

Organisational Learning and Anxiety

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Fear Is a Man's Best Friend

*Standing waiting for a man to show
Wide eyed one eye fixed on the door
This waiting's killing me, it's wearing me down
Day in day out, my feet are burning holes in the ground*

*Darkness warmer than a bedroom floor
Want someone to hold me close forever more
I'm a sleeping dog, but you can't tell
When I'm on the prowl you'd better run like hell
You know it makes sense, don't even think about it
Life and death are just things you do when you're bored
Say fear's a man's best friend
You add it up it brings you down*

*Home is living like a man on the run
Trails leading nowhere, where to my son?
We're already dead, just not yet in the ground
Take my helping hand I'll show you around
You know it makes sense, don't even think about it
Life and death are just things you do when you're bored
Say fear's a man's best friend
You add it up it brings you down*

John Cale (1974)

1. Introduction and overview

In organisational and management literature, debates take place concerning what would be the best way for organisations to prepare for the future. One of these debates concentrates on two positions, one of which emphasizes the necessity of sound strategic planning, whereas the other position firmly underlines the necessity of learning on both the individual and organisational level in order to maintain and enlarge competitive advantage (Sauquet, 2004). Though the latter position suggests a promising course of action, due to several conditions, both positive formal and informal learning in organisational settings do not always have the desired impact. These conditions can be located on both sides of the agency/engagement – affordance/suggestions dichotomy (Billett, 1995; 1996; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2008; 2009; Doornbos & Van Veldhuizen, 2012). Put briefly, the terms *agency* and *engagement* refer to the share learners have in learning processes, whereas the terms *affordance* and *suggestions* point at the work context of learning agency. On both sides, issues may arise that inhibit positive learning because of anxiety evoked. On the agency side, those who learn can experience all kinds of anxieties and fears because of their own mind set when confronted with real or imagined threats. On the affordance side, organisational characteristics (including leadership and colleague attitudes and behaviour) may evoke anxieties and fears, and in the worst case, build and maintain a culture of fear that strongly inhibits positive learning that is necessary to foster the future viability of the organisation (Bennink, 2007; 2012).

One important point of departure is, that one cannot not learn. Learning takes always place, not only for better, but also for worse, and probably most of the time accidentally (as in the informal or hidden curriculum of the organisation, see, for instance, Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth, Sluss & Saks, 2007; Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein & Gardner, 1994; Cotton, Winter & Bailey, 2013, Fang, Dufy & Shaw, 2011; Feldman, 1981; Gordon, 1982; Griffin, Colella & Goparaju, 2000; Jones, 1986; Kentli, 2015; Louis, 1980; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Portelli, 1993; Taormina, 1997; Van Maanen, 1978). People in organisations all have their own personal and professional learning history, either positive or negative, mostly of the mixed kind, keeping them vigilant towards all kinds of attempts to invite them to learn.

Another point of departure is the normative image we have in the mind of the organisational learner. The skilled organisational learner is a competent and developing employee, motivated intrinsically out of love for the craft and for delivering good work, acting on passion and a desire to realize quality, with a personal mission, involved actively in performing better, looking for new challenges in work that is complex, dynamic, and unstructured (wicked problems), who is curious, honest, authentic, self-critical, not always self-confidential, and open and prepared and able to change when necessary, but also a little bit opinionated. Furthermore, the genuine organisational learner investigates and improves motivation for learning, personal learning styles and learning strategies, explores difficulties in learning, in short, everything that has to with reflection on own learning in order to enhance the own 'agency' as a learner (including the improvement of metacognitive skills). Part of this personal investigation is facing the anxiety that is evoked through processes of learning in or on behalf of organizations.



From an existential point of view, anxiety is a normal and even necessary part of the human condition. SØREN KIERKEGAARD, for instance, suggests that people are forced to take more or less important decision throughout the day, without having access to relevant information nor with appropriate ideas about future outcomes and impact of these decisions. In this respect, anxiety is the ever sounding fundamental key-note in all human thinking, feeling, and acting. On the very moment that anxiety has a more delineated object, it turns into one or more specific fears, as main stream theories on anxiety and fear teach us. In the same vein, SIGMUND FREUD considered anxiety as the normal reaction to danger, however with residual pieces of earlier anxieties, including the possibility of impact of reliving birth trauma. To the degree that these residual elements lead to overkill coping behaviour, they can be labelled as unrealistic or even neurotic anxiety, with fantasies and unchecked beliefs as defining characteristics, as is emphasized by, for instance ALBERT ELLIS in his rational-emotive therapy (RET) approach.

In this paper¹, the variety of fears is identified and explored, starting with a brief description of the human condition from an existential perspective and the twin role of anxiety in it (2). Next, the diverse elements of learning processes and learning situations are considered (learning

¹ Please do not quote this paper, since is no more than work in progress, with excerpts taken from a larger text: *Leren voor de verandering* (forthcoming).

contents, learning conditions including learning setting, learning companions, learning atmosphere, and working place), distinguished according to formal and informal learning practices, as far as necessary. An essential role is the all-pervading impact of *feedback*, both its contents and practice, on anxiety. Of the range of coping mechanisms, special attention is given to compliance behaviour, as exactly this leads to inauthentic, defensive-strategic as-if behaviour (3). The question then is, what keeps people still motivated to be involved in processes of organisational learning, despite the vast and pervasive anxiety that seems to be inherent to learning in organisational contexts. Most likely, elements of *hope* as described by JOSEPH PIEPER, GABRIEL MARCEL, VICTOR FRANKL, ROLLO MAY, JEAN PAUL SARTRE, PAUL TILLICH, ERNST BLOCH, and OTTO BOLLNOW are strong drivers in organisational learning processes (4). In conclusion, suggestions for improvement of organisational learning are proposed, with special attention for leadership as a pivotal element in organisational learning, both positive and negative. More in particular, those who guide learning, should be aware of the anxiety provoking character of all learning and act accordingly to it by taking care of a safe climate for learning based on concepts such as the *holding environment* of DONALD WINNICOTT and *containment* of WILFRED BION, while offering *corrective emotional experiences*, as conceptualised first by THOMAS FRENCH and FRANZ ALEXANDER to those in need of it (5).

2. Anxiety as an element of the human condition

As we all know, humans are relatively helpless creatures with extinct instincts and a very long ectopic pregnancy that makes a long period of parental activity necessary in order for the newborn to survive. Generally speaking, humans are characterised by both endless needs and limited means, by multiple roles and mixed interests, while having restricted sympathies and invisible loyalties. Moreover, they suffer from limited awareness (5-7%) and hence, limited rationality and restricted memory. Instead of being rational, humans are guided by emotions, including, greed, desire, love, anger, hatred, shame, guilt, joy, pride, sadness and grief, and last but not least, anxiety and fear. No wonder, one could conclude, matters between people on both the individual and collective level show the tendency to go wrong in a principally unjust world.

