Setting of the Inner Team: A Procedure for Personal Development, Group Coaching and Organizational Consulting.

By Gert Metz and Werner Messerig

Please note: The original article was published with graphics. They will be added to this webpage in due course.

I. What is the Work of the Inner Team About?

Since the beginning of the 1990's we have been in the process of restructuring our training for personal development at the IBM Academy for Leadership and Management Training. We have moved away from customary training and workshop exercises towards dealing with concrete issues and examples from daily practice and life circumstances. While looking for effective methods to work on issues, the systemic constellation work (organizational, family and structure constellations) have become a fixture in our training, "Acting as a Personality."

Using a personality model of the "inner team" (from Scheidt 1998; Ornstein 1992; Schmidt 1995; Schwartz 1977; Schulz von Thun 1998), we have a way of describing the personality that allows us to see systemically the complex and partly conflicting inner negotiation processes within a person. In this model the different personality parts interact exactly like a group of real persons, and form their own system that lives, works and acts as a personality within the larger systems already mentioned (family, organization, enterpriseS). For a humorous illustration of this, see the German novel by Barbara Koenig, The Person's Person (Koenig, 1981).

Since we both deal with the systemic constellation work we naturally began experimenting with constellations of inner personality parts. It turned out that just tracking, naming and "sorting" the inner team gives the client precious information about his or her psycho-dynamics especially about his or her blockages. Above and beyond that, setting the inner team often bring to light entanglements between specific "inner team members" and real external persons, be they persons from the family of origin, the current family, or from the company or organization (see second example, Peter M.).

"To act as personality" does not mean to be "a unified whole," instead it is a result of different negotiation processes among the inner team members. "Can I maybe have your new worksheets?" Already being asked by a colleague for certain well guarded papers of mine triggers the existence of very different internal voices. The social helper in me will want to answer the question with a quick and clear, "Of course," and immediately feel the resistance of the inner egoist who argues against a quick and cooperative response. The inner conflict becomes even more complex when additional parts ally themselves with one or the other of the two parties and create a difficulty within the inner team in reaching a decision. ("What shall I do now?")

In such situations where my individual team members are not sorted out, I feel in an inner muddle. It's difficult to act authentically when all these inner voices don't show up at the same time, some are felt earlier, some later, and all like to attract attention. Constellations like these characterize the difficult situations that can be clarified and worked with using this model.

When a "troublemaker" is hard on me, the important questions are, "Where does he come from?" "How long has he been in existence?" "And what exactly makes him so obnoxious for me?" Usually there is a connection to another system, for instance, one's own family of origin. The main idea for a person "acting as a personality" would be to lead all members of the inner team to consensus and agreement, similar to a conductor coaxing orchestra members to play harmoniously together rather than wildly and out of tune with each other. Others will experience my presence as authentic and real.

Another metaphor is the metaphor of "inner landscape" with foreground, background and underground. In the foreground and background one or the other team members or sub-teams mingle, depending on the outer situation. Foreground and background parties can still exchange, compliment and agree with each other in a constructive team conversation. Sometimes, however, I notice I do not want some of them in the foreground or I don't want to show weaknesses to the outside and initially I keep them in the background. "I feel them, but I don't like them." Or even, "I may not and don't want to be like that," would be possible personal attitudes towards this.

The further process of such a development can lead to separation and repression of inner parts into the underground, from where they can covertly and uncontrollably leak to the outside in certain life situations and create trouble. Finding and detecting such outsiders and underground dwellers in conversations and constellation usually leads to an understanding of the situation within the inner team. Often it is possible to extricate the positive intention of the repressed parts. "What does he stand for?" "What does he contribute?" "What is his function?" "What would be missing if he didn't exist?" "From what loyalties does this speak?" This creates the basis for learning to accept the outsiders inside one's self again and to integrate them into the inner team discourse.

II. Setting the Inner Team

We would now like to demonstrate with examples and to elaborate how on we use the systemic constellation work to bring the different and often adversarial parts of our client's inner teams into a harmonious relationship or a more constructive discussion. This enables our clients to make more consistent and goal focused actions.

Example 1.

A participant brings the following issue:

Bernd: I don't organize my time well. Especially in the mornings I have a hard time getting out of bed and then always end up chasing the clock. I have a little devil in me who I wish I could shut up.

Coach: What does he say?

