. electronic equipment), I give in to the temptation of enthroning the goals which, in actual fact, should not be there.

In the assessment process by the path of action, we come across the same inner-outer phenomenon as by the path of knowledge. On the path of knowledge the observations were taken from outside, whereas the concepts were found and formed by an inner activity. On the path of action the goals are inside, the means outside.

Admittedly, in organisations people often get their goals from outside, for instance, from their superior, and goals are, more often than not, concerned with something to be achieved in the world outside, but ultimately, they spring from an inner human source. Getting excited about certain objectives, going for a future option, showing enthusiasm for an ideal, for moral values, are manifestations of an inner force. The means to achieve these objectives are to be found in the world around me. It is there that I find the material, the people, the organisational forms and the legal frameworks etc. which can help me on the way towards realisation.

As I said in Section C, in popular parlance, expressing a judgment is saying what you think of a situation, but it also implies saying how you think something should be; for example: I think it should go in that direction, I've got the impression that with those means they'll never achieve their goal, or I find those goals improper.

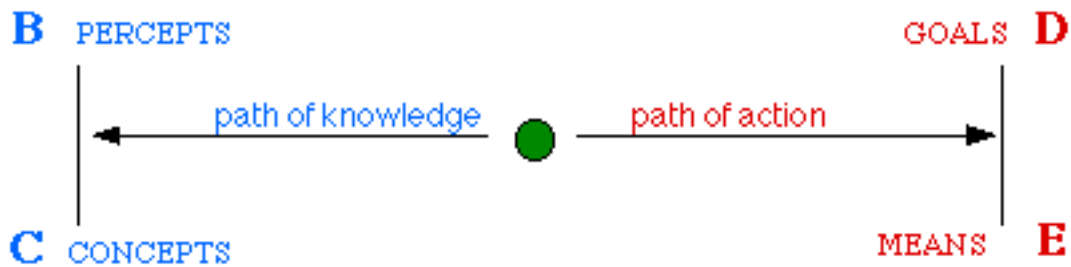
Such statements are a preliminary stage of a mature judgment. This is again evident from the fact that the statement refers to a relation: my relation to the future. This emotional relation can obstruct the way towards a genuine judgment.

My statement reveals more about myself than about the future. It has the character of a prejudice. However, such an emotional relation may also pave the way towards a selective assessment as soon as I manage to objectify my emotional judgment on both sides of the polarity: the goals and the means.

Likewise, this emotional relation may lead to a judgment on the path of knowledge, when I realise that my feelings spring from certain experiences and my interpretation of them. Judgments arrived at by the path of action may bear on the relation between objectives. Just as concepts are part of a conceptual landscape with prime, middle and lower-grade concepts, so are objectives not isolated in themselves, but part of a complex of objectives with sub-targets, with prime and lower-grade goals. One of the elements in the assessment process by the path of action is precisely creating order in this complex of objectives. This activity is allied with, if not similar to, relating a means to a goal.

e. Foreground and background

So far I have distinguished two paths in the process of assessment and for each of these paths two fields: for the path of knowledge: the fields of observations and concepts, and for the path of action: the fields of goals and means.



For the sake of the convenience, I have marked the fields with a letter. The letters have no meaning nor is their order relevant.

They simply mark a field which stands for a variety of names:

- **B** stands for percepts, facts, data, information, experiences, incidents, examples, descriptions, observations
- **C** stands for concepts, characteristics, thoughts, theories, hypotheses, conceptions, thought -models, patterns, ideas
- **D** stands for goals, intentions, wishes, desires, options, values, ideals, motives, impulses
- **E** stands for means, ways, procedures, instruments, methods, practical realisation, facilities, resources

In this section I will go into the question of the mutual relationship between the paths and between the fields. Are they independent of each other or do they need each other? To find out, let us join a research-worker.

He engages primarily on the path of knowledge and, on the surface, it would seem that he is not interested in the path of action. But this is only seemingly so. At one time, he set himself a goal and made choices with respect to the research method. He also set apart certain means (time, money, laboratory space).

While doing so, he gave pride of place to the path of action, the path of knowledge - the research proper - receding into the background.