In fact, learning is the one way to deal with the contingencies and vicissitudes of existence, in life in general, and also within the context of organisations. However, due to several conditions, explored below, learning is not only a way to deal with the world, learning also may invoke anxiety and thus inhibit learning.

Theoretically speaking, there are at least two ways to conceptualise anxiety, the former being the threat of *danger theory* of, for instance, Kierkegaard and Freud, the latter being the *polarities theory* advocated by Vestdijk.

As described by Kierkegaard in his monograph *Begrebet Angest* (1844), the human condition involves making decisions under uncertainty. Effect of decisions are unknown, and may lead to feelings of guilt concerning the possible negative impact of decisions taken. With Kierkegaard we can determine that people are aware of being a finite individual, thrown into a world of experiences and subjected to the vicissitudes of changes over time. People are principally free to make choices in a principally infinite (though practically somewhat limited) number of possibilities that may evoke anxiety. Because of the lack of instincts, people are doomed to make permanent decisions in situations in which they have both too little information and a limited

rationality, are directed by emotions, and hence are unable to predict and oversee the consequences of decisions, let alone judge upon them. Outcomes of decisions may differ gradually in terms of probability between reality and impossibility. Therefore, there will be a permanent and fundamental expectation anxiety when taking decisions, because of consequences that cannot be foreseen, and with a fear for both the possibilities of existence as fear for oneself and for the responsibility for decisions to take. To Kierkegaard, anxiety is the possibility to do the wrong, and even commit a sin and become guilty (Kierkegaard, 1963, 33; Vestdijk, 1979, 365, 366, 367). Kierkegaard called this the alarming awareness of being able to do something because something needs to happen in a situation in which choosing/deciding implies danger. Kierkegaard does not offer us a cheerful image of man, moreover, when we realise that only one event can have an endless number of possible consequences, and that there are endless many situations in which we can or even act (Vestdijk, 1979, 369, 371). One might ask, why Kierkegaard did formulate his theory in this way. In fact, Kierkegaard was more interested in anxiety as human keynote than in fear with clear object, which is quite remarkable, since in his personal life specific fears certainly played a role, such as religious fear and fear for sexuality with accompanying feelings of guilt, in view of the fact of his problematic relationship with Regine Olson, whom he did not marry after all.

Freud simply described anxiety as the reaction to a danger, with both realistic and unrealistic/neurotic elements (Freud, 1927). Anxiety in terms of the threat of danger theory, as described by May in his attempt to align thoughts of Kierkegaard and Freud, comes down to *the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality* (see also, Adler-Vonessen, 1971).

Anxiety as a state of mind with physical corollaries can be described as the experience of uncertainty and helplessness concerning a real or supposed threat that one is not able to handle yet. Kierkegaard described existential anxiety, that often comes down to fear for annihilation, for not-being. You are overwhelmingly afraid, but you do not know exactly for what. The only thing you know, is that you are afraid of losing contact with the world and with yourself, as a result of which nothing has a meaning anymore (May, 1977, 206-208).

Anxiety is often distinguished from fear, the former having no specific or a very vague object, whereas the latter has clear identifiable objects however, the distinction between anxiety and fear will always be a gradual one with no sharp demarcation.

Anxiety is a mental function people have and often use at their disposal in order to survive potential dangers. However, because of past experiences in the personal and professional learning history, people have also learn to anticipate possible danger. To the degree that internal conflicts based on previous traumata play their part, one could speak of unrealistic neurotic anxiety, that may seem overdone in the eyes of uninformed outsiders, but constitute a threatening psychological reality to the person affected by it. It should be kept in mind, that in every situation of real danger, hidden elements may play a decisive role.

In addition to the *danger theory* of anxiety, SIMON VESTDIJK (1979) constructed his *polarities theory*. Put briefly, according to this theory, the essence of anxiety consists of two movements, *contraction* and *expansion*, that are in fact antipodes, labelled by Vestdijk as the two-unit of anxiety and anti-

anxiety. These two movements are in fact two phases in the process of anxiety following each other, at times so fast that they seem to coincide and can be distinguished but not separated. The first phase then is being aware of a threatening situation (or interpreting a situation as threatening), that is, see a situation as a real or supposed danger, to which one reacts by contraction. This means, literally, cowering, both physically (making oneself smaller) and psychical (narrowing of one's consciousness), associated with a heightened tension and as the most extreme reaction paralysis ('nailed to the spot'). The second phase, expansion, follows the contraction phase, sometimes immediately, sometimes delayed, and is characterised by attempts to deal with anxiety (Vestdijk, 1979, 606-633), for instance by trying to flee ('flight'), trying to actively combat the object of fear or even destroy it, with all the risks that it entails ('fight'), or trying to stay in the contraction phase, by not moving and becoming rigid ('freeze'), hoping to adjure the danger ('freezing understood as doing everything to remain unnoticed. A fourth option (Vestdijk, 1979, 651-656) is controlling the situation of anxiety by facing its object well-considered and active, in a kind of internal deliberation, as quick as a flash, to imagine creative solutions to deal with the situation (and eventually and possibly learn from it). Vestdijk (1979, 577-605) mentions also an fifth option for expansion: love as a means to make anxiety manageable and the source of anxiety harmless. This may be difficult to understand, we could think of evangelical thoughts like 'love your enemies' (Vestdijk, 1979, 582).

However, when talking about learning and learning processes, thinking about love in relation with the dangers of learning becomes intelligible. Learning about ourselves and how we can do out work better, can be confronting. However, we can develop a love for learning, by identifying ourselves with positive learning contents, taskmasters and co-learners who are in the best interests with us, indeed, by counting on their best intentions. We could agree with MANON RUIJTERS (2006/2017) when she puts that love for learning is an essential mindset in creating well-being and happiness of people, both at home and at work. We must cherish love for learning as an expansion strategy in everyone who is involved in learning, will learning last over longer periods of time. Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004, 605), from whom Ruijters borrowed these thoughts, connect love for learning as an element of a strong character with adopting new skills and new areas of knowledge, on our own, in formal learning settings such as courses, or in informal learning settings, for instance in work teams. Love for learning is related to the degree of curiosity, but goes beyond that, for as far it is about the propensity to add systematically new learning contents to what one already knows (and say farewell to deprecated learning contents, addition, HB). With the discussion of the love for learning, we close down the section about the polarities theory of Vestdijk and the phases of contraction and expansion, and turn to theories that treat anxiety in more specific terms.

