

OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

A Critical Introduction for the Intelligent Practitioner

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First published in 2002 by ITOL

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ISBN: 0-9539790-1-6

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INTRODUCTION

A Personal Story

Two learning experiences have changed my life. One was a Lewinian 'T' Group which I attended, ostensibly on an evaluative basis, at the behest of my employers, and from which I took much. The other was an outdoor programme I attended in 1978. I had mixed feelings, looking forward to a week of exciting activity, but having no idea what the real benefits were meant to be. My less optimistic colleagues muttered about “brainwashing” and expressed fears that the programme’s objective was to exhaust us, thus making us open to company indoctrination.

Reality was different to all our expectations. We carried out a series of absorbing tasks which required (at the very least) some creativity in their solving. Physicality was at the level of a welcome incidental - adding an element of fun, rather than exhaustion. The emphasis on process and review was high. As time passed, the exercises became more complex, culminating in one lasting 24 hours in which we were able to explore layer after layer of task-complexity, circumstances pushing us towards adopting a managerial approach which emphasised flexibility, communication, and the need to make decisions on incomplete information. By this time we had become accustomed to review, and incorporated it into our performance.

I found the experience deeply seductive, and as the week progressed I became more and more excited. Even now, I can recall specific moments from the programme in graphic detail, yet find it hard to record what I *actually* learned. My learning could not (cannot) be summed up in a list of competencies, and was (and is!) hard to put into words. Whilst researching for this book I found a summary of what happened to me:

“....a profound kind of learning which is readily sensed, but can be difficult to articulate: It is a kind of learning which is fundamental, which is holistic, which is closely linked to personality, and which affects how people learn. ‘Development’ is typically less specific but more substantial

and more central to a person's make-up than 'learning'. (It is) a change in a person's core construct system"

Roger Greenaway (1995)¹

Such changes have consequences: On return to the office I found the routine of my job less congenial than before. My eyes had been opened to a new world, and the day-to-day palled. Acting as a staff member on further outdoor programmes only served to heighten this feeling. Going back to the office felt like going back to unreality. In due course I accepted an invitation to join a development training organisation. From there I built a niche for myself.

The point is, I found that what happened on OMD programmes was more impactful, more significant, than the day to day 'reality' which was my lot as a company training manager. When reading this book you should keep this in mind. I'm a deep believer in OMD.

But a critical one. OMD is a highly fragmented business and has its fair share of chancers, exploiters-of-trends and downright fools. Sometimes the connection between outdoor training and management development is tenuous. Sometimes it doesn't exist at all. Sometimes, indeed, it's just outdoor pursuits at silly prices.

One of the reasons for this book is to try to raise OMD's game. I believe the medium is potentially immensely powerful, but that many providers, anxious to seem relevant to the latest HRD fad, have succeeded only in weakening its impact.

Reflection in recent years has brought to me a belief that many OMD efforts, for one reason or another, fail to achieve what they could. This book reflects that belief and challenges a number of taken-for-granted both in the OMD world and, by extension, in the wider world of management development.

I've also included a practice-based chapter in which a number of exercises, together with possible applications are included, together with tips on course (rather than just exercise) design.

¹ GREENAWAY, R. (1995) *Powerful Learning Experiences in Management Development and Learning*. Thesis (PhD), Lancaster University.

Although each Chapter has been written as a “stand-alone”, I hope there’s enough narrative unity for the book to be read (not all in one go!) from start to finish without appearing too disjointed.

Stylistically, I’ve tried to pitch the book somewhere between two extremes. Academic books are full of useful information but often are so hard to read. Popular management books frequently oversimplify. Both are unsatisfactory one way or another. Add to that the fact that human beings are *complicated*. Helping them to learn and develop is a complex, many-layered business in which there are few easy answers and the style to adopt becomes self-evident. Something that’s readable but doesn’t insult the intelligence with oversimplifications. That’s what I’ve aimed for. I hope I’ve achieved that aim.

OMD deserves more than the quick-fix “teambuilds” which have become its most-sold product recently. If this book has helped you to see greater potential than that, it’s been time well spent for me.

Reading this book

Although it’s my fervent hope that readers will read the whole of this book, it’s possible that people will come to it from a variety of backgrounds, and may wish to partake only of the parts that directly concern them. Some will be engaged in critical enquiry, others for hints as to practice, yet others to consider whether or not they should buy OMD. Some may be students.