Once the work on the path of action has been completed, he starts the research: as in a weather-house, the paths are changing places: the path of knowledge moves to the foreground, the path of action recedes into the background.

This position may continue for some considerable time until, for instance, the moment has come when the financial resources have been depleted, doubt arises about the correctness of the choice of method, motivation slackens. Then the path of action regains the foreground and the path of knowledge moves to the background: the researcher shifts his attention to questions about the sense, the objective and method of his research. The research itself is temporarily stopped and receives no attention.

A similar consideration is valid for the entrepreneur. He focuses primarily on the path of action: he sets targets, chooses means and acts. Is the path of knowledge not concerned here? Of course it is, but without it being in the foreground. The path of knowledge is present in the background, in the form of all sorts of ideas the entrepreneur has conceived of the reality and how it will tend to develop: that of his own company, of the market, of the competitors, of the trade unions, of politics etc. Then the moment arrives when the reality works out differently from his expectations. Why those sudden complaints, why does this or that product not sell any more, whence that drop in motivation?

These are all cognitive questions which prompt the entrepreneur to shift his attention to the path of knowledge and to let the path of action recede for a while into the background.

Until the path of knowledge has provided him with new starting-points for his actions, enabling him to return his attention to the path of action. Here too, the paths of knowledge and action are alternately moving into the foreground or receding into the background.

On a small scale, the same phenomenon occurs on the two paths themselves. To begin by the path of knowledge: in a state of normal consciousness the sensory perceptions are somewhat in the forefront. Without our awareness, the concepts are guiding us, turning the perceptions into mental pictures. This does not actually involve yet any conscious process of assessment. However, this changes the moment we are faced with phenomena we do not understand, Now periods of heightened attention for the sensory perception (what exactly do I see, what is the phenomenon in

question?) alternate with concentration on the search for or formation of relevant concepts (is this a falling star or a satellite?). Here too, we see perceptions and concepts alternately pushing to the forefront and receding to the background.

The same phenomenon can be recognized on the path of action.

Our daily actions are of a highly routine character. The means have been selected, the goals are implicit. In fact, no conscious process of assessment is going on. This changes the moment our actions come up against resistance or fail to produce the desired effect. At that moment a process of assessment begins, whereby the attention focuses alternately on the questions: Why am I doing it, what prompts me, what exactly do I want? When one of the questions takes the foreground, the other does not disappear, but recedes into the background to regain forefront at a later stage. The conclusion of this consideration may be clear: the model here developed is a holistic one.

In the process of assessment both paths and all four fields are simultaneously present. A consciously made assessment requires both paths and all four fields. The two paths are complementary to each other, the four fields are complementary in pairs. When during the process of assessment one pair moves to the foreground, its complementary pair recedes into the background.

If the model of assessment is holistic, the process of assessment is rhythmic. This may, in principle, have become clear from the preceding considerations, but it will be further elaborated in the following section.

f. Assessment in phases or as a dialogue?

The question regarding the nature of the assessment process is of vital importance, because the nature of the process determines its outcome. Where the process of assessment is a mechanistic, logic-causal process, each step, with an iron regularity, following the preceding one and preparing the next one, it is to be expected that the views and plans of action resulting from such a process will not hold out against the realities of life, which, after all, demand a different approach. Our age, in which our way of thinking and acting is so strongly dictated by causal and logical, linear and mechanistic processes, abounds in examplers (environment, health care, educations etc.). The previous chapter already aroused the suspicion that the process of assessment is essentially one of the rhythm and not of causal-linear steps. The causal-linear principle belongs to the lifeless nature. Rhythm has to do with life-processes. Let us go into this phenomenon in greater detail.

Usually, the process starts in the B-field of the path of knowledge, by an observation we do not understand. Our thinking immediately rushes to the rescue with a concept, a hypothesis, a possible theoretical explanation: could it be a beech, could the patient have asthma, could we come up against the second phase of the conflict-escalation? The researcher is then pausing in the C-field and asks himself: if it is a beech, its bark should have such and such characteristics, if it is asthma, the patient should have such and such symptoms, if we have to do with the second phase of escalation, such and such phenomena should also be visible.