A further step in anxiety theory was the elaboration of thoughts of both Kierkegaard and Freud by German psychoanalyst FRITZ RIEMANN (1902-1971) who distinguished four basic forms of anxiety in his seminal book *Grundformen der Angst* (1961) (almost 1.000.000 copies sold!). These four types of anxiety are arranged along two dimensions: a person-other(s) dimension (1-2) and a present-future dimension (3-4):

1. fear for individuation, experienced as isolation and being not-contained
2. fear for self-surrender, experienced as loss of self and independence

3. fear for change, experienced as ephemerality and insecurity
4. fear for the inevitable, experienced as invariability and absence of freedom.

In order to discuss the various modalities of anxiety and learning, we will use an adapted version of the logical levels model of ROBERT DILTS (1983). This model can both be used as an instrument for analysis and an instrument for directing change, such that starting change at level 6 always has impact on lower levels, and starting at level 0 may have impact on the higher levels. In fact, one should always try to identify the various elements of anxiety and learning and arrange them along the logical levels, and then find the appropriate level of intervention to deal with change. People choosing to deal with their anxiety most of the time apply coping strategies, such as compliance, thus finding their alleged solutions on level 2, the level of behaviours and competencies. Instead, they should first analyse their anxiety on all logical levels, and then choose the proper level of intervention, with could be revolving their inner conflicts, find new meanings of sense making, or get rid of self-sabotaging fantasies and beliefs.

modalities of learning arranged across seven logical levels	
the external conditions level/affordance	
0.	aspects on the level of external conditions: lacking resources (money, knowledge and information, facilities, labour conditions, routines, well-functioning business processes, procedures, and equipment, job characteristics inviting to learn, a positive climate for learning, enough time for learning, well-developed HRD policy, opportunities for participation, proper learning accommodation) and external barriers for learning (regulations, persons, such as superiors or colleagues hindering learning)
intersection of the individual and external contingencies: affordance and agency	
1.	aspects on the level of functions, roles, and tasks within the organization, including issues concerning too many or even conflicting functions, roles, and tasks, or outside the organization (private sphere) that may hinder learning
agency: the levels of doing, feeling, willing and thinking	
2.	aspects on the level of (in)appropriate learning behaviour (including inadequate learning styles and strategies, compliance behaviour, communicative, metacognitive and reflective competencies and (not) being able to create affordances)
3.	aspects on the level of attitudes, dispositions, motivations, experiences concerning learning (intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for learning, tendency to procrastinate, fear for failure, feelings of unsafety and falling short, risk avoidance)
4.	aspects on the level of perceptions, fantasies, beliefs and goals: inadequate perception (not seeing problems of seeing them distorted), reasoning based on incorrect assumptions concerning self and (relations with) other people ('when over fifty, you won't learn anything new', 'posing questions makes other people think you are stupid'), inadequate goals (either too ambitious or too low grasped), impact of earlier learning experiences
the unconscious level: hidden agency	
5.	aspecten on the level of inner conflicts concerning identity, autonomy, competence, (invisible) loyalties, self-acceptance, self-esteem, defense mechanisms, unconscious motives ('what really moves me?')
the comprehensive level: sense making and agency	
6.	issues and ambitions on the level of sense making concerning a person's essence ('what bigger picture am I part of? 'where do I belong to?', 'what is my personal holy grail?' (on both the individual, organisational, and even societal level, lifelong learning, 'Bildung')

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3. Anxiety and learning

Learning always involves change and change may imply feelings of insecurity, anxiety and fear as an existential, common element of the human condition, as was conceptualised by Kierkegaard.

However, inadequate learning due to anxiety and fear has been neglected in organisational learning literature, or has been reduced to fear of failure, which is only one of the manifestations of anxiety. From a broader perspective,

four specific objects of fear and anxiety in learning can be distinguished:

1. the *contents* of learning vis a vis the learner: do I really want to learn this, does this belong to me, will it make me more effective, do the new contents imply that I was always wrong?
2. the *learning setting*: the trainer/coach, leader, but also other learners: are they competent, are they trustworthy, do I not pose stupid questions or make silly remarks, will they not steal my ideas? Will they accept me and be supportive to my learning?
3. the *working situation* (both negative learning climate and fear for transfer problems as one of its elements): do my superior and colleagues allow me to practice the new learning contents, and of course, will the new learning contents really work in practice, will I not be punished when things do not work immediately?
4. the *person of the learner*, more in particular when experiencing *fear for failure* and learning suboptimal because of a lack of metacognitive competencies.

We will look at anxiety in a more systematic way, by paying attention to anxiety and fear on the *affordance* side and on the *agency* side, respectively, and not ignore intersections and mutual influences from both sides. However, we first try to explain the acquisition of new learning contents in terms *purity* and *danger*, and end up this section by discussing the detrimental features of giving feedback.

3.1 Learning new contents as sweeping out the ashes

From a developmental perspective, the theme of purity and danger as conceptualised by anthropologist MARY DOUGLAS (1966) can be helpful in understanding anxiety as an element of learning, change, and development. When developmental stages, with any contents, for instance stages of professional development (Watkins, 1990; 1995; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992; Bennink, 2008), are considered as structured wholes circling around a particular worldview, every impulse for development can be seen as a threat to that stage, and thus of the initial wholeness. This also involves notions of holiness, exemplified by completeness: holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong, and holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused in order to avoid impurity and danger.

Douglas (1966, 123-124, 134) distinguished several kinds of social impurity and threats of danger, of which especially that type for us as learners is of interest that emerges from internal contradiction, when some of the basic postulates (for instance, theoretical, technical, or moral principles) are denied by other basic postulates, so that at certain points the system seems to be at war with itself. Crossing some line means entering an area of impurity, and with it threat and danger and a derogation of the initial wholeness and completeness of, for instance, mastery of one's professional self-image and competences (with an impact of level 5 and 6 of the logical levels model).

New learning contents (for instance, new working methods) impose an inherent untidy experience, including the explicit or implicit message that one has done it wrong before, at least, not as effective as one could have been by using new knowledge or new methods (of which the effectiveness has to be proved yet, to be sure). When someone tries to accomplish some

professional wholeness, different points of departure or different points of view should not be mixed up to prevent impurity and danger and with, anxiety. When an employee in an organisation has to learn an entirely new working method, new, because it is based on totally different assumptions, anxiety can be evoked because the new learning contents can be in opposition to the initial professional integrity and accompanying feelings of security. To be concrete, when a teacher who is used to frontal methods with 'sending' as main activity, the invitation to practice other didactics (for instance, interactive teaching) may ask for entirely different position, role, attitudes, and skills. The previous postulates are then a pollution of the new ones, and the new postulates are a pollution of the old ones. Searching for wholeness means overcoming the associated anxiety connected with the danger than is inherent to do something new without exactly knowing how, love for learning indeed can be helpful then (Douglas, 1966, 1, 143, 4, 54).

