A Story of An Action Learning Leadership Development Process

Magnus Larssson
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Innehållsförteckning

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Introduction

This case material describes a leadership development project, undertaken collaboratively by the Media Group, a media corporation and MiL Institute, a leadership development institute. Whereas MiL Institute is the proper name of the organization, the Media Group is a fictitious designation of the corporation. The leadership development project consisted of two consecutive and rather comprehensive programs. Each spanning over a nine-month period and the full process, from conception to completion, covered several years.

The purpose of this case documentation is to present material for reflection and discussion of the actual practice of leadership and organization development, as practiced under the heading of Action Learning, or the version used at MiL Institute, Action Reflection Learning ®. The presented information emanates from documents describing the two separate organizations and the two programs. However the bulk of the case material is based on a number of interviews with people involved in the process. Over 15 interviews were conducted in 2012 with participants and other representatives from the Media Group as well as with MiL Institute’s KAM, learning coaches and program direction.

The interviews were conducted by people associated with MiL Institute, but who have not been directly involved in the programs. All interviews have been audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions have been subjected to a coding process in order to facilitate the compilation of this case material. The purpose of the coding has not been to conduct a proper analysis, but to manage the material and be able to construct a narrative of the whole process. Therefore, large portions of this document consist of raw and lengthy quotes. These quotes have all been translated from Swedish into English.
Background

The client: The Media Group

The Media Group is one of the country’s largest media groups and has played an important role in the development of the local and digital media industry. It is comprised of several separate companies in different media divisions; brands that hold strong positions within the printing industry, the local newspaper market, “local freesheets”, digital media and communication services. Annual sales of 2012 amounted to over SEK 5 billion.

The Media Group in 2008

While 2007 and the beginning of 2008 were great times for the Media Group there was a sudden and dramatic drop in sales during the later part of 2008 due to the financial crisis and the recession that followed the collapse of the Lehman brothers. This financial instability and recession struck hard at a field whose core business – the printed daily newspapers – already were on the verge of becoming obsolete due to recent advances in technology, The Media Group as well as any other player in the field, had to contend with a sudden loss of advertisement which propelled the need to develop new strategies and business models to survive not only the temporary financial storm, but a change of paradigm.

In this situation, The Media Group decided on a growth strategy with a target of a twofold increase in sales and worth in 2012, half of which was to come from new markets (for example the digital market). Central to the strategy was to strike a balance between established and mature fields and investments made into new fields and new business models. Five areas of focus were singled out as crucial for achieving this strategy: the Customers, the Processes (synergy and consolidation), the Competence Maintenance, the Internationalization and the Environment.

To realize these objectives, the Media Group undertook several large restructuring projects, mergers and acquisitions. Investments were made into a web platform for digital developments; a new printing facility was built; certain property and businesses were sold and liquidated. Proactive investments were also made in leadership development, including the programs described here.

In summary, the corporate specific challenges in 2008-2009 were centered around how to translate the “vision” of the Media Group into action. Being a corporation with a fairly complicated owner structure, having grown from acquisitions and mergers, the Media Group faced the dilemma of coming to terms with which processes to keep local and which to centralize.
Leadership development in The Media Group

In 2008, the Media Group had identified a set of needs that they sought to address through the leadership development programs:

- Personal leadership – confident and wise leaders
- Secure next generation of strategic leaders who understand and identify with the corporate vision and can act as ambassadors for the Media Group
- Secure corporation between different parts of the Media Group by a strong network, relations and inside knowledge in different fields
- Increased business intelligence and understanding of the global media industry

According to the CEO: “The dream was to create a platform, a common language, a collective understanding of leadership, challenges.” The HR Director adds to this picture: “Many of us in the corporate coordination group are over 50 years old, even approaching 60, and we are maybe not those that represent the most modern of thoughts and therefore to think of how to invite the others to participate and influence and put their mark on this construction.” It was in this time and context, in 2008, that the initial conversations were held between the Media Group and different suppliers of leadership development programs, one of which was MiL Institute.

The provider: MiL Institute

Founded in 1977, MiL Institute is a not for profit foundation providing leadership and business development for many of Scandinavia’s largest corporations and public organizations. Today, MiL Institute designs and delivers about 80 corporate leadership development programs per year. These leadership programs are custom-made and typically lasts 6-18 months. They consists of a 2-6 modules, each 1-5 days, with themes such as “Personal Leadership”, “Communication” “Change management”. However, the specific content and layout always varies depending on the needs of the specific organization and on whether the target group is high potentials, new managers, mid level management or senior management.
The leadership programs

This case material is based on two leadership development programs in the Media Group, the first lasting from September 2009 to June 2010, and the second from March 2011 to November 2011. Both programs had the same basic design, except for the destination of the international module (see below), and the inclusion of an extra day and two individual coaching sessions in the second program. The first program consisted of 16 days, and the second of 17 days spread over six separate modules with different themes. The programs each had 18 participants and was led by two “program directors” from MiL Institute.

Alongside the 16-17 days, the participants spend an additional eight days (minimum) working on strategic business projects they have received from the Corporate Coordination Group. Three “learning coaches” from MiL Institute support this project work.

The six modules

Module 1 – Vision, Objectives and Values (2 days)

The aim of the first module is to lay the foundation of the work ahead. The purpose and objectives set by the Corporate Coordination Group (CCG) were communicated in person by the CEO and the HR Director. Further, the participants were introduced to each other, to the program direction and to the learning coaches. Finally, project work was organized.

Module 2 – Personal Leadership and Team Leadership (3,5 days)

The aim of the second module was to develop self-knowledge and self-awareness. With the help of different exercises and organizational simulations such as the Cake Factory (where the participants in a matter of hours go through the cycle of starting, running and developing a cake factory) the participants learn about themselves by way of observations, feedback and reflection. They are also introduced to different theories on leadership and teams.

Prior to the module, participants completed an online self-assessment in the form of MBTI-II (Myers Briggs Type Indicator-II) and the results, the use and the theory behind this instrument are discussed in detail during the module. Finally, coaching and feedback were introduced as constructive leadership tools and practiced in various group settings.

Module 3 – Business Intelligence (1,5 days)

The third module targets the participants’ business intelligence and aims to increase their understanding of the media industry from a “Media Group-perspective”. First, by learning more about the use of financial control for corporate strategic purposes. Second, by gaining a better
understanding of the external business environment and its opportunities in order to be better equipped to identify and creatively develop new business possibilities. Finally, by being provided with know-how, theories and tools that can be of use in the work on the strategic business projects.