Different Chapters may appeal.

The critical enquirer may wish to first turn to Chapters 2 and 3, which look behind the practice of OMD to seek to identify the currents of thought which underpin it and to compare critical views on it. I also develop an argument that OMD often suffers from a poverty of ambition, and challenge some of the “taken-for-granted”.

Practitioners and buyers may wish to turn straight to Chapter 4, which examines outdoor media, looks at course design and spends a little time on review.

Appendices D to G may also be of use to the practitioner and buyer.

I hope everybody reads Chapter 1. OMD doesn't exist in a vacuum – it's part of the world of experiential learning and an understanding of the underpinning theories of that world is vital to all who wish to do their work intelligently. OMD is a method. Experiential learning is the context within which that method works.

Appendix 'B' will also be interesting to some, especially students, and can be treated as a fifth chapter. It's an essay on the roots of OMD which turned into a – for me at least – thoughtful critique of where OMD came from. For me it was revealing to discover, for example, that the U.S. roots of OMD are *very* different from their British counterparts. It was also revealing to identify the idealism which was the sub-plot to the pioneer outdoor development organisations. Whatever, read it for yourself and see what reflections you have.....

I've also included an extensive **bibliography**, primarily, I guess, of use to students but also as a kind of acknowledgement of those who contributed to my own reflection on OMD. Others especially deserving of acknowledgement are Steve Goodwill, co-author of my first, practice-based, book (see bibliography), my long-suffering wife, my colleagues in Lindley Lodge, ADAPT, ADEPT and QED Training (you know who you are!) and - of course - delegates from Barnsley to Bucharest – *they* did the real work!

Bill Krouwel
Shepton Mallet
June 2002

CHAPTER 2 – CLASSES OF OMD

From its earliest days, OMD combined elements from the two worlds of outdoor and organisational development. This is illustrated graphically by two articles which appeared in the same edition of the same magazine. The first is by David Williams¹ and is interesting in that it describes Mortlockian Adventure Education – pretty much at the Davie Crockett/Horatio end of the development training spectrum. The author speaks of transitional learning for those on the threshold of adulthood more than of OMD. The focus is clear: *“The courses are designed to develop personal qualities, attitudes of mind, and skills in those attending them...a progression of experiences and situations in a number of contrasting environments can bring about an increase in personal and social awareness.... The aims and objectives of courses of this nature vary according to the position of the employee and the particular requirements of the industry involved, however they can best be described as involving social needs of the individual, e.g. creating a sense of achievement or an increase in self-confidence....”*

Rhetoric largely of the old paradigm – of bringing out personal qualities, of the *environment* delivering increases in personal and social awareness.

I wrote the second article², and (at the time) had far greater 'Indoor' provenance than outdoor. The rhetoric is strikingly different:- *“Our objective is to provide a framework of exercises within which managers can test their powers to cope with an accelerating rate of uncertainty and change...other management development needs can be satisfied by the outdoor programme.....These include the ability to organise, to persuade, to motivate others and to work as a team...”* and *“That’s where much of the learning takes place – in review sessions. It’s vital that these are given as much consideration as the actual exercises...it is important to get the right balance between*

¹ WILLIAMS, D.H. (1980) Adventure With a Purpose. *Training Officer*, 16 (10).

² KROUWEL, Bill 1980. Management Development Using the Outdoors. *Training Officer*, 16 (10).

exercises and review". Different rhetoric – recognisable for a competency-driven approach, management-development jargon, and emphasis on review....

Within a few years, the latter approach was in the ascendant as the basis for a business which experienced mushroom-like growth, incidentally transforming the approach adopted by the likes of Brathay and (eventually) Outward Bound. It also gave birth to a host of organisations whose brutal names – Challenge, Adapt, Impact – often belied some subtlety of approach.

Nevertheless, some survivalists survived and prospered during the OMD boom years. The result was the coming into being of a range of OMD offerings, the differences between which were not always apparent to prospective users. A number of writers have therefore attempted to sort OMD into classes, although without complete success.