These considerations prompt the researcher to re-enter the B-field with renewed interest, in search of facts which could underpin his hypothesis. If he finds them, his first intuition proved correct. But usually, a renewed and closer observation will reveal new phenomena, requiring him to look for new concepts, to adjust his hypothesis, to correct his theory, in short, to be active in the C-field. The results of this activity should in their turn be verified in the B-field, until the researcher is satisfied. The process we described is rhythmical in nature, it may also be called dialogical: B and C being in dialogue, questioning each other and replying to each other, until they have reached agreement and the researcher is (provisionally) satisfied.

At first sight, it would seem obvious for the path of action to follow the logical-linear process. For it is logical that first the objectives have to be clearly identified before even seriously considering the paths leading to them.

In this case a sequence is evident and a phased model would seem justified: first D then E. Yet, this supposition is disproved by experience. As a matter of fact, it is not all simple to get D clear in one's mind.

D has to do with impulses, intentions, prospective options; they belong to the sphere of the will, which is not easy to get through to with our consciousness.

Apparently, we need E to bring D into our consciousness.

The path of action is usually entered upon via the D-field. For example, we want to solve a problem, end a conflict or, more positive with an eye to the future, put environmentally friendly products on the market, allow staff members greater participation etc.

It will not be long before we move to the E-field with the question of how these matters can be realised. Several scenarios are set up. These provide concrete pictures of what realisation of the original goal can lead to.

In the light of these pictures, one may ask oneself: "Is this what I want, do I really want to it?" Such questions - in the D-field-give rise to reflection on and reconsideration of the objectives, whereupon the ways and means have again to be looked for in the E-field. Such ways do have their consequences, for instance, an unsuspected dependence on certain groups, personal sacrifices, the need to acquire new capabilities.

These consequences should also be willed. This shows that the originally formulated objective is part of a complex of objectives which should be willed in its entirety.

This again raises the consciousness, prompts reflection and reformulation in the D-field, followed by a renewed activity in the E-field. This continues until a plan of action has been found which adequately explicits goals and paths and provides for a satisfactory relation between the two. Here too, the process is in essence rhythmical, dialogical.

I now come to the question of how the overall process, involving both the path of knowledge and the path of action, evolves.

Practically all literature on problem-solving and decision-making describes this process in phases. If the preliminary phase of formulation of the problem is left out of account for the moment (we shall revert to it in the following section) , all the current models are variations on the basic pattern of image-building - assessment - decision-making. Three steps to be made in succession. When I consider this troika in the light of the preceding analysis, the image of the situation appears at the end of the path of knowledge. The facts have turned into an image, because they have been ordered and made transparent by my thoughts. Such an image-building is the results of an intensive process of assessment.

If judgment is suspended until after the image-building phase, it means that, in fact, no image is being built, only bits of information have been collected.

If by assessment in the said troika is meant that in this phase people are allowed to air their feelings and tell how they experience the situation, what they think of it etc., their feelings can either be used as a step to contribute in the cognitive process or be introduced as facts in the B-field. In either case there is no justification whatever for a separate assessment-phase after the image-building (path of knowledge).

The same applies to the path of action. The plan of action at the end of the path of action is the result of an intensive process of assessment. If after the assessment-phase no further assessment were allowed, there would never be any plan of action at all.

If in the context of the said troika, the assessment-phase allows feelings to be aired concerning the objectives and possible solutions, the same goes here as was said before on image-building.

The feelings can either be used to intensify the assessment process on the selective path or should be taken into account in the mental pictures to be conceived from the consequences of certain solutions.

In either case, there is no justification whatever for a separate assessment-phase preceding the decision-making (path of action). From this the conclusion can be drawn that the three-phase model resolves into a two-phase one: instead of image-building - assessment - decision-making - : path of knowledge - path of action.

The assessment process is dropped as an independent middle phase, or in other words: the whole process is one continuous process of (re-) assessment! There remains the question of the phases. The knowledge-action path-model could also be seen as a two-phase model: go the entire path of knowledge first, before entering upon the path of action. The logic of this order is inescapable. First the diagnosis, then the therapy, first analysis of the problem before you apply any measures.