Explained in abstract developmental notions, the purity of the actual stage N recognizes impulses for development to stage N+1 as possibly endangering the wholeness of that stage, and introduces elements of conflict that need to be resolved one way or the other because of an inherent pursuit of purity and integrity. As Douglas puts it (1966, 163), "*the final paradox of the search for purity is that it is an attempt to force experience into logical categories of non-contradiction. But experience is not amenable and those who make the attempt find themselves led into contradiction*". Elsewhere she posits that dirt is always a matter out place (1966, 165).

Considered from the other side, when we consider stage N+1 as a pure structured whole, the presence of stage N elements can be seen as possible dangerous since it threatens the wholeness of stage N+1 by maintaining old contents. A real stage transition can be accomplished when the learner has managed to overcome the threatening impulses from stage N+1 and has turned into a new form of purity, from which point of view elements of stage N are the polluting factors that threaten the new wholeness of stage N+1.

When learning is considered from the point of view of purity and danger, it can be said that people who are never afraid, will also never learn something new, not about the world, and not about themselves. This concerns not so much being afraid for people or something else concrete. It is more about that somebody who has gone through the anxiety of possibilities has learned to have no fear, for having learned to deal with threats, solving problems without fear and realise possibilities without feeling guilty. Freedom is not closed in contraction, but is opened by expansion by sweeping out the ashes of previous, deprecated learning contents (May, 1977, 50-51; Vestdijk, 1979, 677).

3.2 The affordance side

In line with the logical levels model presented above, we will start with anxiety and learning at the affordance side while looking at elements within the organisational context that may evoke anxiety and thus prevent positive learning, but may people force to learn the wrong things, out of fear. The affordance side consists of a variety of possible learning settings, ranging from accidental learning in everyday organisational practice, via informal intentional learning in, for instance work teams, to formal intentional learning settings in internal or external courses with formal assessments et cetera. Thus, every situation can be a learning setting, each evoking its own

forms of anxiety, though with a central function of giving and receiving *feedback*, as will be discussed below.

From the psychoanalytic corner, one could claim that on the affordance side, there should be safe environment for learning, since learning always involves some risk and hence anxiety, on a very general level, as described by, for instance Kierkegaard, Freud, Vestdijk, and May.

In terms of the psychoanalyst DONALD WINNICOTT (1960; see also, Anzieu, 1971; Anzieu, 1975/1984); Applegate & Bonowitz, 1995, 83-119; Durkin, 1964; Durkin & Glatzer, 1973/1997; Foulkes & Anthony, 1957/2014; Gibbard & Hartmann, 1973; Prodgers, 1990; Scheidlinger, 1964; Schindler, 1966; Slater, 1966), a learning environment should be a *holding environment*, something like ‘a good mother’ instead of ‘a bad mother’. In similar terms, WILFRED BION (1961; 1970) claims that a learning environment should offer opportunities for containment (see also, Berk, 1986; Berkouwer, 2004; Burger & Roos, 2012; Cluckers, 1989; Grinberg, Sor & Tabak de Bianchedi, 1998; Lammers, 2006; Lazar, 1994; Modell, 1976; Vansina-Cobbaert & Vansina, 1996). However, it is not self-evident to apply concepts used in psychoanalytic practice in organisational settings. Nevertheless, in organisational theory the importance of the phenomena just mentioned is recognised as important conditions for learning and creativity. Therefore, on the affordance side, some general qualifications for a positive climate for learning and creativity can be identified (Isaksen, Lauer & Ekvall, 1999; Isaksen & Ekvall, 2010), including:

- *challenge/involvement*: the degree to which people are involved in daily operations, long-term goals, and visions
- *freedom*: the degree of independence shown by the people in the organization.
- *trust/openness*: the emotional safety in relationships
- *idea-time*: the amount of time people can, and do, use for elaborating new ideas.
- *playfulness/humour*: the spontaneity and ease displayed within the workplace
- *conflict*: the presence of personal and emotional tensions (a negative dimension – in contrast to the debate dimension)
- *idea-support*: the way new ideas are treated
- *debate*: the occurrence and open disagreement between viewpoints, ideas, experiences and knowledge
- *risk-taking*: the tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity.

However, from a structural and cultural point of view, organisations may simply not be ready to function as learning environments, as one or more or many or even all of these qualifications are absent. It would not be fair to blame leaders for these shortcomings, since there is more to it. JOOST KAMPEN (2013) describes what he calls ‘neglecting organisations’, organisations that function much the same as parents neglecting their children. Kampen identified several ‘silent killers’

- unclear strategy and/or conflicting priorities of the organisation
- ineffective management team
- conflict avoidance by the top by either deciding everything from above or leaving all options open
- inadequate or bad vertical communication (both top down and bottom-up)

- bad coordination of units, functions, and locations
- poor middle management competencies and insufficient management development

Nevertheless, in the accidental informal hidden curriculum, the role of the leader is pivotal. Conclusions of Hermans, Bergen and Eyssen (1975), and Compernelle (1987) (see also: Nieuwenbroek & De Vries, 1988, 33), who investigated the impact of family patterns on the development of fear of failure, identified a number of patterns that most likely will occur in organisations, as becomes clear when replacing the word ‘parents’ by ‘superior’, and ‘child’ by ‘subordinate’, by means of a thought experiment (which is, for proper understanding not meant to equate children and subordinates, but only to indicate similarities in patterns):

- parents/superiors provide too little explanation and support to their children/subordinates (the actual or future learner with fear of failure) and give little response to the question of the child/subordinate whether s/he is doing it right or about how s/he should carry on;
- parents/superiors show little approval or satisfaction in case of positive results, this withholding the child/subordinate positive feedback;
- parents/superiors show relatively many feelings of irritation and impotence (negative release of tension), leading to a pedagogical atmosphere of bleakness and irritability;
- parents/superiors often express their doubts about the happy ending of a task or assignment, bringing children/subordinates to the fence concerning their own capacities;
- parents/superiors highlight high levels of performance by setting the bar high and thus developing fear for failure.

This may easily lead to a climate or culture of *fear*, defined by PETER FIJBES (2017, 25) as an organisational dysfunction, in which collective, obstructive anxiety/fear is prominently present and is used systematically to enforce employee loyalty, obedience and effort. These fears are fourfold:

- ◆ the fear to get punished for whatever reason, in any case for being critical
- ◆ the fear to become eliminated
- ◆ the fear to lose livelihoods/socio-economic security
- ◆ the fear to become a target.