Dainty and Lucas highlighted one of the problems:

*"Programmes can differ quite considerably not only in terms of the type of tasks that participants are asked to perform, but also in terms of the type of review process utilised, and the overall outcomes that are intended by the course organisers...the problem is that there is a real danger that its diversity is misunderstood rather than managed, ignored rather than used for improving programmes, and can lead to confusion rather than clarity about the advantages and disadvantages of using this development activity"*¹

Others have also recognised this issue, and writers have attempted to throw some light on what Beeby and Rathborn (1983) termed "...uncertainty and confusion about the operation of the outdoor approach and what it seeks to achieve with relevance to the workplace"². Beeby and Rathborn also noted ".... the very richness

¹ DAINTY, P. and LUCAS, D. (1992) Clarifying The Confusion: A Practical Framework For Evaluating Outdoor Development Programmes For Managers. *Management Education And Development*, 22.

² BEEBY, J.M. and RATHBORN, S. (1983) Development Training – Using

and variety of programmes, reflected in...numerous objectives, make the outdoor approach a difficult one to communicate easily.....the immediate requirement is for greater clarity of terms in future discussions and presentations of the approach”

Doughty¹ succeeded in encoding some commonly held views, declaring that “Perhaps some of the discontinuity between the understanding of providers and clients lies in the confusion over the differing outcomes of management development and personal development”. His categories are:

First Generation: Growth through physical challenge, little review or facilitation. Participants take from the experience as they are able. A confused and painful experience for many. Trainer-centred and didactic style for inputs.

Second Generation: Growth through physical activity. Process assisted by facilitation - review may take a large part of the course indoors. More participant-centred than the first Generation. Delivery more interactive.

Third Generation: Seeks to balance physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of personal development – indoor or outdoor as need dictates, in a programme aimed at holistic learning. Equality-centred style. Power lies equally with the trainer and the participant

Without a specifically management agenda, Priest and Gass (1993)² also adopt a generational approach. They list five of which the first three are similar to Doughty’s. The others are:

Frontloading: In which the instructor: “(before the briefing, possibly during, or just after it)...explains several key learning

the Outdoors in Management Development, *Management Education and Development*, 14 (3).

¹ DOUGHTY, S. (1991) Three Generations of Development Training. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 7 (4).

² PRIEST, S. and GASS, M. (1993) Five Generations of Facilitated Learning from Adventure Experiences. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 10 (3).

points. These points may include, but are not necessarily limited to: sharing the learning objectives for the activity and any related motivational benefits, stressing the desired positive behaviours in advance, warning learners of the consequences of negative behaviours and asking learners to review or revisit earlier commitments to change before beginning an activity".

Isomorphically framing the experience: Trying to turn the experience into a metaphor for work, for example by reframing a rope spider's web as a distribution network.

What's interesting about the generational approach is that it encodes a 'taken-for-granted' that had emerged during Development Training and OMD's early battles to differentiate itself from traditional outdoor pursuits: That review of processes is *automatically* a good thing. Certainly, the conventional wisdom is that a tidy plan-do-review model is somehow more 'objective' than the rather untidy process wherein people undertake tasks without reviewing them, or review them in an *ad hoc* way.

This represents a gross oversimplification of the experiential process. People learn at the most inconvenient of times and to think that formal, offline review is *indispensable* to learning perhaps reflects a failure to accept the complexities of the human learning process. I have spent many a dull hour watching earnest facilitators religiously reviewing every twist and turn of a 15-minute 'grounds' task, often to the despair of the people who actually performed it. Formal review of every task is *not* indispensable. What *is* vital is for the facilitator to be close enough to the group to sense those key moments when light has dawned and to honour the group by ensuring that the learning is captured. Groups and individuals learn at their own pace, and attempts to 'hothouse' learning can actually get in the way.

Priest and Gass's additional classes are problematical, offering the potential for instrumentalism. The fourth generation (front loading) is particularly open to this, seeming to enable trainers to tell people what they will learn. Ersatz experientialism, substituting free group process with a procedure set up to prove the trainer's point. The main objective can only be to send delegates home carrying with

them *exactly* the lessons the designer wanted them to take away, whether or not these are relevant to them.

Their fifth generation (isomorphic framing) is more pathetic than problematical. Telling people that a rope spider's web is a distribution network is silly. They can *see* that it's an arrangement of ropes and frames. If the experience doesn't have the capacity to be an effective metaphor, no amount of window-dressing will make it so.

Non-Generational Classifications

Other writers have attempted to classify OMD by non-generational means.

Beeby and Rathborn (1983)¹ cite two classes of OMD:

Adventure Education – where the medium (the outdoors – climbing, caving and so on) is the message – so review is seen as unnecessary.