This module is primarily designed and led by representatives from the Media Group. Key resources are the Media Group’s CFO, the Media group’s Market Director as well as the CEO of one of the Digital Media affiliates.

**Module 4 – Change Management and Resistance to Change (2.5 days)**

The forth module focused on change management and on how to deal with resistance to change. Different tools, theories and methods (such as “PEST analysis” and the “4 Rooms of change”) were introduced concerning how to manage change on a personal and organizational level. The module included a session on the progress of the project work, including peer feedback from the other participants.

**Module 5 – International Outlook on the Media Industry (5 days)**

The purpose of the fifth module was to gain a better understanding of the international media industry. In the first program, the program went to New York where the participants took part in the 80th Annual INMA World Congress (International News Media Association), where topics such as advertising, new technology and brand opportunities for newspapers in the Digital Age where discussed. The module further included visits to various companies, such as the New York Times, Ipsos MediaCT, as well as research groups studying mobile phone usage and journalism, leadership and communication at Columbia University, etc.

In the second program the program went to Shanghai, China. Similarly to the first program, this trip included visits to various companies, such as Thomas Jacob from WAN Ifra (The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers), as well visits to homes of regular Chinese families, to get a closer contact with a quite different culture.

Part of the objective of the fifth module was for the participants to take more responsibility for organizing their own learning activities, both as individuals and as a group. They were therefore asked to arrange and prepare most of the days themselves, including transport, questions for the company visits, as well as individual and group reflection sessions. The module was concluded with a workshop where the participants reflect on and make sense of the new experiences they have been exposed to during the week.

**Module 6 – Project Reports and Closing Ceremony (1 day)**

The sixth module concludes the program with two forms of presentations to the Corporate
Coordination Group (CCG). One is the summary of the “International outlook at the Media Industry”, the other, the final presentations of the strategic business projects. After receiving feedback from the CCG, the module is concluded with a celebration dinner and diplomas.

**Strategic business projects**

The centre piece of a strategic business project is a burning issue of strategic importance that needs resolution. According to the MiL philosophy, such a project needs to fulfill certain criteria, to be useful in a leadership development program:

- It should be a real burning issue of strategic importance (not fabricated)
- It should be of a strategic complexity slightly above the participants’ current position
- It should be fairly open so there is room for the participants to explore and possibly re-define the question
- The project work (and leadership development program) should be firmly anchored and supported by the executive management of the organization

The strategic business projects run parallel, but not separate from, the modules as the participants are presented with the task at the first module and present their findings at the last.

The participants are then given the task to, out of these four questions, choose the three that are most relevant and urgent to them and in the same process also form the three separate project groups that will work on these assignments for the duration of the program. This task is completed through a self-organizing process between the participants where the program direction is present for support. The group is expected to spend a minimum of eight days working on the project. The learning coach is present on six of these.

**Resources in the programs**

Several different resources are part of the conceptualization and delivery of a MiL style leadership development program. Here follows a brief overview of the different resources, their roles and responsibilities.

**Program direction**

The program direction act as speaking partners to the HR Director and is responsible for the overall design and layout of the program. They have the overall responsibility for the learning and development of each participant, and are present at all program modules. The two program directors in these programs each have more than 20 years of experience in leadership development and come from different professional backgrounds and fields (economy and psychology).
Learning coaches

A learning coach was assigned to each project group, attending six out of eight scheduled project meetings. The role of the coach is to support the dual purpose of the strategic business project, i.e. to achieve results and to learn from the process. The three project coaches are all MiL Senior Partners and hold 15-30 years of experience in leadership development (as managers, entrepreneurs and consultants), representing three different professional fields (economy, psychology and law).

Media Group – key resources

The Media Group’s HR director has been highly involved from the start and is identified by many as a key figure in the success of the program. The HR Director handles the contact towards MiL Institute, the participants and their superiors, as well as the CEO and the fellow members of the Corporate Coordination Group.

Other than the HR Director, the entire Corporate Coordination Group led by the CEO has been exceedingly involved in the process leading up to the program as well as during the program. Some as project owners, some as guest resources during Module three. Module five was in both cases a co-creation between representatives of the Media Group and MiL Institute.

Finally, representatives from the two major owner families participated in Module four.

Guest resources

At some instances, external guest resources with specific knowledge or insight needed for the program were invited to lecture and hold Q&A with the participants.
Experiences from the programmes

Introduction to the section

The six modules offered the participants with a wide array of potential experiences and learning. In this section, we outline some of the more prominent experiences from the different modules, told by the participants.

Organizing the project work

The projects function not only as an arena for learning, but constituting this arena was also a learning experience. Organizing the project work was a task afforded to the group at the very first day of the program. The process included choosing three out of four projects as well as forming project groups among the participants.

PARTICIPANT 3
First we were instructed to, I think that was the way it was, that we had to divide ourselves into groups and drop one project at the same time. So it was given that one project had to go. It was done – you are going into three groups and one project – there you go. We divided us in to three groups in five minutes and dropped one project and then the people who were in charge, the program direction I guess, stopped the process and asked us questions. Don’t remember what it was but it was like this: didn’t it go a little fast and on what reasons did you drop… I suspect that this is what happens in all similar situations. It was such a cliché, what we did. /…/ So when we did the process over again we didn’t come to the same conclusion. The groups turned out completely different and a different project was dropped /…/ I think that we first did a summary division, like, let us split on geographic basis. We’re located in the larger part of southern Sweden, for certain with a certain list to western Sweden, but we are very spread out and the we just split and the second time we started to think about what kind of roles we have, distribution by sex and things like this and that led to a completely different division and then another project was chosen and another was dropped. It was all really exciting. Good exercise to begin with /…/ this didn’t take us more than ten minutes to do the first division and then before we were ready with the second one two hours had passed, I think, so yeah…

Reflection on the process constituted one of the first strong learning experiences in the programme, for some of the participants.
The different modules and different kinds of topics

The different modules focused on quite different kinds of topics, from personal leadership, self-knowledge, team processes etc, to strategy, business intelligence and so on. While the themes of self-knowledge and team processes generate a rather vast amount of comments after the program, the modules focusing on business intelligence and economics generate less comments.

MODUL 3

PARTICIPANT 5
What I take with me from there, it was the discussion and the knowledge about strategic economy. I remember that I liked that session a lot and that I took a lot of knowledge with me home and very powerful – and right there where we were with the company also – more people in the directorate should… this is really the only memory I have from – it was what probably the thing that meant the least to me personally but that was substantial in terms of knowledge input.

In the fourth module, the theme was change management, and a guest from Ericsson contributed with input and an exercise.