Is this then a case of phased linearity, without any dialogue coming into it?

Not at all! Dialogues come into it on various points. Let us begin by a purely diagnostic conversation. The sole aim of such a conversation is to get to know what is wrong with a patient, what is the matter with a child, or why an organisation is

shaky . The selective path does not come into it in the form of solutions, but it is, as it were, present inside the path of knowledge.

By the path of action on the inside of the path of knowledge I mean the following (see also Section E). Every researcher has, at any time, formulated a research-target (motive) and conceived a path leading to it (method) or reserved the necessary means (money, space, time). The elements of this path of action accompany him on the path of knowledge. They spring to mind as soon as the targets are called into question (by the research-worker himself or by the research-object) or when the means turn out to be inadequate. At that moment, the path of knowledge is for a while abandoned and all attention and activity is concentrated on reformulating goals and means.

This may even occur several times during a short leg of the path of knowledge. To that extent, there is a dialogue between the path of knowledge and the path of action.

This is the first manifestation of this dialogue.

At the moment the conversation has arrived at the point of discussing solutions -thus explicitly embarking on the action path- the dialogue between path of knowledge and path of action takes on two new aspects.

Firstly, the solutions have continually to be tested to the situation. These tests give rise to aspects which so far had not been brought up in the discussion of the patient, the child or the organisation, because they were then irrelevant. Now certain solutions need to be tested, via the path of knowledge, for their financial, organisational, technical, legal or political possibility and feasibility.

Secondly, only when the participants have set the goals and established the paths leading to them, does it show how differently they regard the situation, interpret the diagnosis and read the image.

It is as with the previous example whereby the goals are only brought to full consciousness by concrete paths.

In such a case the path of action gives rise to completely new diagnostic questions, which prompt a return to the path of knowledge.

Between the path of knowledge and the path of action we have found three dialogues. One between the path of knowledge and its own inside , one between the path of action and a much wider range of image-building, one between the path of action and the path of knowledge in a narrower sense.

Consequently, a phased model is out of the question on the path of knowledge and on the path of action as well as on the two joined together. Assessment is in essence a rhythmical, dialogical process.

g. The key position of the underlying question

Up till now I have defined the paths and the fields inside them and I have shown that the process of assessment is not linearly phased, but rhythmical-dialogical. I haven t yet examined what it is that gives the process its dynamics and direction. The answer to the question of what propels and steers the process is as simple as it is fundamental: a question. Each active process of assessment goes back to an underlying question.

Anyone who does not feel a need to understand the world and to change it through his actions is content with himself and with the world. He will at most say what he thinks of the world and what should be changed.

An active process of assessment starts only when questions arise. These may manifest themselves as cognitive questions from a sense of dissatisfaction with oneself (I want to comprehend the world) or as selective questions from a sense of dissatisfaction with the world (I want to change the world).

The cognitive questions provide the impetus for the path of knowledge and direct the process. The selective questions provide the impetus for the path of action and direct the process. In the course of a conversation cognitive questions may concentrate on specific B-or C-questions (what exactly has happened, what is the tenor of this concept?).

Likewise, selective questions may concentrate on specific D-or E-questions (What precisely is our objective, how do we envisage this path?).

It is important to bear in mind that questions always come from a questioner. This is found out by asking: Who is the question from, who has identified himself with this question, who, so to speak, is kept awake by it, who is really eager for an answer to this question? When the answers to these questions are not clear, the process of assessment is bound to be flat and with little real involvement. The result is correspondingly flat.

In the aforesaid phased model, formulation of the question forms the start of the first step. It is followed by image-building, assessment and decision-making.

This shows distinctly the poor realistic value of this model, because everyone knows that questions are changing as one goes along.

One discovers a question behind or beneath the original one or a sub-question suddenly gains an unexpected dominance, or the problem suddenly shows a quite different angle from what was originally thought.

Indeed, more often than not, the principal outcome of a conversation is the discovery and explicit definition of the question proper.