Development Training (in an employment context) as a training method which is “.....a *special class of experiential learning which distinctively incorporates use of the outdoors (experience) with process reviews (assessment)*”

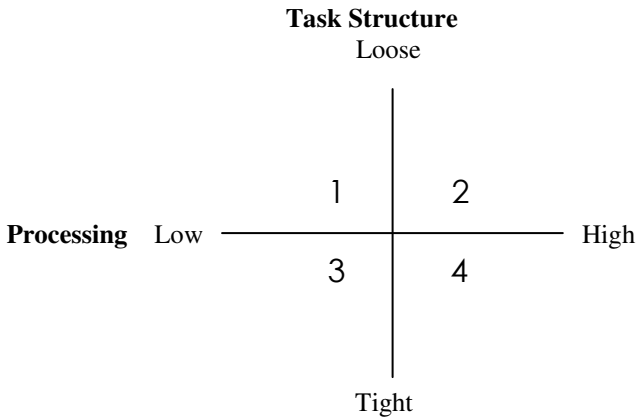
Dainty and Lucas (1993)² present a framework for evaluating Outdoor Development (their term) rather than defining classes. They suggest that evaluation should come from looking at three continuums, one of which (outcomes) is dealt with in the next section. The other two are:

¹ BEEBY, J.M. and RATHBORN, S. (1983) Development Training – Using the Outdoors in Management Development. *Management Education and Development*, 14 (3).

² DAINITY, P. and LUCAS, D. (1992) Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers, *Management Education and Development*, 22.

Tasks undertaken - from highly prescribed (high technical support required, structured, narrow objectives) to very flexible (low technical support, unstructured, broad objectives);

Review Processes - from low intensity (general focus, low personal focus) to high intensity (specific focus, personally challenging and direct). With seeming inevitability, these two are combined to form a matrix:



Task/Process structure (After Dainty and Lucas)

Whilst perhaps more satisfactory, these classifications still leave something to be desired. Dainty and Lucas, for example, classify abseiling as an activity requiring high technical support and structured, narrow objectives. To limit the learning to that dictated by one's narrow objectives seems to be a remarkably confining thing to do. A first-time abseiler might experience a wide variety of thoughts, feelings, emotions; the learning potential for each individual is different. For one, the support of team members may trigger-off reflection about their behaviour in managing people. For another, it may provoke reflections on trust. For yet another, ways of coping with fear. The experience of abseiling (or of choosing *not* to abseil) provides a wide range of learning opportunities. If we then review the exercise around structured, narrow objectives, we limit

the experience. We dictate the learning agenda by only *allowing* people to learn what we wish them to learn.

The idea that an activity can meet structured, narrow, learning objectives denies the essential autonomy of human thought – the “*active sense-making process which addresses itself to all experience, external events impinging on the person, sensations of seemingly inner awareness and offered pre-structured knowledge*”¹ It also limits the potential of outdoor development to meet real (but different) people’s real (but different) needs.

Although Dainty and Lucas provide a convenient example, this underplaying of human autonomy also applies in varying degrees to my own earlier writings, to Priest and Gass, and to Doughty. We all imply that people only learn (or at least learn best) through some form of structured 'review' process when an expert – a teacher or facilitator - is present.

This case seems to be most strongly presented by Doughty, who demonises the purely activity-based approach as “*a confused and painful experience*” (Doughty, 1991). It may be, but powerful transformational learning is often, whatever the medium, confused and painful.

Another problem with categorisation is that it impoverishes perception by lumping together various characteristics which may have nothing to do with each other. Thus Doughty’s “generations” ignore the fact that it is perfectly possible to combine little formal review and facilitation within a warm and caring atmosphere which utilises outdoor activities.