There are various ways in which organisations allow or inhibit learning. For instance, SANNEKE BOLHUIS, (2009, 42-43; 2016, 62-63) makes a distinction between seven types of learning environment, offering more or less affordance:

- (1) the *for-granted* environment with a hidden curriculum for learning, leading to unconscious sense making below the threshold of awareness
- (2) the *inviting* environment stimulates to try something new without sanctions
- (3) the *forcing* environment pushes people towards learning, for instance following courses
- (4) *conflicting* environments with conflicting expectations, demands and instructions
- (5) the *supporting* environment facilitates learning
- (6) the *helpless* environment leaves people to their fate by not offering any help
- (7) the *punishing* environment discourages, decries, prevents, and punishes learning.

Tarrini (2004) made, (based on Carré & Pearn, 1992) a simple distinction in four types of learning environments that perfectly matches the affordance – agency dichotomy, as the scheme below shows. The first dimension concerns the degree to which the general organisational environment (including structure and culture) promotes, supports and anchors the learning of all employees. The second dimension concerns the degree to which staff is familiar with, motivated and able to learn.

- (1) A *stagnating* organisation has confidence in past experiences to solve actual problems. Employees are not encouraged to develop. Both policy and structure hinder development, and facilities for development and learning are not present. People are not motivated to learn anymore and, even worse, cannot be motivated for learning as well.
- (2) A *frustrated* organisation believes to do the right things, but employees are frightened and lack confidence in their own capabilities (lack of ‘self-efficacy’ in accepting new methods), despite the fact that management encourages, facilitates, and supports learning and has removed practical barriers for learning. Nevertheless, there is no commitment among employees because their anxiety, their needs and their skills to contribute constructively to designing solutions have been neglected.
- (3) A *frustrating* organisation forgets to acknowledge that employees are skilled and motivated to learn new things. Systems and structure offer little opportunities for self-development and learning. Formal learning (training and education) has little priority for management.
- (4) A *learning* organisation has a strong vision concerning the future. Individual and group potential for learning and changing is utilised fully on all levels for formulating, realizing, and revise organizational goals. External and internal factors hindering learning are detected and removed. Sustained and permanent learning is encouraged and supported emphatically on all organisational levels, and self-efficacy is promoted instead of frustrated.

		<i>affordance</i>			
		high	high		
<i>a g e n c y</i>	low	<i>frustrated organization</i>	<i>learning organization</i>	high	<i>a g e n c y</i>
	low	<i>stagnating organization</i>	<i>frustrating organization</i>	high	
		low	low		
		<i>affordance</i>			

This scheme marks the transition to the other source of anxiety and fear, the agency side.

3.3 The agency side

In an interview, EDGAR SCHEIN (2002) discussed the relationship of learning and anxiety, by making a distinction between learning anxiety and survival anxiety.

1. *Learning anxiety* comes from being afraid to try something new for fear that it will be too difficult, that we will look stupid in the attempt, or that we will have to part from old habits that have worked for us in the past. Learning something new can cast us as the deviant in the

groups we belong to. It can threaten our self-esteem and, in extreme cases, even our identity. You can't talk people out of their learning anxieties since they are the basis for resistance to change.

2. Given the intensity of those fears, none of us would ever try something new unless we experienced the second form of anxiety, *survival anxiety* - the horrible realization that in order to make it, you're going to have to change.

The basic principle is that learning only happens when survival anxiety exceeds learning anxiety.

In a more dramatic form, almost in a Kierkegaardian idiom, anxiety can be evoked through learning in both formal and informal situations (that is, in both workplace and educational settings). Four main types of interpersonal fears can be distinguished, of which the fourth type of fear can also occur apart from others being present (Kaës, 1976).

1. the fear to be *devoured* because of loss of identity (e. g., 'in this learning setting you have to adjust to much, you cannot be yourself')
2. the fear for *persecution* (because of deviant behaviour in the learning setting, leading either to compliance behaviours or leaving the learning setting)
3. the fear to be *abandoned* occurs when the learner experiences within the learning setting the fear to be put aside by others and getting the depressive feeling of being no good at all
4. the fear for *fragmentation* means the fear of falling apart as a person, because of contradictory advices on how to perform well in the workplace (old versus new working, methods, procedures, and routine).

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An important type of anxiety in learning is *fear for failure*. Several distinctions should be made here, first of all the distinction between positive and negative fear for failure. Second, four types of fear for failure can be distinguished (adapted from Nieuwenbroek & De Vries (1988, 12-13):

- the *cognitive* fear for failure
- the *motoric* or *technical* fear for failure
- the *creative* or *innovative* fear for failure
- the *social* fear for failure.

The everlasting question is whether these fears are completely caused by the learning setting and co-learners participating in it, or whether aspects of the learning history play tricks upon the learner, such as learned helplessness and self-destructive fantasies, irrational beliefs and unproductive modes of thinking concerning learning processes, including:

1. the demand to be loved and accepted, preferably by everyone, if not, that would be terrible
2. the demand of perfect competence: succeeding in everything because only then you are a person with worth
3. the demand for perfect solutions for everything, in every respect
4. the demand that there is one perfect way to do the job or the learning, mine
5. the demand that the world is just and preferably also easy and comfortable to live in, at best without trouble
6. the demand to feel always good and never experience sorrow
7. the demand that people always must to what you want them to do.

It can be imagined that these fears can be arranged on levels 4 (fantasies and beliefs) and 5 (internal conflicts) of the logical levels model, and find their expression in inadequate behaviour, most of the time. Common forms of this inadequate and even inappropriate learning behaviour can be arranged under the heading of compliance behaviour (on levels 2, 3 and 4 of the logical levels model, and probably also level 5, the level of inner conflicts).

Compliance can be positive and negative, depending on the intentions and the outcomes. In behaviour therapy, compliance is positively valued when understood as commitment and adherence to appointments. However, compliance can also be negative, when it means something like sham adjustment, apparent cooperation, in fact a complex and subtle combination of fight, flight, and freeze expansion behaviours. Generally speaking, negative compliance is a strategy of learners to protect them from disruptions and other threats caused by the learning situation (being assessed or even judged, the person of the facilitator, comings and goings of co-learners). Unwanted compliance can be caused by at least two circumstances:

1. lack of motivation and no opportunity to withdraw from the learning setting (because it is obligatory to participate and/or when there are negative consequences, such as not getting a promotion, a salary rise, or not getting a tenure, in case of not achieving learning goals or when necessary outcomes are not realised);
2. anxiety caused by either a strong achievement motivation to participate in the learning setting (including fear for failure, either positive or negative, regardless or just because of possible negative consequences).