Thus it comes at the end instead of at the beginning. Once the question proper is found, the solution is usually near at hand.

In reality, the question is neither at the beginning nor at the end alone, but also in between, on the way. The process of formulating the question, testing and reformulating it permeates the entire conversation. Actually, this process too is of a dialogical-rhythmical nature: a dialogue between the (changing) question and the (evolving) answer.

h. The symbol of the lemniscate

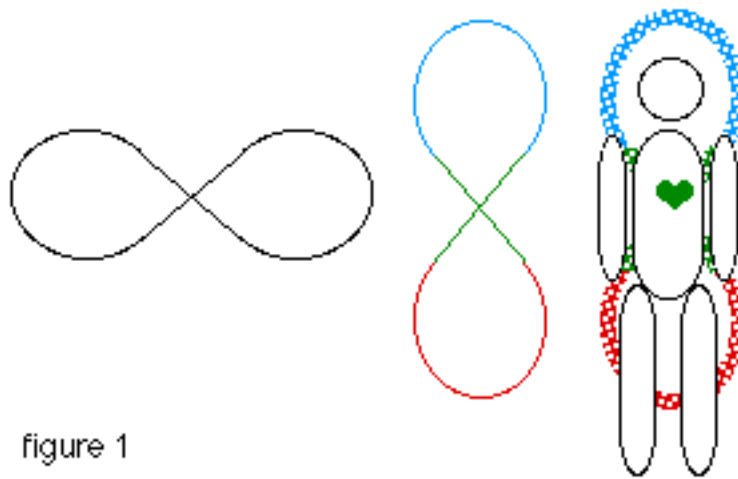


figure 1

When we wish to symbolise the assessment process as it has hitherto been described, the lemniscate springs to mind. The word comes from the Greek and means: a flower garland. It was used to decorate the victor of a fight.

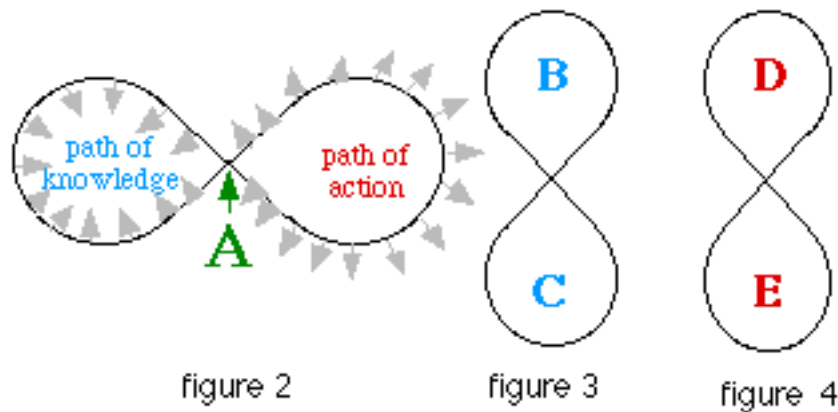
The garland was hung around the head, was crossed over the heart and ended in a loop around the lower body (fig. 1).

Mathematicians use the lemniscate to symbolise infinity.

For our purpose the symbol is practicable for the following reasons:

- It encloses the whole human being: head, heart and hand (see drawing).
- It represents a continuous process without beginning or end. Processes of continuous always link up with existing opinions and invariably end up in provisional conclusions. In that sense they have no beginning and no end, they are uninterrupted life-processes.
- It represents a dialogue, a breathing-process between inside and outside. The inside of the left-hand loop becomes the outside of the right-hand loop and vice versa (fig. 2). On the path of knowledge the outcome lies within me (a learning process, comprehending the world), on the path of action the outcome lies outside me (changing the world), (fig. 2). On the found inside me: 'B' + 'C' (fig. 3). On the path of action the impulses of my will are inside me 'D', the means are outside me 'E' (fig. 4).
- It has a distinct centre. At the intersection of the two loops is man with his question 'A'. It is this question which in actual fact sets the dialogue in motion and gives it direction.