MODUL 4

PARTICIPANT 4
And that was another good exercise. I think it was at this point that we talked a lot about the transformative leadership. And then there was another guy from Ericsson who did an exercise with us about how they think when they develop, for instance, a new cell phone. They look 10 years ahead and have workshops around that, like, this is the way we should think, whereas we often end up here and now – how much do we sell, how much revenue do we have, what costs do we have – but how should we think, how do we meet the reader and the customer in five and ten years – what do we have to do in terms of development. So I think we have to think much more like that.

Experiences from the rope exercise

The participants also describe experiences linked to specific exercises. For instance, the team exercise of creating a figure with a rope (the Rope Exercise) is an important exercise that produced learning experiences for the participants. In the exercise, a number of communication and coordination challenges become evident, leaving the participants to experience and manage various forms of frustration and practical cooperation challenges.

PARTICIPANT 3
That it turned out in a typical way, like it usually does, that some felt steamrollered. And this
is difficult – it often happens that someone or some people take command. Let’s do like this. And then someone tried to make him- or herself heard. Doesn’t get listened to and gets moody. Then I don’t do anything. Then I’m like: I’m not going to say anything more. I do what people tell me to do, but I’m not doing more than that – so they get cut off if you say that and then there are some people who keep order and say that if you say your name, since we didn’t see each other, so you say your name and then your case, so to speak. And then I try to keep some kind of order in that. And it’s a little closer to where I stand as a person, to first come up with game rules for it. If you want to say something, ok then you say your name and then you say what you have to say and then we discuss it and so: Can everyone accept this solution? Because you’ll never come to a solution that everyone prefers. That requires a real genius that comes up with an insanely good solution, but when you are 18 persons – then you have to look for a solution that everyone can accept. I don’t think you get further than that.

Beside the experience of the problematic process, the exercise also left some participants with an experience of learning. For example:

PARTICIPANT 3
I’ve become keener on listening to everyone and to get everyone in the room onboard. It makes me feel bad when I notice that people get cut off and steamrollered like that. I have a little, I guess I’m a little weird when it comes to that…

*Has your awareness increased about it or is it more like you dare to address these delicate issues?*

Both. Partly, I dare to, knowing that I have a larger capital to use and also, the awareness has increased a little – even if I probably always have – my mother is like that and I have that from her. I feel that she always sees everyone in a room and I

*You think that’s what one should do?*

I, I find it very difficult if I don’t do it, that’s how I would put it. Then I really want to stress that I’m not sure that the result always turns out better if you do it that way, so I don’t put myself on a pedestal and go God, everything I do in the group is much better because we listen to everyone, but it feels like shit.

**Experiences from the trip abroad**

The expeditions abroad were designed to bring the participant into contact with a variety of new perspectives. However, as in the exercises, it is not only a question of having new experiences but again, reflection here emerges as a crucial element. It could relate both to the various different perspectives encountered between the program group and the people at the place of the visit, for instance between the Swedish participants and the Chinese people in Shanghai, but also to the
different perspectives within the group of participants, that were surfaced by the encounter with the foreign context.

The projects

The second major element of the programmes are the projects, which as expected provide an arena for a great variety of experiences. Not only do these relate to working in the project teams, but also to the process of organizing the project work.

Working with the project and in the project group

After forming, the group meets and starts their work, which includes settling on a number of issues concerning ambition, roles, and general ideas about what this is all about.

PARTICIPANT 5
Tentative steps and becoming a group ... I remember sitting in a conference room, almost a little locked in and I was excited about which project model we would have and how we would structure this and that, like, and I felt that I didn’t get any response and then you got clues to that later when you did the MBTI-profile and so on. Who are you in a group? But you didn’t know that then, but you got lenses for that later.

But what was it that you understood?

Yeah, but I thought like this – oh God – perhaps they prefer that someone else does it and so, but, like, no one in our group was at all interested in structure issues like this so it was an open goal and I didn’t understand – I though that perhaps I take up too much space now… but the others turned out to be completely uninterested. I know that we talked about ambition levels – where to we set the level of ambition in this and we were all convinced that we all had pretty high ambitions and afterwards we could conclude that that also is open for interpretation, of course, what a high level of ambition is to one person is not high for someone else. We all agreed that we would have a high level of ambition. It’s just that it’s not certain that it mean the same in practice. …

And I remember that Coach B, in a Coach B-manner, didn’t really address it… Let the group find their own way... /…/ but I think she described her roles very much so in a way she would follow us and be a little, sometimes a hand brake and sometimes a whip when it was needed, but in between we would see her more like a – I know we talked about bumpers at some point. That we were in different boats and she was the safety cable when we collided – either within the group or with other groups or other projects. We would see her a little like she hung on the side of our boat and was some kind of safety tool that we could use whenever we wanted to. But I think that she contributed and helped us posing the right questions and
interpreted our behavior in a few situations when we really needed help, because we needed help because we also met a few times in between the meetings with her.

Since the projects are seen as an arena not only for solving the organizational task, but also for individual development, a common principle in MiL Institute is to encourage the participants to distribute tasks and roles, not according to who already has expertise and experience, but according to who does not know but needs to develop a specific skill or capacity.

PARTICIPANT 2
It just happened to turn out that way. Coach C wanted us to do what we didn’t feel comfortable doing… so we tried it out for a while, but it didn’t go that well. /…/ Someone who didn’t like to give presentations or someone who was bad at writing would, like… it didn’t turn out well but you could see when it just happened. Someone would go like “that’s mine.. I’ll take it” and just go for it. It got a lot better, it also became more fun than when you had to force people who appreciated doing a certain thing to do something else, well, I don’t know. We tried to not run into it too fast and that was smart because that was probably what we were meant to do, I think, to not too quickly sat “you work with it, then you do it” and “you work with that, then you do this” – but we stayed pretty open – like if someone is tidying again, then I’ll do it instead. Perhaps three persons were given a task, but there would be one who really flourished.

The project work turned out to be more demanding and time consuming than most participants expected from the start.

PARTICIPANT 4
Yes, we also had the coach, Coach B. Then, we had also booked meetings – both with he, when she was present, and meetings with only us in the projects group and sometimes we also invited the sponsors. So you spend a lot of time in between. We spend very much time on this. /…/ it was really intense, then, to do your normal job here ad work 100% and there were many late evenings. More time that what we all had thought it would be.

The process of working on the project offered a lot of opportunities for tensions and strong experiences of both frustration and success.

The Learning Coach

A specific aspect of the project work, is the presence of a Learning Coach, who at times intervenes and might assist the group in various parts of the work.