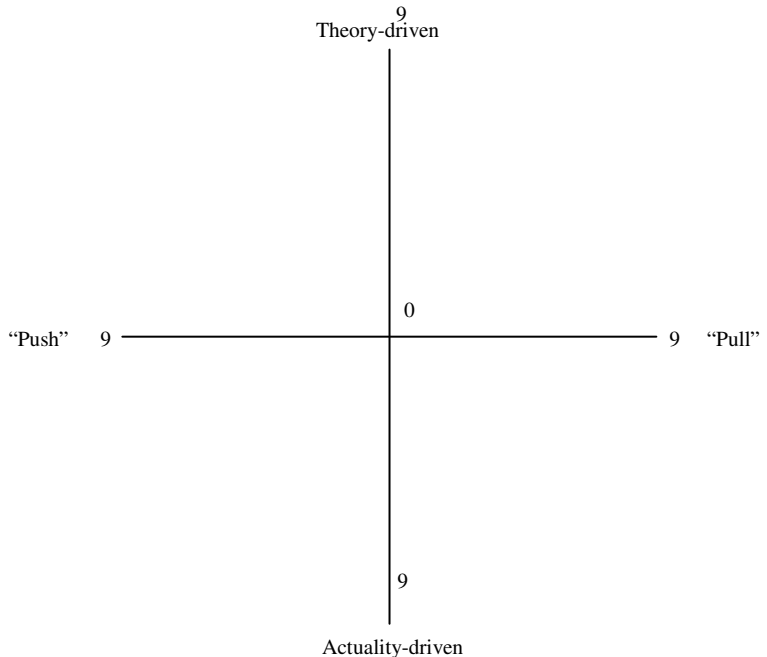
To summarise, dividing OMD into hard classes is unhelpful in that it unnecessarily 'freezes' various approaches to the medium into 'good' and 'bad' classes and does the same for the media themselves, for example by characterising a particular technique as having 'narrow'

¹ BURGOYNE, J.G. (1995) Learning from experience – From Individual discovery to meta-dialogue via the evolution of transitional myths. *Personnel Review* 24 (6).

or 'broad' objectives. Some of the classes seem to provide the potential for subtle forms of manipulation. Others are simply asinine.

REVIEW

Exercises, however complex, form only a part of the learning process. Review is equally important and for many people is where the *real* learning takes place. There are a number of ways in which review can be conducted. These are illustrated in a continuum on the next page:



“Push” v “Pull”: The “push” style is one in which the trainer, working to a preordained agenda, manipulates the review so that the lessons conveyed, whatever actually happened, are the ones he or she

wants to convey. An advantage of the pure “push” style is that it can be demonstrated that the delegates learned what was wanted by the client. Disadvantages are that sometimes this may ignore the learning as actually experienced, undermining the credibility of the process in delegates’ eyes by appearing to be focussed round a hidden agenda. At its worst, the style is known as “frontloading”, in which the trainer tells the delegates what they will learn, gives them an exercise, and then reviews it around what s/he told them earlier.

The “pull” style is one in which review focuses around what actually happened, and delegates’ views and feelings about that. The trainer’s job is to “pull” these from the delegates by asking open, probing, and (occasionally) closed questions, helping the group to find its own way to articulate the learning. An advantage of the style is that it draws out real learning. A disadvantage is that the learning may not be what the customer wanted.

“Theory” v “Actuality”: A simpler continuum. Some reviewers prefer to place the learning into a context based on current theory, others on their perception of actuality. Thus (at the extremes), one reviewer relates expressed learning to a body of knowledge, the other seeks to place it in the 'here-and-now' context of management life as it is lived by the delegates.

I am no fundamentalist, and am thus able to move within the continuum. Nevertheless, I believe that there are advantages to the “pull” style, in that there’s little point in sticking rigidly to a fixed learning agenda if delegates are actually learning other, perhaps more powerful, things. Thus my approach is fundamentally “pull” *but with a high expectation that properly designed exercises will highlight appropriate learning.* In terms of methods, that might mean:

- Open questions, small group discussions, plenary reports
- Facilitators working at drawing out the learning
- Focus in review on asking questions which help the group to relate back their on-course learning to life at work

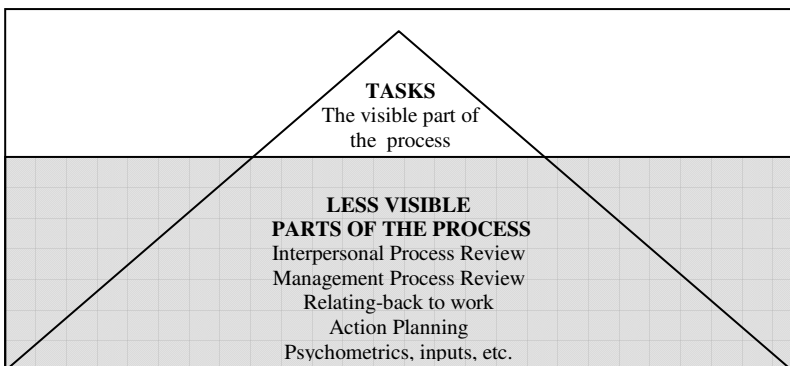
In terms of “theory” v “actuality”, it may be wise to cultivate an ability to occupy the whole continuum, but to bias review towards the actuality sector, relating actuality to theory rather than the other way around.

