Tobias Voss

Transform Your Training.

The METALOG® *Method*

Dedicated to my most important teachers Chris Hall, Frank Farrelly and Gunther Schmidt.

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. PROLOG

1. INTERACTION ACTIVITIES: A HOLISTIC LEARNING CONCEPT

1.1. Discovering the Interaction Metaphor

1.2. Principles of Brain-based Learning

1.3. Fundamentals: Resources – Metaphors – Language

1.3.1. Trainer Mindset: Competencies and Solutions

1.3.2. Key Principle: Metaphors Steer Actions

1.3.3. Flexible Precision: Language as a Tool for Cooperation

1.4. The Essence of Interaction Activities

2. INTERACTION ACTIVITIES IN ACTION

2.1. Staging

2.1.1. Staging Experience-Oriented Learning Methods

2.1.2. Criteria for Staging an Interaction Activity

2.1.3. What Exactly Is Poly-contextual?

2.2. Performance Stage

2.2.1. Objectives of the Performance Stage

2.2.2. Opportunities for Intervention during the Performance Stage

2.3. Attributing Meaning

2.3.1. Questions Focus Attention

2.3.2. A Question of Timing: The 3-Phase Transition Model

2.3.3. Building Bridges to Everyday Life

2.3.4. Scaling with Ropes

2.4. Use of Observers

2.4.1. Observer Role and Objectives

2.4.2. Observe, Note, Feed Back

2.4.3. Observing and Giving Feedback as a Dedicated Learning Project

2.5. Process-oriented Work

2.5.1. Learning Content Goals and Process Outcomes

2.5.2. The Condition Compass

2.5.3. The Optimum Stress Level

3. TRAINING TOOLS IN CONTEXT: TEAM DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Core Considerations

3.2. Contracting Team Development Processes Using Experience-Oriented Learning Methods

3.3. Successful Intervention

3.4. Forms of Intervention in the Team Development Process

4. METALOG TRAINING TOOLS

4.1. SysTeam – Maintaining the Emotional Balance

4.2. Team^2 – Seeing the Bigger Picture

4.3. CultuRallye – Rules Make Life Easier- or do they?
4.4. Communic8 – More than just Dialog
4.5. Heart Selling – A Fair Trade
4.6. Tower of Power – Setting Sights Higher

5. APPENDIX – CUSTOMIZING YOUR LEARNING PROJECT

5.1. Preparation Aids for Group Work
5.2. Recommendations for Published Collections of Interaction Activities

GLOSSARY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PROLOG

0. PROLOG

My name is Tobias Voss, and I am the Managing Director and founder of METALOG training tools. Since 1994, I have supported companies and organizations as a freelance coach and trainer, focusing primarily on the development of experience-oriented learning methods[1] (EOL). This book is a hands-on field-report derived from these experiences that will enable you to boost your effectiveness as a trainer and allow you to quickly understand and use techniques that work.

We all know that life as a trainer can be stressful and unproductive if the same poorly realized techniques are used again and again, but it doesn't have to be. Like many of you, the early years of my career as a trainer were stressful. It felt like I was trying to find a diamond buried deep in a block of granite and the only tool I had to help me was a tiny blunt chisel. Something seemed to be missing, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was....

One day, I was conducting a two-day seminar for flight attendants of a large airline on the topic of "Customer focus on board." After one and a half days, I was worn out from speaking too much and by the passivity of the group I had in front of me. How was I going to get through the rest of the day? The focus of the afternoon was on how to deal with challenging situations with customers. I had several theoretical models and a couple of top-heavy exercises lined up. But I knew right then that my training plan was just not going to work; nor did I want it to. In desperation and out of a deeply held desire to engage the group, I had them do an exercise using material I had in the trunk of my car left over

from another training workshop. It involved them transporting a ball from one point to another which was balanced on a ring attached to strings. Without making a connection between the exercise and the topic, only knowing that it would energize them, I said: “I now have a task for you on the topic of ‘dealing with difficult customer situations.’ This here is the customer. (I held up the ball.) Please transport the customer along the aisle to the foyer. The strings must remain taut at all times.”

As soon as the group started the activity, to my delight (and relief), not only were they fully concentrated on completing the task, they were also laughing and having fun. At the end of the 15 minutes it took them to complete the activity, they were more relaxed and open than at any point during the previous parts of the seminar. However, I still didn’t know how I was going to link the experience they had as a team during the exercise to the topic of “managing difficult situations with customers.” So, I simply asked them what they thought, and hoped that they would think of something. To my surprise, the ideas immediately started to flow….