PARTICIPANT 1
And coach A was a lot more like a catalyst. That person who is – I would put it like this: the sponsor was a director of a football club, a Swedish football club, but Coach A was, the coach,
was the coach. He was the one who would freeze the moments. He was the one who helped us find the gaps and he was the one who said check this out, I saw these links. It suits you, I think. Almost like a coach who can say: let’s look at this video, observe how the goalkeeper acts. He always goes down right, shouldn’t we try to aim left then. You know, like that. I guess that was their roles.

*What did you think of his style, the coach?*

Coach A? Basically good, actually. The way I remember it – and I don’t remember all the details now – but at some point there were a few in the group who reacted to something and that we discussed and who someone in the group was responsible of talking with Coach A about to, yes, it was probably about him being so booked up with other things – so we had – yes, this is really not talking behind his back – it was just that we perceived him going in and out in the process, like, I think. That was the way we saw it, I think.

**Giving feedback**

Many learning experiences in the project group relates to feedback. For many, it was important to challenge the fear of negative feedback. The project groups, were an arena where feedback was given in an organized way, often structured and facilitated by the learning coach. For some, this was a strong experience.

**PARTICIPANT 4**

Yes, one can say that. Because, in some way, you get there through feeling safe with them. We met really often, but it’s like that – you have to practice that. That even you, when you meet other people, you don’t choose the people you work with in your everyday life. So, to progress you need to dare to accept that feedback that perhaps is negative and positive, but it actually helps both me and the other person, if you only dare to. And we got to practice that together – to really dare to – and, oh God, this is not so scary.

*So, in which way is it easier for you today in comparison to before you participated in the program?*

Yeah, I guess it’s that you have practiced the fear, or the fear, what you were scared of before was a little – what will your response be if one would say something negative? Yeah, but if you had come anyway and depending on how you put it, it’s of course not that scary to talk about – if you, if you put it the right way.

*One can say that you’ve been trained, that you have practiced?*

Yeah, we got a lot of practice and we did it many times when we met in the big group – everyone – it wasn’t just the six of us, because you get pretty comfortable. We got to know
each other better than the others. That we split up - that happened plenty of times, which everyone really liked – we split up in trilateral talks.

**Managing changing expectations**

For some, the expectations from the sponsors changed dramatically during the process. The group needed to reorient itself, and at times with little time and resources available. This constituted important learning experiences for at least one group.

**PARTICIPANT 3**

Our so called sponsors – the ones who had asked for this project, the ones who would join us, supervise, lead us, like in the group executive board – they didn’t give a shit about what we did, to be honest… for instance, they were not here when we presented the project, and instead there was another guy who they had sent in their place so we had a really good contact with him but the others didn’t care. Then, we had a telephone meeting with one of them, after which he completely changes the terms for the project when it’s 3-4 weeks before reporting and at this point we had been working for nine months or something like that. Like aaahhhhh, that’s how fun it was.

Luckily, most of us – because in a situation like that you have two options – either one can lay down and die or one can try to make something up, so we decided pretty quickly to first be extremely ironic for a while, like, gallows humor to process the whole thing and then we said: No, let’s fucking finish this and finish it properly. Now, let’s do what he says. He has changed this, OK, let him. And later when we’re done, we can hate him in our sleep.

So we hit it on these new terms and didn’t whine, we just moved on with clenched fists and shut eyes. And later, when it was time for presentation, we delivered such a badass presentation, to be clear. It’s confident, but it was really good. And we delivered awesome material, we really nailed it...

Part of the learning had to do with the experience of muddling through, and the importance of persistence. Some of the participants describe that just keeping on resulted in important experiences of being able to mange mor than one expected from the beginning, and produced results that were beyond one's expectations.

Further, the importance of the contextual arrangements for how the projects are developed, is echoed by the HR Director internally responsible for the programmes. She thus seems to share the perspective of the deep embeddedness of this kind of development work, with the representatives from MiL Institute.

**CLIENT**

That question is actually more relevant to pose to participants and sponsors who can have
quite different perspectives, but if I’m to give my perspective on it, it would be that if it hadn’t been clear from the sponsors what you wanted in the end and if the sponsors hadn’t been accessible and the group hadn’t succeeded to redefine the project that concretize it, it had been a startup time and I know that is has been like that in a few projects, so what it depends on I don’t know, but it’s also a part of the idea that it’s not completely set. That’s what reality looks like. It’s not always crystal clear. But I don’t know to which extent that’s my responsibility.

Presentation of the projects on the last module

The final part of the project work, in the programme, was a presentation for the project sponsors on the last module. This was an occasion not only for the group to summarize their work and their conclusions, but also an occasion for making a statement and trying to influence the sponsors and the CCG about what the group felt was the way forward.

As described by the programme participants as well as by the learning coaches, the presentations were very varied. It was an occasion to “deliver” to the top management, and some project groups were more in a delivery mode than others. One group presented a list of things that needed to be taken care of and changed, for the top management to see to. Others tried to engage them more in thinking about the issues. Some groups were quite confident, forcefully addressing strategic issues that previously had been beyond their reach as middle managers.

Learning coaches working in the project groups

In this section, we turn to the experiences and stories from the learning coaches, working with the project teams. Working as a learning coach in a project group might include a number of different strategies and techniques. One common type of technique, is feedback, which can be introduced and facilitated by the learning coach.

Learning coach C

So, how do you work with tools like observation, feedback and coaching in your group?

I had individual phone talks with everyone. I met someone in person too, when I was in Goteborg. And I gave some feedback after the meetings when we checked out, has anything happened with the group or have you fallen back in an old pattern. Not individual feedback in a group. Not that much. But group five…

How does the group itself work with feedback – to each other, coaching each other, observing each other?

The first group was very good at working with that. That tone isn’t there. I also told them that it’s my ambition that you’re going to do this on your own when I’m not there, because that’s
what it’s going to be like later so you have to have to get it in yourselves.

*What do you do then? How does it work? Any examples? If you can remember?*

It’s in the moment.

*What can one give feedback on?*

There can be those kinds of comments or brutal laughter when someone says something: “Stop a moment. Would it not be better if you said… What did that laughter stand for? What do you want to say, what did you want say with that comment, which was a little slick, funny or what?” There were in particular two guys who were clever, arrogant, young CEO:s in small size businesses. “What do you think happens if this is your employee? What had the employee said about you when we left the coffee room? What did you mean? What did you want to achieve? What did you want to give? What kind of gift did you loose? What kind of china did you wrap in toilet paper?

In contrast to this kind of structured events, much of the learning coach’s work seems to be less structured, and more opportunistic.