Compliance can be expressed through various behaviours, some of which may fall in more categories than one (Bennink, 1994; 2000, 167). Some examples of compliance behaviour are:

- *distracting* (playing ignorant, telling jokes, superficial communication, asking many questions to show 'motivation')
- *showing off* (asking for feedback frequently, entering into complex theoretical or methodological discussions with the facilitator or co-learners, making ambitious plans, facework and impression management)
- *downplaying* (minimalizing mistakes made through rationalizations and excuses)
- *avoiding* (playing autonomy by not asking for help, holding on rigidly to safe themes, not giving strong opinions, avoiding personal and/or threatening themes)
- *immunization* (emphasizing the difficulty of the job or the learning content; making assessment more difficult by giving serious self-critique, formulating unrealistically high learning goals, eliciting pity by showing helplessness, or making play with 'personal secrets')
- *flattering* (doing exactly what the facilitator or co-learners ask, being overly friendly, generous, or even humble to the facilitator or co-learners, agreeing with interpretations or suggestions of the facilitator or co-learners; playing the 'good learner' by adopting points of view, opinions, ways of communication of the facilitator to make a right turn, attributing progress to the efforts of the facilitator or co-learners, being positive about the facilitator and the learning setting by giving extensive compliments).

In sum, anxiety can be reduced through compliance behaviours as an expansion strategy. These

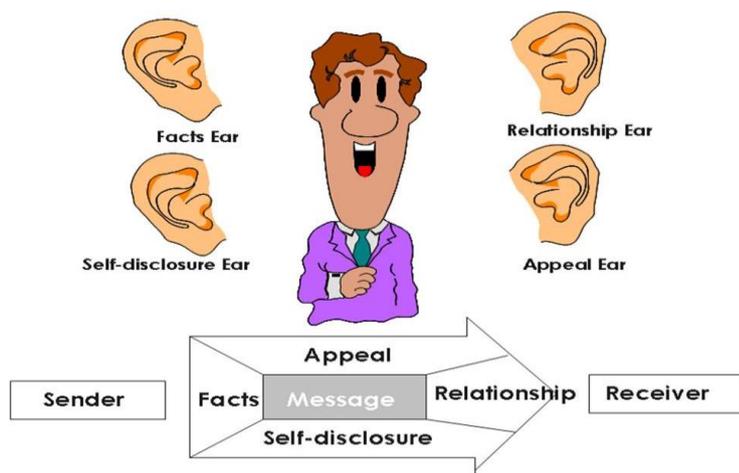
compliance behaviours may protect the learner (notably those with *fair for failure*), though may at the same time cause new anxiety, the fear that compliance does not work and only leads to being unmasked. Inherent to compliance behaviour is inauthentic, defensive-strategic as-if behaviour, that can be interpreted as the learner rejecting responsibilities for learning and for engaging in real interpersonal learning adventures. A specific element causing anxiety and compliance behaviour can be found in the phenomenon of feedback.

3.4 The underestimated negative impact of giving feedback

An essential element in the development of anxiety is giving feedback, both concerning its contents and its proceedings. In line with the axiom than one cannot not communicate, it can be taken for granted that in organisations daily interaction is loaded with feedback, of all kinds. Where there is communication, feedback will be there, almost automatically. However, in order to keep things clear, we should make a distinction between everyday feedback giving almost unconsciously as part communication and interaction, and feedback as a deliberately used intervention in order to exercise influence over another (think, for instance, of a performance appraisal interview, a correction conversation, or in instruction situations). When we confine ourselves to the latter, we must not fall prey to the evaluation basis fallacy. We speak of evaluation bias, when we, in case of conscious evaluation, confuse the *assumptions* of feedback, the *plan* of giving a person deliberate feedback, and the *execution* of the plan for this intervention. A plan based upon sound assumptions can be carried out either effectively or without success. However, in case of failure, we do not know for sure, whether this failure was due to bad performance, a bad plan, or to unsound assumptions. It is, in sum, about making a distinction between choosing the right assumptions, doing the right things and doing these things correctly. Learning based on feedback usually means that someone informs the learner – solicited or unsolicited – about the observed or alleged distance between some criterion (learning goals, performance outcomes, criteria for proper behaviour) and actual performance, followed by suggestions to the learner to bridge this distance.

Textbooks informing us about social and communication skills are rather univocal concern the technique of giving (and receiving) feedback effectively (for instance, Bolhuis, 2016, 210-211; Fluit, 2013; Voerman, 2014):

- give feedback on behaviour that can be changed instead of feedback on relatively unchangeable personality traits;
- be concrete and specific in giving feedback by telling exactly what is about;
- dose the feedback by not giving too much at one time, and thus offer the learner the opportunity to keep oversight, to understand, store, and remember the contents of the feedback;
- offer the learner the opportunity to react and explore and discuss options for improvement, at best as concrete and specific as possible, by pointing at the criteria for proper or appropriate action;
- do not give negative feedback only, but give also positive feedback, as positive feedback stimulates, encourages, and gives positive energy to do something with the feedback meant correctively: good for you doing x, but try the next time also to do some more y (as a practical concrete advice);
- teach the learner to deal with feedback in a constructive manner, by pointing at the good intentions of the feedback giver, trying to understand the contents of the feedback and asking for explanation when necessary, verifying the feedback critically by referring to the criteria in use, and finally reflection upon how and where the next steps for improvement can be taken.



What is wrong with the very phenomenon of feedback, notably its assumptions, can be explained by using the four-sides model of FRIEDEMANN SCHULZ VON THUN (1981), a model distinguishing four facets or elements of a message. As a speaker, one should have a keen mouth for every facet, and as listener, one should have a keen ear for every facet of a message, as the illustration shows.

1. The *factual* aspect contains statements which are matter of fact like data and facts, which are part of the news.
2. In the *self-revealing* or *self-disclosure* aspect, the speaker - conscious or not intended - tells something about himself, his motives, values, emotions et cetera.
3. In the *relationship aspect* is expressed respectively received, how the sender gets along with the receiver and what the sender thinks about the relation.
4. The *appeal aspect* contains the desire, advice, instruction and effects that the speaker is seeking.