This first experience[2] was the beginning of a journey of discovery in which I had the opportunity to observe at close quarters how behavior and motivation affected the learning process. The more experience I gained, the more I understood about what fostered and, above all, what hindered effective learning:

- Mandatory attendance: when management or the HR department have “corralled” the participants into attending the seminar.
- Trainer talking time: when the trainer spoke so much that the participants hardly had any time to do exercises.

- Non-engagement: when individual participants were not prepared to engage in the learning process, instead dismissing everything as “baloney” and just sitting exercises out.
- Uninspiring content: if I couldn’t present the learning contents in a fresh and meaningful way for the participants.
- Lack of laughter: if the training was no fun and the group hardly or never laughed.

Hypnosis as everyday focusing of attention

- Intensity of experience: if the exercises didn’t involve the learners in a deeply intensive experience.
- Fear of mistakes: if the learners had unrealistic expectations of themselves and were afraid of making mistakes.

The METALOG Method developed over the years as I endeavored to rise to these challenges in my work as a trainer. I would like to thank the all the people I have had the good fortune of working with over the years, without whom I would never have been able to gain such valuable insights into learning. The countless mistakes I was

permitted to make, and the feedback I received from the participants at my seminars and workshops, contributed significantly to my professional progress. Indeed, without them, this book would never have been written. This book is ultimately a very personal book that contains short accounts of my work with experience-oriented learning methods. Naturally, to protect the privacy of my clients, I refrain from using the real names of any individuals or companies, only stating the industry in which they work. I have also added a **glossary** at the end of the book which contains short definitions of the terminology I developed over the years.

So, let's first start by explaining a few core concepts:

Metalog
In Steps to an Ecology of Mind, the British anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, uses the term metalogue. He describes this as a conversation in which the discussion is not only about the issue at hand, but also about the structure of the conversation as a whole. As such, a metalog is a type of metacommunication in which you also talk about how you talk to each other. Creating and facilitating metalogs is part and parcel of every trainer's daily working life.

Hypno[3]
A major role in my work is played by the communication patterns of the physician and hypnotherapist, Milton Erickson. His methods were analyzed and modeled by a number of researchers, including Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the developers of NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming). My goal is to make Erickson's language patterns and approaches accessible so that they can be used in the context of group work, and especially for work with interactive and experience-oriented learning methods. Hypnosis and trance is not an illusory or enigmatic concept, but an everyday phenomenon. It does not necessarily have

anything to do with sleep or relaxation, but rather with a deliberate focusing of attention.

Trance and hypnosis have always played an essential role in many different cultures, for example, in dance, percussion, and storytelling. Gunther Schmidt[4] proposes the terms “problem trance” and “solution trance” to describe how individuals or groups become focused on a specific state. One of the themes of this book is exploring how to realign this focus in the desired direction.

Systemic

The concept of systemic consulting originated from family therapy. Today, systemic concepts are widely used for counseling and consulting work in a range of social systems, from corporations and nonprofit organizations to schools. The fundamental concepts[5] are:

Circularity: The behavior of one person in a system is at the same time cause-and-effect of the behavior of others in the system. Hence, it does not make sense to attribute specific qualities to any one person. Rather, such qualities are always fluid and capable of being refashioned.

Perspective: Humans act and communicate from their personal perspective. A statement such as “we are a bad team” may stake a claim to universal validity, but what it describes is only one of many possible perspectives. Hence, perspective is always merely the constructed reality of the person making the statement.

Context: Behavior has a specific meaning only in a defined context and is not universally valid beyond this context. Context provides a framework in which the specific meaning develops.

Hypnosystemic

Gunther Schmidt combined Erickson's resource-focused hypnotherapy and psychotherapy with systemic approaches into a coherent concept. My personal experience of hypnosystemic coaching is that it provides a highly effective and supportive range of approaches and interventions that can be tailored precisely to the needs of the client. These concepts have shaped how I approach experience-oriented learning methods, making my work more dynamic and flexible.