**Learning coach C**

*What does it mean for you to observe the group when it’s working?*

A lot. I have their individual development plans and they have told me that, but I also see certain things that cannot be read there. The meaning of the project, namely that it becomes one – it’s not an exercise example, it’s for real. They act like they do in everyday life. That enables you to see that – ok, so she acts like this even if – yeah, she probably does that when she deals with issues like that or that type of collision within the group. Then I can refer to that and it happens – sometimes it happens that you sit next to each other at the coffee table, so you can give that kind of feedback. “Is that the problem you have at work? Yes, I recognize that. Ok, so how can you change it? What kind of support do you need from the group? Does the group see it? Do you see it? What kind of help do you need to ask for so that you don’t end up there again? You have a privilege now; your coworkers don’t in the same way.

**Learning coach C**

*How do you balance reaching results in the project, the development of the group and the individual learning goals that the participants have?*

You sort of have to design in the step, but intervene in it… So I often focus on the exaggerations and understatements. I can let them go on about the project, but we have done a thorough check-in before. When an hour has passed on just one project: “Excuse me, you should be brave, you said that this morning. I don’t think this proposal is that challenging. So
there is a fine line between courage and foolishness and I don’t want to push you to foolishness, but this is as brave as you can or want or fell like or is it just a quick fix because you have other things to do” that opens up for a new discussion.

At the beginning of the project work the learning coach introduces the group to his or her role and to what kind of interventions the group can expect and on what level.

Yes, it’s really good that you ask that because I’m very clear about that. I say that we are different coaches and we have different coaching styles and I’m like this that I’m very careful with you as an individual, I look at the group and I look at the result. It’s not like a failed project where we have learned a lot about leadership – that’s not OK to me, I rather look at the three dimensions – you as an individual, the group/the team where you have opportunities to actually practice some kind of leadership with other leaders and it’s no kindergarten and then we have a business project where you feel a lot better if you have contributed with something, but it has to be something new. And therefore we have asked for business projects and no investigation projects. And I can be quiet sometimes and sometimes I’m going to pop like a jack-in-the-box and be tough but loving. So what I’m saying is that I in that way have legitimated my style and they can react to that and it happens that the group says: “Damn, you’ve been quiet a long time now” “Yes, I haven’t heard any foolishness so go on”

Confrontational interventions consist in voicing or surfacing the coach's own experiences and observations of the group, which often amounts to challenging avoidance in the group.

Learning coach C

So when I joined the picture, they were kind of stuck. People started to- “No, I can’t this time” and started to mess up the meetings and so and then I wrote one of those e-mails – what I’ve seen in the process and which exits there were and what the alternative was, being that the group would end up in bitterness and discomfort, but there are alternatives and that’s what I want to discuss with you. So it became one of those – when the group was ready for it in a way.

But you said that they needed to be brave and reformulate the task – had that happened before they got stuck?

No, they felt it, but no one named it in the group: “So, what the hell are we doing?” “Time-out – hang on a minute – are we going to work with this for a couple of months without… none of us believes in it, but what should we do?” “What does a middle manager do?”

You said that they had forgotten about you and didn’t...

Yes, they didn’t want to hear anything then.
Learning contracts is another technique, valued by some of the learning coaches.

**Learning coach C**

When it comes to the learning, I know that I, in the first program as well as in the second program, have forced them to formulate learning goals for themselves and stuck to that and that I, because I’m passionate about formulating goals, most of the time don’t accept what they come up with, but I ask if, like, do it another round, an one more. “Why are you doing this?” “Why?” To really make them describe their future.

*What kind of learning goals would you not accept or were not complete?*

“I’ll become better at communicating”, for instance, or “I’ll be more strategic”

*What is it that you – when do you feel satisfied, what kind of questions do you ask?*

Yeah, then I ask questions like. I either use Torsten’s scales from 1-10. How much better – where are you now and how good do you want to become? Or to really make sure that if you want to be more strategic – what do you mean by that? How do you want to feel? What kind of meetings do you want to be able to handle? To make them stop hiding behind – I want to be a more confident leader or whatever it is.

/…/ We work with it on a more individual level, meaning that I have a dialogue with them by e-mail or on the phone or they send the learning goals to me and I get back to them with, like a proper school teacher, the red pen – almost. /…/ We did a round in the team and they had to write down the learning goals they had when they started, which I think, become real learning goals and not only empty phrases. Because it’s so easy to get stuck in empty phrases.

One principle often repeated among learning coaches, is to focus on problematizing and orientation, and to slow down the tendency to jump to soon into problem solving.

**Learning coach C**

*How do you test the strength of something in the room?*

Ask mean questions. What happens now, what will he say? What will you say then? Are you prepared? /…/ Dare to stay in the problematizing, view it from many different angles before you rush for a solution. Bring up that a basic interview process influences. They want to interview. We can interview 40 people in the organization. How long does that take? What long interview are you planning of having? Yes, it can be 1-2 hours times 40. Ok, let’s take a look in your calendars. Who does this – when, and what happens in your organization if someone comes from a completely different part of the Media Group and starts asking questions? What sorts of fantasies do that create in your employees, if someone had done that? Yes, ok. How do you explain what you’re going to do? What do you need to do? Yes,
perhaps we can get everyone together and present before? Yes, ok. How do you plan to do
that?

The role of the learning coach is new to the participants, and might be understood in a variety of
ways. Often, a process of clarification and trying out various interpretations of the role took place in
the beginning of the work, where the participant attempted to treat the learning coach as project
secretary or project leader, before establishing some idea of working with the him or her with a
focus on learning.

Reflection

In most of the stories, reflection is an important element of the programmes. Many experiences of
learning from the exercises are linked not only to the experience of the exercise as such, but to the
process of reflecting on this experience afterwards. Participants describe a variety of techniques
utilized for reflection. One such is reflection in the whole programme groups (18 people), while
other forms are structured in a sequence of different steps and alternating group sizes.

Reflection in the large group, reflection on the previous day

In most cases, the day starts with a reflection in the whole group. This is a practice that often starts
of each new module, then labeled “Check-in”.

Participant 1

Yes, we did that often and it often happened in these reassemblies we had after each, when we
were at these conferences. We always started with reflecting on the day after and that was
incredibly exciting…

How did it go about?