The assumption of giving feedback is what I would call *red pencil thinking*. The *factual* aspect of feedback (both positive and negative) is the message that some behaviour is assessed against the background of some criterion. That is, both the feedback giver and the feedback receiver are trapped in a correct/wrong scheme. More confusion arises when a part of the message is that making mistakes is allowed, since this means the starting point for learning. Total confusion is there when yet another part of the message is that the feedback is about behaviour, not about the person. Of course, some behaviour is evidently wrong, such as misspelling someone's name, striking the wrong key on the piano when playing a sonata of Beethoven, claiming that $5+3$ equates 12, or dialling the wrong phone number. These are the very mistakes one must not make. In many other situations, there is no such clear cut criterion for correct organisational behaviour. Nevertheless, feedback givers pretend there is, with the red pencil in their hand. It would be more appropriate to recognise that the correct/wrong scheme does not always apply. Instead of giving feedback, one might pose questions such as: what was your intention, how did you prepare the job, did you reach your goals, and if not, because of what did it not had the expected impact? The other aspect, that the feedback is about your behaviour and not about you a person, is quite next to the track. This can be easily explained by using the logical levels model. Behaviour is always an expression of a person's intentions, attitudes, beliefs, convictions, and perhaps of his or her worldview, and hence identity. One can try to distinguish behaviour and person, but is cannot be separated. The feedback receiver has always both the opportunity and the inclination to take it personally (you did wrong thing = you failed as a person). From this perspective, the *self-revealing* or *self-disclosure* aspect appears somewhat odd. The feedback giver claims to be right, and moreover, claims to have a monopoly on wisdom. Next, as is advocated in many textbooks on giving feedback, it is recommended to speak in terms of I-

messages. So, it would be correct to say: I am having trouble with you coming too late. However, what could be the hidden message of this sentence other than some subtle reproach? Moreover, only listening to the surface level, the feedback receiver could easily answer something like: too bad for you, but I had my reasons for being late.

The claim to have a monopoly on wisdom returns in the *relationship* aspect. The relational proposal would be one of difference in level, expressing something like: I have the correct information, you don't, and I see our relationship as one in which I as the smart one have the right to inform you (the dumb one) about the quality of your behaviour and have to duty to listen carefully and understand what I am saying to you. At this very moment, the *relationship* aspect merges into the *appeal* aspect.

The *appeal* aspect of the message cannot be otherwise than please change your behaviour in the direction I just told you.

This way of giving feedback is confronting, disordering, violent, intimidating, a narcissistic attack, hence anxiety-evoking, and thus counterproductive. No wonder that feedback receivers may experience a fear be *devoured* because of loss of identity, a fear for *persecution*, the fear to be *abandoned* or a fear for *fragmentation* (falling apart as a person, because of feedback and the way it is given). Indeed, research shows that this way of giving feedback on performance, is not always and at times far from being successful (Bennink & Fransen, 2007; Van den Berg, 1993; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ilgen & Davis, 2000; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Kluger & DeNisi, 1998; Lam, Yik & Schaubroeck, 2002; Liden & Mitchell, 1985), perhaps because of reasons just discussed. It could be imagined that a good part of a negative culture for learning is caused by inappropriate use of feedback, in everyday interaction, informal learning settings, and formal learning settings alike, though each in its own respect. So to speak, many feedback givers are just punching way above their weight, in a way that can be considered as overbearing.

One could conclude, that the previous paragraph is a bit paradoxical. It is, in a certain way, only because of the fact that is written text with no opportunity for conversation. In training sessions, the practice of discussing feedback giving, takes place in a more explorative manner., by asking questions such as: I saw and heard you giving him feedback. What did you try to accomplish and what was the actual impact? In doing so, exemplary behaviour is shown of more effective feedback behaviour.

Here too, there is perhaps a relational difference in level (because of one being in the position to pose questions and the other in position to giver answers), but the red pencil is absent: there is no right or wrong scheme, but simply investigating questions to be answered in order to arrive at more effective behaviour while avoiding evoking anxiety.

4. Learning and hope

An important question to be answered concerns the issue why on earth one ever would even try to learn something, from the perspective of anxiety evoked by contents, processes, participants, and surrounding conditions of learning. Answers to this question are located on the **comprehensive** level of the logical levels model, the **sense making and agency** level and may have their impact on lower levels, as Dilts (1990) promises us in the discussion of his model. However, why learning? In line with thoughts explored above, we could conceptualise learning

anxiety as a subspecies of general anxiety, in which learning anxiety probably has more specific objects getting their meaning in terms of the keynote of the more general anxiety based on both the awareness of potential danger and learning history. Doing so, we make a distinction between anxiety aroused by some external danger (either real or imagined) asking for learning, and anxiety aroused by the very situation of learning. Of course, Kierkegaard was right when called anxiety a ‘school for learning’, but he does tell us why should learn. Of course, learning will take place whenever there is an urgency to learn in order to survive, that is, learn or perish, or, in the words of Schein presented above: learning takes place when survival anxiety exceeds learning anxiety. A more substantial answer lies implicitly hidden in May’s definition of anxiety presented above as *the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality*. The saving notion is that of ‘some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality’. The presence of such a value may provide the person exactly with the kind of hope s/he needs in order to find the courage to survive.

There is probably no author more close to sense making and learning than psychotherapist VICTOR FRANKL, (1909-1997) who made the *search for meaning* to the cornerstone of his logotherapy. Frankl (1946/1963; 1978) suggested that man was not such driven by a will-to-lust (Freud), or a will-to-power (Nietzsche and Adler), but by a will-to-meaning, even in the most deplorable circumstances (as in the concentration camps and mass-destruction camps in World War II, in which surviving meant discovering the meaning of suffering). According to Frankl, man can only live and survive with a purpose and a goal in future to be directed at. Giving up hope, acquiescing in the present situation, and being totally indifferent was never an essential feature of man. That is, we cannot be happy in a hopeless situation of effort without hope, with the punishment of useless labour, as described by ALBERT CAMUS in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. People always strive to some form of accomplishment of the not-yet of possibilities in order not to betray freedom and responsibility for making choices and not being afraid (Pieper, 1949; Bloch, 1975), based on the courage to be (Tillich, 1952), be patient while developing yourself as a ‘homo viator’ (a pilgrim on the way) and become part of something bigger than you, that nevertheless can be a part of you (Marcel, 2010). GABRIEL MARCEL (2010, 61) closes his essay on the phenomenology of hope with a summarising note: *“we might say that hope is essentially the availability of a soul which has entered intimately enough into the experience of communion to accomplish in the teeth of will and knowledge the transcendent act – the act establishing the vital regeneration of which the experience affords both the pledge and the first-fruits”*.

Where Sartre would simply have said not to surrender to the ‘mauvaise foi’, thus not disavowing your freedom in making decisions, Freud as a biologist of the mind would have referred to the need for survival taking care of necessary learning. Others would point at some concept concerning a personal ‘holy grail’ as a leading value, or driven by a fragrance of higher honey (as in the poem *The Song of the Mad Bees*, of the Dutch poet MARTINUS NIJHOFF).