Bernd: He says, "Take a break, relax, don't get under pressure from the outside, enjoy your life. (He tries to create short term pleasant circumstances for me.) On the other side I have a little angel who says, "Come on, get up, otherwise you are under pressure again!!"

More inner team members who play a role for the dynamic of this theme are extricated:

The Organizer: he reminds one of deadlines, projects, the need for time and resources. The Administrator: when this one is dominant, he conveys to Bernd himself and the others the impression of incredible busyness.

The stupid thing, however, is that it often concerns useless and unimportant things.

Questioning him about the parents shows: they're both retired and enjoy life. The father had been the manager of a branch of the same company in which the son now works. The father has taken an early retirement.

Bernd: I am delighted for him. I wish for the same sometime. But there are phases in life where you can't do anything else but work and you have to get through those.

The Father: I had too little time for the children. I want to do it better.

Then it slips out of the father: the company benefits from my effort, the family benefits from my effort, but me, I'm apparently not important to myself.

A constellation shows the following picture. (See figure 1.)

Considerations Here the fundamental question is whether one sets one's self as a meta-level I or whether one equates the I with the whole of the personality parts. Each decision has far reaching implications. If one defines an I different from the personality parts, one has introduced a hierarchy and a meta-level. The I is then so to speak the team leader, and one can see, like in an organizational constellation, "how the leadership stands."

Which personality parts from the many possible ones to describe and set depends, of course, on which are relevant to the actual theme or issue. We explore a specific inner team (a small number of the most important members) in the face of a concrete theme or issue. This is why it is most sensible to represent the aspect of the outer world in the constellation, that is to place a representative for the challenge that constellates the inner team (in this case: "expectations of the family" and "professional tasks.")

Modeling the known Theme Centered Interaction (TCI) three parts, we have a qualitative differentiation between:

• "I" (inner leadership)

• "We" (inner team)

• "Theme"

In the inner team constellations we sometimes give the representatives name-tags for easier orientation. The above mentioned three parts are easily emphasized with different colors.

About Constellation 1 (Figure 1). This constellation shows in this context the following dynamics: Little Angel and Little Devil talk from both sides to the (poor) I. Both of them whisper their own insinuations into one ear or the other, and, kinesthetically speaking, creep up on him. By the way, this is in reality an effective trance induction: having two different personas speaking two different messages into opposite ear! The conscious control by the I gets switched off by this double message.

We can see the Organizer stands on the side of the Little Angel and also in energetic connection to the Professional Tasks, strengthens this side and looks at the I as if asking for a response or in a challenging manner.

The Administrator has the position of a "vanguard." The I which has been put into trance by the insinuations of the two ambivalent voices is unable to act powerfully and with focus, and mechanically sends its administrator energy to the front with busy-work activities. With its busy-ness, the Administrator creates the illusion of activity and is at the same time in the way of the real demands of family and professional tasks. After questioning the representatives, we let the Little Angel to the I: "What I want is that you go your way successfully, just like your father. The I nods in agreement. This statement of the Little Angel brings Bernd into contact with the deeper positive intention of this voice on a deeper level than the superficial concrete nagging, which he otherwise hears in his head.

Then we let the Little Devil say to the I, "I represent someone here who otherwise doesn't have a place." The facilitators then put another representative behind the Little Devil and give him the name tag, "time for myself," because this is precisely the need which the Little Devil serves, which Bernd would like to shut up.

Thus, the positive intention of them embarrassing and unpleasant team member of the client is clear and named. After one or two intermediate steps and after Little Devil and Little Angel have verbally acknowledged each other's tasks, the following final constellation emerges. (See Figure 2.)

Time for Me, Expectations of the Family, and Professional Tasks stand in a slight curve clearly visible opposite the I. Little Devil and Little Angel stand beside and support the part they primarily serve. Thus they visually emphasize for the I the relationships they have to these parts, and are at the same time distanced from the I, which reduces their auditory and kinesthetic closeness to the I.

On the other hand, the Administrator and Organizer are placed on each side of the I. They lend him "a better hand" as serving resources here. And now I leads. Then new active and leading role of the I is expressed by its slightly forward position between the two. (When we set the inner team, we orient ourselves only slightly towards the proven "grammar" from other types of constellations - for instance, the idea that standing at the right places symbolizes priority - here, we look in a new way and also allow the client to assume a more subjective assignment of meaning to the positions.)