It meant that the program direction, who were the ones leading the conference. We sat in a
circle and they simply let go of the ball. In the beginning, they were obviously the ones who
wanted to be seen – they were always first to begin. The told what they saw and a picture was
created of it, but gradually completely different people initiated the thread, but it was really
exciting to see how 18 different pairs of eyes could complete the picture of a day and what
you had perceived. I would say that it reminds me of the idea behind the Swedish conscript
army long ago. That all the competencies that exist can complete each other instead of having
a professional army that only knows how do to one thing – fight. So, if I could only find a
picture. It was obvious that someone could see one thing and someone else expressed the
same observation, but based that perspective on…
Reflection on exercises

In the interviews with the participants, some events such as the Rope Exercise, are given a more prominent role than other experiences in the program. Regardless of whether this is to be interpreted as an indication of the significance or of the salience of the specific exercise at hand, the participants clearly depict reflection as an important element in learning from these experiences.

Reflection occurred in relation to most activities, and many participants tell the story of how the program direction and the learning coaches have made them aware, not only of the need for reflection in their daily lives, but also of the simplicity and diversity of different reflection techniques.

Participant 5
It was actually like this, aha, - it was the first exercise, I think. It was like – with which small means and tools, with help from someone who helps analyzing what happened in the room. There were only short instructions from the program direction, in order for us to solve the task on our own. Then later, they helped us extract loads of findings from that exercise. With simple means, only with help from someone who helps you by leading the reflection, you can learn a lot. It was more of a, aha – God, it doesn’t have to be more complicated than this.

Participant 1
They set a frame for how we could understand our reflections, which was a really important part of the our learning, I think. So, through these reflections – it was like a crucial element of the process, kind of. ... I think that the way they were so consistent, the stimulation of the reflection process, how they in some way also showed – perhaps it was acting at some points – but I don’t think so. I mean, how excited they could get from our stories. It gave them meaning. You never felt that the program direction, for instance, just sat there, like, ok, everybody has said something; let’s go home – I never felt that.

Participant 1
And I can also tell you that, that it repeated it self when we were in New York. It was our international section and this was also an incredibly powerful memory from when we visited the New York Times, 5-6 persons, a listened to presentations. It was very much about how you use the citizens in an urban district to create journalism in this district. So, a type of interactivity and reader participation. And when we sat down in a café close by and tried to sum up what we had heard, seen and experienced. Because we would often reflect on what we had experienced. Then a person with 100% commercial background began and said that it was pure crap. Why in Gods name were we there? There is no business in this. And I remember that I said – “hang on”../…/ If you think like this and that – you come to the conclusion that what they do here is what they do on Google??? Talking about the staff getting 20% for an experiment and develop different things within their employ. And if we look at it from that perspective – what are our reflections? And suddenly we had changed the course. And this
taught me the thing with us working in a media house where we in terms of culture have to work in a much more coordinated way today – there is no doubt that the editorial staff have their area of responsibility, the marketing department have theirs and there is a sharp division from a credibility perspective, but we have to work a lot more like one company. How important it is with the different inputs, the different lenses.

Here it is as much the different perspectives among the participants that are surfaced in the encounter that produces a new level of awareness, as it is the new context as such. Either way, though, it is clearly through the reflective process that the different perspectives are made visible, and the ways of relating to them becomes visible. This visibility might then be unsettling and frustrating, but by voicing these feelings, they are increasingly transformed into insights and learning.

Learning about oneself

An important general theme concerned “learning about oneself”. This happened in relation to specific exercises, such as doing a MBTI-self-assessment, but also in relation to activities that on the surface seemed to concern something completely different, such as forming project groups, the expeditions abroad, or when receiving feedback and listening to other people's reflections.

PARTICIPANT 5
To my mind, lots of things happened during that year. Partly because you actually learn about your self in association with Myers Briggs and that whole – but you also learn from others’ reflections about you. You also develop an understanding of how you reach out and there were many elements that addressed that and I also thought we had fun with it in my group. So we were pretty good at feedback and helped each other progress. I think you learn very much about yourself through the reflections of others. Both about themselves and their reflections about me as an individual. In general, I would say, just as much as you learned about process of program direction or about the people who were the – you learned even more about the other participants and their reflections and their changes and their journeys. I think that was, that was in it self a lesson. How much you can learn from the people around you if you just have time to listen or to pause. I think it was something very strengthening and also tiring that you had the opportunity to reflect and question ones everyday life on so many levels.

This participant describes how the Myers-Briggs self assessment tool was introduced and used by the program direction and the learning coaches to help the participants speak of their individual differences and learn about each other.

Participant 4
In this we also got to – and I thought that was great – to get diagnosed, I was about to say. No, but we got to do that Myers Briggs thing, I’ve never done one before. So that was very… then
we found out which letters we had and then you related that to the letter you had personally. First, we guessed as a group which letter you thought you were, did you think you were – extrovert or introvert /…/ That was pretty interesting. I didn’t think, not I wouldn’t have guessed, at some point I was at the wrong end, I was about to say. I was probably not extrovert, no I wasn’t… I knew that I was pretty extrovert. I was probably one of the most extrovert in the group. That didn’t surprise me, but then something happened. J and P, which indicates whether you’re spontaneous or not, organized, and I thought – I’m really spontaneous, I mean I can be spontaneous in my way of thinking – that sounds fun, let’s do it – but in the end I’m actually quite planned. I think it depends on the situation you’re in. So that was a little – ok, I wasn’t like that, Ok. But I understood that I was more structured when we started to discuss it, but I thought that was very interesting. And then we put it – we had an appointment with the project group – and what does it mean to us as a group when we work, the fact that we have different qualities. How can we benefit or how can we learn from someone being more introvert, how do we use that quality?

Sometimes the input and the insights from the MBTI are not limited to the workplace but help the participant make sense of relationships in the private life as well. For many, the use of the instrument brought a strong sense of making sense of themselves in their various contexts, as well as at times making sense of other’s conduct. It seemed to contribute to a clearly perceptible increase in self-awareness, emphasized by dedicating a full retreat to personal leadership and individual self-knowledge.

**Participant 5**

*Because some things happened, I can imagine, during that week or that module, which were about looking at oneself and becoming more aware. Can you tell me more about that – which was the biggest aha-experience for you?*

That was difficult. What could that have been? It was partly a picture of some ideas about one self were reinforced or you got more comfortable in that and also you had some things confirmed and at the same time, there were some concerns, perhaps, that also were, not confirmed, but got you had – they could be blown away or you didn’t have to spend much time and energy thinking about it. But, for instance, I’ve always heard that I’m dominant and talk a lot – it’s been like that since school – ok, but everything is great, but if you only could be a little more quiet sometimes. I’ve always been dominant and with that comes that you always do that at the expense of someone else. I know that that was a topic I discussed and had the opportunity to ask questions about.