5. Suggestions for improving organisational learning

Is organisational learning without anxiety possible? Probably not, and an organisation totally without anxiety and fears is even not desirable at all. As Fijbes (2017, 12) puts it, without anxiety, there is no challenge, that is, anxiety can be motivating, activating, and productive. When anxiety

becomes intimidating, it becomes counterproductive. What Fijbes does not mention, is that every organisation has employees in need of a stick behind the door to be afraid of, and thus stay productive.

However, to call fear a man's best friend, is probably half the story. At least, fear is a Janus-headed companion, that travels with us in our role as 'homo viator'. Without anxiety, no learning, but learning settings themselves can be anxiety producing, and that is, for the greater part, detrimental to learning. What can be done then?

In line with logical levels model, we can look for solutions and interventions on each of these levels. On the 0 level, the affordance level, much can be done to reduce anxiety. Even more in line with the underlying rationale of the logical levels model is starting with level 6, the sense making level, on which an organisation calls out itself as a learning organisation, put it on the website, in the annual report, and wherever it should be noted. More important is to put these ideas into practice and to impregnate the entire organisation with the DNA of learning, while paying much attention to affordance. Moreover, workers need to get all the information necessary to do their job properly and make learning possible.

On the structural side (levels 0 and 1), this means, creating jobs than encourage learning and creating enough possibilities for learning on the job, for instance by promoting informal learning through intervision and team learning. Also on the structural, HR instruments should (also) focus on learning, for instance concerning selection, appraisal, and training of staff. In case of formal learning settings, enough attention should be devoted to make transfer from the learning setting to the work setting possible.

On the cultural side, everything should be avoided that generates and maintains a culture of fear. This imposes a heavy burden on management as pivotal function, not only in their daily conversation (for instance in offering feedback in an exploratory manner), but also pay attention to everything that has do with negative learning experiences due to the hidden curriculum of the organisation (arrangement on level 1 and 2 of the logical levels model). Of course, this asks for management development, with proper management skills and behaviours without a red pencil (level 2), and a well-development managerial attitude with elements of containment when necessary, in order to create and maintain a holding environment (level 3).

All members should get the opportunity (affordance) to develop their agency competencies, both concerning specific skills related to their function, role, and tasks, and metacognitive skills (including learning to learn) (level 2), and moreover develop a metacognitive and reflective attitude (level 3) (see, for instance, Cornoldi, 1998).

A difficult issue is what should and could be done in case of problems on level 4 of the logical levels model. Anxiety and fear may be driven by unrealistic elements, such as assumptions, fantasies, and ways of thing that will not pass rational tests. In formal learning settings, facilitators could be aware of fair for failure, perhaps manifested in negative compliance behaviour. More in general, these facilitators should be aware of the anxiety evoking impact of the learning setting, including learning contents, behaviour of trainer and co-learners, and help learners to deal with anxiety, both the realistic part by creating a safe place to learn, and the unrealistic, even neurotic part to help learners face self-sabotaging fantasies and beliefs (Baldon & Ellis, 1993; Beck, Freeman, Davis, and Associates, 2004; Dilts, Hallbom & Smith, 1990; IJzermans & DiMattia,

1993; Korrelboom & Ten Broeke, 2004; Rombouts & Kwee, 1990.

The final question then is, whether learning settings should provide learners *corrective emotional experiences* (Alexander & French, 1946; Bolten, Hesselink & Vreeswijk, 1988; Brown & Pedder, 1980; Goldfried, 1991; 2012; Van Kalmthout, 2001; Pierloot, 1985, 55, 66-67; Schafer, 1984, 290; Stone 1973, 68 ev; Watkins, 2017, 2).

In the world of psychotherapy, this is not an uncommon thought, but on the workplace? A first thought could be reversing the issue: why should we administer organizational members more negative learning experiences than they have already got? It is hard to find good reasons for that. Instead, the idea could be to work along the lines of non-violent communication (Rosenberg, 2003) as a first way to reduce anxiety and unsafety on the workplace. However, offering educationally corrective experiences, more specifically, what would that be like?

Before exploring this thought, we should, again, look at existential philosophy, for instance, at the work of OTTO BOLLNOW (1955/1958). In his book *Neue Geborgenheit* (1955), literally translated as 'New Security' – which is quite an inadequate translation, since Bollnow probably means something like 'feeling at home, feeling sheltered', the opposite of, being displaced and homeless, hence, *New Shelter* would be a more appropriate translation – Bollnow tries to capture human existence in more than anxiety and disgust, while emphasising being safe, sheltered, and comforted, and faith in the future. In a world in which we are all exposed to the threat of all sorts of danger, safe places are necessary to prevent falling prey to fragmentation and persecution. Watkins (2017, 3) takes up the theme of corrective emotional experiences and asks the technical question, how we can accomplish this in learning settings. The royal road would be connecting offering corrective experiences to concrete goals for learning and acting of the learner, so that concerning these points progression is both necessary and possible. Then choose appropriate interventions, based on acceptance an empathy, and avoid those interventions that do not lead to corrective experiences. As was discussed above, not every learner benefits from feedback, especially not from the red pencil way. Inviting to reflect on own experiences, assumptions and points of departure will be more effective, especially when concrete application in the working setting is in involved in the reflection (thus paying attention to the transfer from the learning setting to the work setting). Consequently one could return to issues in the following session to see whether the attempts of realising a corrective experience and transfer did result in improved behaviour in the work place. In any case, issues of anxiety should be recognised and discussed in accepting way, not to remove earlier negative emotional learning experiences, but to set something against it, just to demonstrate that this learner is a person with worth and dignity an able to develop and learn. In addition, it can be said, that interventions aiming successfully at corrective emotional experiences, lead to a number of positive experiences in the learner (Chabot, 1988, 303, 309-311):

- (1) the *'I am getting air experience'*: the relief that arises after one has taken the opportunity to express oneself about something problematic or shameful;
- (2) the *'affect-discharge experience'*: crusted emotions can flow off (finally), what can be experienced as liberation, relieve or even purification (catharsis)
- (3) the *'acceptance-experience'*: know that you are accepted and because of this able to accept yourself, not as a fixed end state, but as a point of departure for further change and

- (4) the *'I can something (again) experience'*: unexpectedly, or after focused exercise being able to do something that seemed impossible before
- (5) the experience that is associated with emotionally charged insight: pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fall into place, or even the experience of a suddenly breaking light beam.

Precisely these effects may be helpful in dealing with anxiety in organisational learning.

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