In summary, delegates should find themselves working hard during review, being strongly encouraged to think for themselves about their actions, probing deeply into this and working to relate the learning back to the working world.

Links between exercise and review: Neither exercise nor review takes place in isolation. In particular, people often reflect whilst in the middle of an exercise (a characteristic which I recognise, providing useful pocketbooks in which delegates can record in-task reflection for later use during review). Similarly, the extremes of the “push” style can be avoided by exercise design – build elements into exercises which provoke desired learning – but in a way that helps delegates to see the learning for themselves, and therefore 'own' it that much more.

I find that the small group/plenary approach works well, allowing better air-space for individuals and provoking interesting and useful discussion if separate groups have different perceptions of what happened and the learning to draw from it.

PROGRAMME COMPONENTS: The components I use in OMD programmes are summarised in the iceberg diagram below:-



RELATING BACK AND ACTION PLANNING

The espoused objective of much OMD is to enable people to change behaviour in their everyday world. The idea is that by reflecting on programmed activities and exercises they will perceive new, different, better, ways of going about their daily business.

If this theory is to have any chance of becoming a reality, people need to make connections between how they behave in exercises and how they behave in the day-to-day. If these connections are not made, the course is a waste of money.

Time should therefore be devoted to enabling people to make the connections. An action-planning session at the end of the programme isn't enough; links should be made throughout the programme. Some ways of doing this are:

- Frequently ask variations on the question “*In what ways is behaviour in tasks (a) like work and (b) not like work*”. This is extremely useful in helping delegates to make connections and to explore ways of transferring learning to the work environment.
- Encourage delegates to form self-help groups at work. One company with whom I worked allowed and encouraged delegates to meet weekly to examine how their learning was being put into practice. In another, informal (but planned) 'curry-groups' were set up to discuss further learning on a monthly lunchtime basis.
- Use electronic media – I have a colleague who uses email as a very effective follow-up tool
- A useful old standby is to encourage delegates to write a letter to themselves, address it, and pass it to the facilitator. After a suitable period (say three months), the facilitator posts the letter to the delegate who thus receives a self-penned reminder of their intentions.

There are many other ways of building learning-reinforcers. The key is to ensure by whatever means that learning is retained and transferred.

PSYCHOMETRICS

Psychometric questionnaires such as the ®Myers-Briggs Type Indicator¹, the ™FIRO B,² and many others purporting to measure various aspects of human personality have attained such a pitch of popularity in the HR world that it is likely that almost anyone providing programmes with a developmental aim will experience pressure to include them in the mix.

They have their uses, but in programmes which aim to focus on the here-and-now and to have a firm basis in actuality, they may prove to be distractions. Use them (providing you have, or have access to, someone suitably qualified), but do so with care and discernment.

I have found that in OMD programmes, psychometrics are best used as supports to the overall process, providing amplifying food for thought rather than being a central part of the programme. As such, they can enrich processes of self-discovery. Certainly, on events with a career-development focus they are excellent tools.

But be discerning in their use. Just because you *can* doesn't mean you *must*!

INPUTS

The same is true of inputs.

Before giving an input, ask yourself “*why am I doing this?*” “*Does it add value?*” “*Whose needs am I meeting?*” If any of the answers

¹ ® MBTI and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are registered trade marks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. OPP Limited is licensed to use the trade marks in Europe.

² ™ FIRO-B is a trade mark of Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

are unsatisfactory, think again. If still in doubt, ask a question instead!

I find that a good knowledge of a range of learning and management development models is useful, but rarely plan in great detail which inputs I am to give. It depends on the emerging needs of the group – a timely input can act as a reinforcement and legitimisation (for those who need it) of learning as it is being experienced. This puts some pressure on the facilitator, as a wide range of theories need to be understood in order to give the right input at the right time. Nevertheless, acquiring and maintaining a high level of theoretical knowledge is important if delegates are to be given inputs which illuminate rather than dazzle.

Inputs have their place in experiential events, but are subordinate to the experience (and the task-review-relate cycle) itself. And OMD is above all an experiential medium...