This man-linked question confers on each assessment process its own identity.



i. The significance of feeling

When I try to chart my inner life, I discover that it consists of three provinces. The first covers images, thoughts and memories; the second comprises feelings, emotions and experiences; the third covers desires, intentions and impulses of the will.

This inner world can be epitomized in the words: thinking, feeling and willing. The outside world enters in me as an observation. My inner world is externalized in my actions.

The preceding considerations may have created the impression that feeling do not enter into the process of assessment. On the path of knowledge thinking and observing are heavily relied on, on the path action willing and acting are mainly drawn on. The feelings that we came across were considered either as preliminary stages of the assessment proper on the cognitive and selective paths or as facts which we include in the B-field or the E-field.

Does that mean that we have detracted from the quality of feeling? Here we come up against a remarkable paradox. The essence of assessment engages feeling. Feeling is the faculty par excellence by which to express how one thing relates to another: how fact relates to norm, how forms, colours, tones relate to each other, how people relate to each other and finally also how I myself relate to all this.

Now the paradox is this: precisely because the assessment process is essentially a feeling activity, we should be very careful to draw into it the ordinary, subjective feelings, laden as they are with sympathies and antipathies, with prejudices and desires. Before being useful in the assessment process, such feelings have to undergo a thorough evolution.

The way in which I have described the process of assessment also points to the stages where the emotional feeling can be trained.

At three points in the process we come across the emotional feeling - other than in the subjective, emotion-charged judgments - that is in the **motive**, in the **process** and in the **results** of the assessment.

Motive-process-results: they constitute a fundamental trio for each human activity. The motive often springs from unconscious depths and adds force to the activity. The activity manifests itself in the process as a series of actions in time.

In the results the motive has solidified in space. We can apply this group of three, for instance, to a learning person (motive for learning, process of learning, result of learning), to a researcher (motive for research, method of research, result of research), to a working person (labour motive, labour process, labour result) and so forth. The trio helps us to discover a wide variety of aspects of an activity.

For example, this trio shows us where feeling plays a role in the assessment:

The **motive** for the assessment. Underlying the cognitive and the selective question, which we previously indicated as the energy source of the process, is a feeling. Underlying the cognitive question is a feeling of surprise, wonder (Plato already knew that all true science springs from surprise), underlying the selective question is a feeling of oppressiveness, of responsibility. Such feelings can produce genuine cognitive and selective questions.

The **process** of assessment. The feeling can judge the quality of the process: does it go chaotically through the four fields, does it endlessly stagnate on the cognitive path, does it jump prematurely to solutions, does it linger on in formulations of goals or is there a healthy movement in which all the poles get their due?

The **result** of the assessment. Here again it is the feeling which is the ultimate referee on the result. Have the participants got the feeling that the facts have satisfactorily been explained and understood, have they got the feeling that the plans of action on the path of action make sufficient allowance for the insights gained on the path of knowledge? People are often heard saying: I have got the feeling that a number of facts have not sufficiently been discussed, I have got the feeling that along these paths we won't be able to achieve our goals etc. Such feelings can be taken seriously and thus be the stimulus for intensification of the assessment process.

Passing by these three stations, the feeling is purified of its socially negative sympathies and antipathies and is trained to become, what I would call, an organ of observation and cognition.

In the following section I will illustrate that this fact opens up new prospects for the relations between the participants of a discussion group.

j. Assessment and group-formation

In a major of the previous considerations I described assessment as an individual process. The conclusions arrived at are certainly valid in situations where people are individually dealing with questions. In many cases, however, the social reality requires people jointly to arrive at a common judgment.

Judging individually is at the same time easier and more difficult. Easier, because no one contradicts you; more difficult, because it is not so easy to enter into a discussion with yourself, to get your own prejudices unstuck, to enlarge one-sided ideas of a situation, to get off your hobbyhorses.

Anyway, assessment in groups adds a new dimension: a group is formed, relations are established, the group process starts.

Group-formation and assessment are as the two sides of a coin: when people talk with each other, there is, on the one side, a content (they talk about something, assessment) on the other side, a relation (something happens between them, group-formation).