Increased self-awareness included thus both learning about new aspects of oneself and confirming other, that were already known but more deeply felt when receiving confirming feedback from others and from psychological instruments, like MBTI.

Learning about oneself and developing as a person was a valued, but also sometimes unexpected,
Participant 1
And you also get an explanation to who am I – for instance, I’m the only child. I have often protested against the thesis that single-children are spoiled, because I’m not. I wouldn’t say that. I was well, but I would say that I also – you become closer to your parents too, you can’t escape. So you had to take responsibility for things and you easily get precocious too, I think. But in my case, I think that was due to some things – my dad was ill from time to time when I was younger, during some periods that have affected me in different ways. And that made me think about my core – who am I inside – something like, why don’t I understand this question and I think my kids who have three siblings each – they have a completely different approach to how to sit in a couch or how close you can become with someone, perhaps, than I did when I was a kid. I don’t know, but I can imagine. They’re always so used to it and kind of and sit like a bunch of bananas in the couch back home and watch TV, whereas I could choose the corner I liked. Dad had his chair and mom was perhaps in the other corner. So, it wasn’t more complicated than that. And you can think about that – what made me react in certain situations and that has to do with leadership. So, you clinch with people who, like, who am I and why do I do this? It’s might not be dangerous, it’s a question of experience, if you know what I mean.

Consequences and learning

Career related consequences
A significant number of the participants move on in their careers during or close to the program. Sometimes, the step up in the career might be a consequence of the program, for instance from expansion of contact network or exposure to new opportunities, while it at other times might be that the participation in the program was more of a signal for a career lift.

CLIENT
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 – 13 have changed jobs since they participated in the first program. /…/ I think that these people have been made visible. They have pushed their limits, to work with things that are a little more difficult that what they do in everyday life within these projects. I think the networks that develop in a spontaneous way do; I think many have started to think about their lives in general. It starts a movement, a curiosity. So I think there are a number of things that matter but I think the program and what happens with people in the program, that makes you reflect a lot about yourself. Clearly, it starts processes.
Personal consequences

The experience of being more secure in one’s role seems to be related not only to the program, but also to the simultaneous career progression that many participants experienced. Rather than placing the programme as the causal factor, the experience seems to be more towards seeing career progression, gaining experience, and the learning from the programme as an integrated whole.

**Participant 3**

*OK. But this with dealing with people who lead in different ways or you’re talking about bullies and that – if you compare to your possibility or capacity to deal with them – before and after the program – has it changed, has something happened, or?*

Yes, it has. I’ve become much.. yes, definitely. Partly due to the program but also partly because of other things. During the program, I’ve changed position and kind of advanced a step on the latter, but it’s been quite a shot in the arm, partly on how to handle it and also.. this is silly, but the higher you get in the hierarchy and the more you experience, the more authority you get and so you can, you have authority and credibility to take advantage of in situations like this. So it has significantly improved my capacity to deal with it. As simple as that.

As explained by this participant, the programme was experienced as a necessary prerequisite for taking the step career-wise, not only by developing necessary skills, but also in gaining clarity on what’s expected of you in a new demanding role and the self-assuredness to accept it.

**Participant 2**

*Would I’ve gotten this role without the program? That’s really, really difficult. I wouldn’t have known, I wouldn’t have understood, I wouldn’t have felt confident in what they expect of me, what they want. A blank paper from the corporate group that says “create something that gives more money”, I would absolutely not have felt confident with that responsibility. No, it would have been impossible. I can’t see it happening. So that’s related to what we did in the project, it’s related to my network and the insight in CCG and having gotten to know the people, so I understood what one wanted and what one talked about. I had the courage to throw my self out there.*

Less control

One aspect of learning that is mentioned in a variety of contexts, from customer relations to family, is a lesser need to have control. It is also referred to as a greater confidence in processes where the end result is unclear, and in a belief in other people’s capacity to take responsibility.

**Participant 2**

*Things I know I do wrong or that I do, but don’t want to. If I sometimes get pushy and*
stubborn about having to understand, have to understand, I think it should be like this and
why, why then do I just push it and push it – sometimes. It gets to me sometimes when I’m in
the middle of it and just – no, stop it, back off, quiet, let the process happen because then
they’ll conclude that you either get there, like I think, but then you reach that through the
process, rather than me forcing them to it. I know that it became very clear to me when we
were in the program that I have a tendency to do this. If I see something that obvious and get
frustrated that the other don’t see it, I know that Coach C told me sometimes – he was like:
quiet, be quiet. But like, aahh. And the others got to talk and then it actually happened that
they came down to what I said or what I thought, but they just processed it and talked about it
in another way. They didn’t think like me or they were in a different place, but it was still like
this – you don’t have to decide or control... And that was such an insight.

Changing structure of work meetings

Some participants go as far as incorporating forms of different forms of interaction from the
programme into the everyday work processes. Experiences from the project work concern how it is
possible to change and re-structure, and have the power to shape rather than accept the forms that
are given. In the words of one of the participants:

Participant 4
I think it’s more that I changed the structure of it. This organization, the people I’ve met, who
are in, who I gather, we are like a matrix, there are loads of different… back then we had a set
agenda before we met every Wednesday and we were pretty many or we are pretty many. I’ve
changed the structure there to more get to, get closer to each other and share in order do really
do things faster, rather than having those meetings when you’re so many that you only report.
And now, I’ve split the group so that we can meet together in monthly follow-ups to make
everyone become more aware of the figure and that and then we have inspiration every other
week instead. To share useful information and things like that...

Consequences for the organization

The projects were intended to be an arena for learning, but they were equally intended to produce
decisive impact on the organizational needs of the Media Group, such as securing the next
generation of leaders and creating new ambassadors for the Media Group’s vision within the
individual companies and the business needs of the corporation.

Building and expanding networks in the organization
The projects functioned as an arena for developing networks in the organization, and for expanding existing networks. Through the connections established between participants in the program new possibilities of co-operation were realized during and after the program, not only between different companies within the Media Group but also between certain departments within the same company.

**Participant 5**
At the same time we connect – you got a bigger network and you got to make your voice heard and the opportunity to influence and speak up in forums that were completely new. We did interviews with everyone in CCG or parts of the CCG anyways, so we expanded our networks a lot. /.../.. at the end of the program, you knew all 18 pretty well, I think, and that’s has been incredibly useful afterwards as I’ve stayed in the Media Group and I’ve even more use of it in my new role, so the connections have become different and new, where there are people who you work close with, that were also in the program. Also, some people were in the other program. Then you share some kind of language or something, it’s useful.