We keep the name Little Devil for this inner voice in this case since the name had lost its negative connotation for Bernd. In other cases, the "name" of an inner part can change through the recognition of its positive intention.

In the end, after we let Bernd take the position of the I. We also put his parents behind him in order to strengthen his new inner team order, especially by his father.

Then we let him say, to the ones standing in front of him: "Now I can see you all well and separate you from each other."

To the two sides: "I now guide your action in an awake and decisive way so that I can divide all of these well."

This is a very decisive point: prior to this the I was in a passive reactionary role on whom the different inner forces tugged. Now the I takes an actively created leadership role and shows its inner impulses and resources their place and tasks. In conclusion the Father says to the I: "Yes, you can do this for sure, and I enjoy seeing this."

As in an organizational constellation, the role of the leader is the deciding key position for the synergy of the system; it is also important for the inner synergy that there is a functioning inner leadership. What this I stands for exactly and what weakens or strengthens it is a deep question that goes into the area of spirituality, and whose thorough discussion would be beyond the frame of this article (see for this Moore & Gillette, 1993).

In the archetypal psychology of C. G. Jung the "inner king" is opposite the "inner magician," and while the king represents the light of awareness and the area of conscious orders, the magician stands for the effect of the self or the hidden unconscious and for those processes of self-organization and self-regulation that appear "magical" to the conscious mind.

While we set a separate and defined figure for the I that consciously steers, it might be more congruent for the totality of the person, if some of the figures, with their self-organizing, reciprocal effects remained behind the curtain and not on stage in a concrete constellation. We can think of them there in the sense of a "magicician" who acts behind the scenes.

In this all encompassing perspective, to the extent that the "I (king)" is also just a part, he complies with the whole and its bigger movement at the same time he leads.

"Team Development" of the Inner Team (= Development of Personality)

Thus, this is a co-evolutionary process between the leading and consciously intentional I, on the one hand, and the different conscious and unconscious psyche formations and parts, on the other hand, with their own needs, strivings, and loyalties. The team development in the outer reality is also similarly a co-evolution between the team leader and his crew.

Example 2:

Peter is forty years of age and has been a leader in a service enterprise for five years. His appearance and behavior seemed to be strongly formed by social competency and rebellious reactivity against rules and "boundaries" dictated from the outside. His leadership style appeared to be cooperative and was marked by a high degree of empathy and a high tolerance in the area of interpersonal relationships. Until now, he was quite accepted and successful as a leader with this style. We've invited him to briefly describe his issue.

Peter: In difficult situations I have the feeling that I am missing leadership competency. That makes me feel insecure and I'm almost incapable of action, because I feel so muddled-up inside.

Coach: What exactly are these situations? What is the significant characteristic of these situations?

Peter: I notice this especially in situations in which a certain firmness and accountability for taking action is required. A while ago I felt this only rarely on some occasions, for quite some time I have felt it more often.

Coach: Since when exactly have these situations become more intense?

Peter: I don't know exactly, but I believe it has become stronger since I have a new boss. That frightens me and also makes me feel uncomfortable.

Coach: How would you describe the boss most accurately?

Peter: Well, he takes action. In many situations, he is much more focused on results and is firmer than I am, and that frightens me somehow. Mostly I don't feel well after I have experienced him like that.

Coach: And how would the boss describe Peter M.?

Peter: (Spontaneously) Much too soft, looks for too much interpersonal closeness and doesn't take action where it would be necessary.

Our impression and the impression of the group is that Peter has the ability and talent for "firm, results oriented action" in this or in other situations. That brings up the question, "what hinders him from using this ability?" Or, "who or what succeeds in negatively effecting his ability or causes him to repress it?"

Peter answers our question regarding his earlier experiences in similar contexts where he was confronted with firmness and results-oriented actions, and the fear this created for him: After the divorce of his parents, he had to move to his father's as a child and live with him. This worked out okay for a while, until the father used on his son the extremely harsh and results oriented behavior, "with which he acted as a successful leader."

Secretly and without the father's knowing, the son snuck away more and more often to his loving and warm mother. After a while the mother found a new, loving partner and Peter's excursions to his mother increased. In addition to that, he wished to never

become like his father. In the course of his description, and after more questioning, Peter himself felt the parallels and thought he might be seeing his father in his new boss.