Over the past decades the social sciences have taken hold of these two aspects by two totally different tracks and thereby alienated the one from the other.

The content became the object of a technocratic approach: the whole process of assessment was made into a linear, methodical event of problem-solving and decision-making, as if no relations existed between those involved.

The relation became the object of group-dynamics and sensitivity training, a method whereby the group-dynamics is cut off from the content-dimension: one is immersed in the there and now of the relations, without any regard at all for a cognitive and selective path. If one method leads into a cold programmed world, the other introduces us into a warm, but extremely unrealistic and dim world.

The assessment process here described tries, via the content-aspect, to enable the relational aspect to enter into it in a new way and integrate with the content. This takes place in four ways:

1. The systematic engagement in the four fields and in the underlying question raises new interest in the contributions people can make to filling these fields. This leads to acceptance of the fact that people, whatever their shortcomings, are committed to these fields. This again gives rise to a new sense of responsibility for the

fact that through these fields, people also are, as it were, committed to each other. Thus, going seriously into the dialogue between the fields and the paths is bound to awaken an objective interest in, acceptance of and responsibility for human relations.

2. Since, in this assessment process, the feelings are called upon as an organ of observation and cognition, they are purified of such destructive effects on relations as are sympathies and antipathies. This gives the relations a different filling.
3. Subjective opinions with regard to the content are not brushed aside, but taken seriously and used as a step towards an intensified assessment. Consequently, they are not allowed to start a life of their own as indigested, festering elements.
4. When relations within the group have to be discussed, experience has shown that the lemniscated model offers a firm foothold on this slithery and dangerous ground, so that slips and accidents can be avoided. For in this area too there is a question at stake and the four fields have to be worked through. This process keeps the discussion hygienic.

Once the assessment along this path has promoted the group-formation their interaction begins to show: improved relations contribute to the quality of the assessment in that one is prepared to give away or to accept certain bits of information, one dares give up established ideas, thereby making oneself vulnerable, one dares hold back certain rationalisations and be more direct and personal in calling things by their names. As a result, the assessment process gains in efficiency and depth, which in its turn increases the group-members confidence in each other.

This process, whereby assessment and group-formation reinforce one another, can also be considered as a dialogue between the two, as interaction between the outside of the process (the content of the discussion usually lies outside the group in time and space) and the inside of the process (the relational element lies inside the group in the here and now, see remark at the end of Section B).

In addition to the basis attitude of the researcher (on the path of knowledge) and of the entrepreneur (on the path of action) there is the basic attitude of the encountering person (in relation).

The cognitive question and the selective question are now joined by a third one: the relational question of who is the other, how do I relate to him and what is our joint task? If the cognitive and selective questions go back to feelings of surprise and oppressiveness respectively, so the relational question is based on a feeling of empathy, of involvement.

To conclude this article, I would characterise this model as a socio-ecological model. Let me explain this.

The essence of an agricultural activity is ecological: taking care of certain aspect of the environment, of a number of connected environmental factors in order that something can grow. A farmer puts a grain of seed into the ground. He cannot by himself transform this seed into a ripe ear. He must be confident that the ear is dormant in that seed as a potential quality.

What he can do is look after those environmental factors which he can control: sufficient mineral substances, water, air, light and warmth. These factors are not looked after only once or one after the other, but taken into account alternately according as necessity demands and throughout the whole period of growth.

This image is an effective metaphor for the process of assessment in group. When the grain of seed (the question) is put into the ground (the group), the group-members are, in actual fact, unable to produce the answer. They can have the confidence that the answer is potentially present in the question-germ and can be liberated by a correct care of the environment, which means: sufficient hard facts in the B-field, mobile, resourceful ways in the E-field, clear thoughts in the C-field and inspiring goals in the D-fields. These socio-ecological environmental factors are not phased either nor cared for only once. They are looked after throughout the whole process of growth from the question to the answer according as the situation requires. If this is done properly, the answer dormant in the question-germ is liberated and can be harvested at the end of the discussion.

A.H. Bos - Ph.D.

copyright: [Stichting Dialoog - Holland](#)