Interaction activities

Interaction activities (or also only activities) are none other than the practical embodiment of experience-oriented learning methods. The group, or individuals within the group, are given the opportunity to interact with others, allowing them to perform, communicate, reflect, experience, and feel. As Kurt Hahn would have it: learning with head, hand, and heart. This process takes place in an environment that, on the surface, appears to occur in a fully self-contained microcosm of the group dynamics outside the frame of everyday life. For this reason, it is essential to establish a supportive working climate in which abilities and skills can develop and flourish. These "learning projects" mostly follow a simple structure: After the trainer sets up the activity, the group completes a task, with occasional intervention by the trainer. The experiences gained from the activity are subsequently embedded in the "bigger picture." The following chapter explains what needs to be done to maximize the desired effect.

METALOG training tools

This is the name that my partner, Erwin Voss, and I use for the collection of interaction activities we have developed and published over the years. Although they partly draw on classic concepts, the majority of the tools have been developed as completely new learning scenarios. They

enable learners and trainers to experience and explore a range of topics such as communication, customer focus, leadership, teamwork, organizational development and social learning. The METALOG Method, on the other hand, is a universal concept for working with interaction activities, not only the activities we developed but also those developed by others.

Therapy?
This not a book about psychotherapy. Rather, it examines how learning scenarios can be developed to accelerate and sustain learning and development in your groups and individual participants. Hypnosystemic knowledge can be easily transferred to the work you do with groups.

Trainer
For the sake of simplicity and readability, I use the term “trainer” to describe individuals who lead interaction activities and group processes. The term also covers all professions involved in learning and development across all contexts, such as companies, schools, churches and social organizations.

In order to make the book easier to read, when referring to trainers or learners, I alternate between either the female or male personal pronoun, but not both at the same time. In all cases, however, both male and female training professionals are implied in equal measure. Where I refer to a specific person, I use the personal pronoun appropriate for that person.

Interconnected
At many points in the book, you will find references to other chapters. Please feel free to explore these references.

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[1] The term “experience-oriented learning methods” (EOL) is used here as an umbrella term for various methods such as working with interaction activities or Accelerated Learning.

[2] See Chapter 1.1. “Discovering the Interaction Metaphor”

[3] Milton Erickson (1901-1980), American physician and psychotherapist. Several psychotherapy procedures have been developed based on Erickson’s methods and philosophy.

[4] Gunther Schmidt integrated hypnotherapeutic and systemic concepts into the so-called “hypnosystemic approach.”

[5] You can find a more detailed description in Chapter 3 “Training Tools in Context: Team Development,” p. →

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INTERACTION ACTIVITIES: A HOLISTIC LEARNING CONCEPT

1. INTERACTION ACTIVITIES: A HOLISTIC LEARNING CONCEPT

Chapter 1 details how I discovered interaction activities, examines the principles of brain-based learning and addresses the core considerations of the METALOG Method. The core considerations can be found in Chapter 1.3.1. (“Trainer Mindset: Competencies and Solutions,” p. →); Chapter 1.3.2. (“Key Principle: Metaphors Steer Actions,” p. →); and Chapter 1.3.3. (“Flexible Precision: Language as a Tool for Cooperation,” p. →). These considerations form the basis of the entire concept. Chapter 1.4. (“The Essence of Interaction Activities,” p. →) examines the current “state of play” of my knowledge—after all, learning never stops. But, first of all, let’s go back to where it all began.

1.1. DISCOVERING THE INTERACTION METAPHOR

In the Prologue, I wrote about how desperation with the slow progress I was making with a group of flight attendants at a seminar led to the discovery of the concept of interaction metaphors.

The flight attendants were immediately able to draw parallels between the activity they had just done and their real world. With the help of the insights they gained from the activity, they realized for themselves that the key to managing difficult situations with clients was their attitude and communication style. I realized I had discovered a new, fascinating side to interaction activities: The group were able to find what they were looking for through the

interaction itself. The following table shows the parallels the participants drew between the activity and their “real” world.

In another seminar—also with an airline—in which we were examining the role of the purser on board, I looked for a learning scenario that corresponded to the duties of this service & leadership role, namely, being the ‘communication hub’ on board. I set up a scenario in the style of a bistro table involving a round, wooden plate balanced freely on a wooden pedestal. The group’s task was to remove figurines from the plate one by one. [6] For each “bistro table,” there was a team of 3 at work. One person from each team was the “executor.” This person was blindfolded and was not permitted to make direct physical contact with the others; only spoken instructions were allowed.

Balance on board