We offer him the opportunity to find his inner team, together with the group, and to look at his team and feel it in a constellation. Together we come up with the following inner team members: (the numbers serve only for orientation in the constellation figure, they are not otherwise. (See Figure 5):

F = focus (Peter himself, his I) 1 = the empathizer 2 = his leisure time self 3 = his inner child (which he loves, and acts out with much feeling) 4 = the self-reflective one 5 = the warm and emotional one (full of feelings) 6 = the leader 7 = the rebel 8 = the protector of those who are excluded (7 and 8 were both felt and identified by the group after being with Peter for the two days of the training) 9 = the results oriented one, the firm one (this is not foreign to him, he can sense this part, but "I may not and do not want to be like that.") V = Father

1, 3, 4, 5 and F: These parts feel good together with warmth, closeness and security; "what could endanger us is far away."

7 & 8: We are strong and can have a great effect. We can do a lot.

2: I feel good, pleasant and good contact to 1, 3, 4, 5, F and I also feel the others.

9: I feel excluded. I am annoyed and angry (9 was place by Peter behind two divider panels).

All persons set have labels with the names of those inner team members they represent.

We bring F and 9 into eye contact with each other, and also set the father, V. Making contact between 9 and Father is initially difficult; both express the need to clear the air.

I let Peter tear label 1 into two pieces and replace that with labels for 9.1 ("having permission to be firm and get results") and 9.2 ("harmful aspects of being firm and results oriented") - these aspects he experienced with his father.

I let him give the label, 9.2 back to the Father and offer him the following sentences: F to Father: It wasn't easy for me, and I honor you as my father. I carry some of you in me, which has made it difficult for me. I give it back to you now and leave it with you.

F to 9.1: Now I see you for the first time; it's great that you are there. I believe that we can do a lot together.

F to 6: Now I see you for the first time and it feels good.

After looking at the final constellation Peter expresses the desire to connect again his entire inner team. One after the other we let each individual team member go slowly towards him and touch him slightly with one hand while saying, "I am the ___ part of you." Some minutes of silence and experiencing each other's touch follow.

Coach: How are you now? Would you like to say some thing about it?

Peter: Yes. Now it is okay; now I feel an inner calm.

III. Some Principles of Bert Hellinger's Constellation Work.

Some principles of Bert Hellinger's constellation work serve as an orientation in the setting and developing of the inner team. For example:

A. Completeness: All soul forces belong to the system.

Cut-off, excluded and repressed parts are often represented in the system by the formation of symptoms or an inner figure (which then for instance becomes the "little devil" or "trouble maker"). These symptoms or inner figures represent the excluded parts in an automatic and unproductive way and decrease the person's potential . This reminds us of the unconscious identification of one clan member with an excluded member in the family that occurs in family constellation work. If an excluded part or inner figure gets reintegrated and gets into the view of the I, the scope of the I gets bigger again. Since the I was run before by the excluded part, it can now get into a conscious and active relationship to its needs and demands and can even use them as a resource.

B. Honoring:

Only when the I acknowledges the personality parts can it create a functioning inner team and free up those energies. The needs expressed by these parts also have to acknowledge the leadership of the I. They can do this, if the I honors and cares for their needs and if the I also has a vision of the whole that it serves and integrates these needs in with the whole.

C. Balance of Give and take:

When an inner part receives the energy of the others (or of the whole system) in an appropriate way that fulfills its needs or function, energy will flow back to other personality parts or to the whole system. This creates a thirst for action or contentment or joy of live, etc. The inner exchange of give and take happens as energy. The system seems to have a sense for how much each different part "deserves" and how much is appropriate. When parts do not agree to their respective places (which can change during certain phases of the constellation), and these parts want too much, then there is chaos, unrest and stress in the whole system. This can also be observed in other systems (greater than an individual) and the resulting constellations.

IV. Integration and Differentiation.

The concept of the Inner Team supports the two principles of differentiation and integration. The teamwork of those two is the basis for any evolution. The differentiated self- perception, combined with a differentiated and conscious "dealing with one's self," is the sign of a developing person to us. Bringing out and setting the inner team according to a specific situation can contribute to this development.

There can be also the danger of "objectifying" processes of the soul. By examining an issue or theme through setting an inner team constellation in a specific, flexible context, this "objectifying" can be countered. But this topic needs more reflection.

We would welcome a collegial exchange about this kind of constellation.

Already in Gunthard Weber (1998), Christine Essen introduces an interesting example for the setting of the inner parts in her article "Constellations with Symptoms of Fear and with Panic Attacks."