One participant describes how he took the opportunity to do an experimental exchange with a fellow participant and co-worker and thereby learn about each other’s tasks and challenges. This was not part of the programme as such, but inspired by and supported by the programme activities. The experimental exchange offered new and learning opportunities for both parties, as well as for their contexts, that were exposed to a surprising temporary shift of persons.

**Influences on the top management**
The involvement in the programs influenced not only the participants, but also the Corporate Coordination Group, i.e. the top management team of the corporation. Members if the top management team argue that the two programmes together brought a new awareness to the organization, about upcoming challenges and opportunities, as well as a new energy to the top management team. More specifically, the top management felt inspired by some of the projects, focusing on specific market opportunities in the contemporary internet-oriented society. Although these might not immediately have been turned into business projects, the inspiration has helped the top management team focus their attention more toward a broader range of possible futures.

**Design and reflections from the consultants**
One of the primary aspects of development work at MiL Institute is reflection. In this section, we present some stories, descriptions and accounts from MiL Institute’s consultants, i.e. the program direction and the three learning coaches, on how they consciously work with reflection to promote and encourage the participants to transform experiences and insights in the programmes to changed
behavior and new actions at the workplace.

**Working with reflection as a method**

Many times during the programmes, the program directors and the other consultants organized and facilitated reflection processes. This was one of the most common and general aspects of the programme, and reflection occurred in relation to almost all other elements of the programme. One of the program directors tells about the way reflection occurred after a simulation exercise (the cake factory):

> Then I suggest: sit down on your own, gather your thoughts; avoiding group-think is something I’m always careful with. So, no matter what it is: if we’re starting a piece of work, begin with thinking on your own. And if we’ve done something, begin with reflecting by yourself, preferably in writing. Write down a couple of key words, key feeling, “I felt left out” or “I feel elated” or whatever it might be. I often start with catching the feelings. And then we meet and talk about- “How did you feel?”.... And that’s open for analytical questions – “Why do you think you felt that way?” – “Does it have anything to do with where you ended up in the process, did it go too quickly, too slow? Etc. So dig in that I felt like this, what does it mean, does it influence your way of behaving. From feeling to acting. “Can you understand why you felt that?” “Can you recognize this from your every-day life?” Kind of, getting closer to the every-day life. And “What would you have been able to do to not...” let’s say that you’ve become victim of a certain feeling – I got moody, I got stubborn, I felt left out, I lost my motivation – “Would you have been able to affect that?” and “If this normally happens, can you get out of it or go back?” These kinds of questions and in about that order.

One of the recurring occasions for reflection was the check-in procedure, utilized in project teams on almost every meeting and facilitated by the learning coach. This was a procedure for starting the meeting in a constructive way, and typically includes letting everyone say something about how they are feeling, and if they have any special concerns for today (like pressing tasks that will be drawing them away at times). The procedure can be more or less elaborate and include a level of reflection, all depending on the group, the occasion, and the strategy of the learning coach. It might develop to a reflective arena, more than just a part of the ongoing production culture.

**Working toward action, not "just" reflection**

All of the consultants emphasize the need to push reflection beyond simply articulating experiences and making processes visible, in order to produce learning and facilitate new actions. Most of the consultants describe this as a challenge, in relation to which there are a number of strategies and techniques.
Learning coach A emphasize that real learning concerns actually doing something differently:

It’s not the reflections that create the learning, but the reflections become reflections. And a reflection is just there. And that’s why I always bring up different examples of how great it is to reflect, without it leading to any learning. … you haven’t learned anything until you have changed your actual behavior or strengthened a behavior. And I always say these two things, because if I just say changed behavior someone says: “But if you realize you already do something good?” Then I say… ”but then you want to do more of that and then you’ve changed the behavior through giving it more energy.” But to leave out that discussion, I always say that it starts with you changing or strengthened your behavior.

What’s not so good, we want less of – what’s good we want more of. But in the reflection one can conclude that … or “I should communicate more with my employees” and then you don’t, but you send an e-mail and then nothing happens. Half a year later you get bad feedback again from your employees and you think again, something very reasonable, that ”I should really communicate better with my employees”, but no learning has taken place. You don’t reach ARL.

The reflection is an insight, it can be an aha-experience, but it doesn’t become learning until something actually happens. And that’s what I think we should all communicate as our strength – that we actually make it happen, because I think many competitors stress the importance of reflection. Find space in every day life to reflect. So pretty soon we won’t have much uniqueness in that aspect – to just create space for reflection. And then I think that I can create space for learning – to help with that, to have tools so that people in a project group or in a coach group can help each other “Ok, but how do we deal with that reflection? What kind of learning is there in the reflection? What should you do more or less of until our next meeting?” To find tools for making them help each other.

One of the learning coaches takes the “check-out” reflection (a round of reflection at the end of a meeting or a day) as an example of an occasion where he can push for more action. He asks for instance how the participants can try out their new ideas, how they can test their ideas in practice, and have some very practical ideas formulated and shared, before the meeting ends. This also includes lowering the ambition (the threshold) so as to find something that is actually doable. The learning coach associates this with solution-focused work:

**Learning coach A**

The task for me as a coach is about lowering the threshold enough for the learning and there I always speak of rules of thumb in the learning contract. So, the simple rule of thumb that push in a certain direction… … That’s why I’m working with solution focus – to work with that and go: this is where you want to get. Which simple rules of thumb can push you in that direction? And then I have, I think I said that last time that, 24 hours. In the annual report of
2009, the CEO stated that the fact that the Media Group was not listed gave them more freedom to take those kinds of pro-active actions and investments in times of uncertainty and cutbacks. rs from now, so a good habit. The good habit is the rule of thumb, but I also demand: “what do you do within 24 hours?” Just because, in that case, they have to lower their level of ambition. It can be doing a phone call or booking a lunch with someone who inspire them in the subject or to order a book or to google the subject – suppression techniques or whatever it might be that they want to get through. That way of working with learning goals – with the big L – that’s like – “what do you do in 24 hours and what is a good habit? The group can help you brainstorm.”

In all, a variety of reflection techniques were used, but clearly one important aspect of the consultant work was to focus reflection processes, and having tools and techniques for furthering reflection into thinking about practical action the everyday work.

Conclusion

This case material has presented some chosen aspects of a leadership development case, with the overall purpose of helping a client organization developing strategically. The dual goals of strategic organization development and individual leadership development runs through the case, at times in tandem and at times more disconnected. The general purpose of the case material is to enable and facilitate a theoretically driven discussion of how action learning oriented leadership development might be problematized, explored and understood.