



# GÖRAN GENNVI

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“The management system we have today is based on the notion that the world is predictable. But the world does not look like that. IFL’s client companies must compete in an international market and will encounter many different perspectives out there. Just face it! Leaders work with a high degree of risk and must find decision processes to manage risk. They must manage multiple perspectives in a constructive way. That is what the model is based upon – dialogue.”

## WHY

### W hat is knowledge and why is it important?

GÖRAN: I have a model from which I work that makes distinctions between different ways of communicating. What I believe is that what is known as innovative dialogue is a key to learning and is the kind of knowledge we need for the future. The dialogue model has four rooms. On the axis, it says individual-collective and conventional-new. The first is called the Courtesy Room where people talk about harmless things and common conventions. In the next room—the Debate Room—one has to prove more (for example, by asking such questions as “Where do you stand politically?”) The third room is called Exploratory Dialogue, where people must dare to bare themselves and say: “I realize you have facts that I have not. Tell me more.” In an exploratory dialogue, there is a technique that is required of how to ask questions: “What do you mean? What do you base that on?”

The fourth room you go into is like “the jazz”, “the jam session” or “the flow”. Here, people gain access to many different perspectives and can experiment and create something new together. We have a lot of learning there. This is when people become impassioned about topics and begin to jot down ideas on napkins. This fourth place is about Innovative Dialogue; it combines the key words collective and new.

What IFL is doing in order to pilot participants to the fourth room is what I call supportive-infrastructure. My specialty as faculty is to use nature. This is where nature helps, as I see it. When I am “sitting on a tree stump”, I am more inclined

to explore a bit more of another colleague's experience. I do not take these risks in the management group and the boardroom. There, I prefer to position myself and then it is the advocacy that is more important. The supporting infrastructure is very important; I think for getting "the flow" where one really adds a new perspective and builds upon each other. It can be incredibly rewarding.

So infrastructure can help to open up people's minds and create a willingness to learn? And, it can also provide tools and techniques to provide support for the participants in the programs. It is good for participants to be able to focus on what should be created while you at the IFL focus on creating the conditions.

GÖRAN: Absolutely! The management system we have today is based on the notion that the world is predictable. When I talk about this model with the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, they say: "The industry wants predictability." But, is that so then? The world does not look like that. IFL's client companies must compete in an international market and will encounter many different perspectives out there. Just face it! This is all about the fourth room: Innovative Dialogue. Leaders work with a high degree of risk and find decision processes to manage risk. They must manage multiple perspectives in a constructive way. That is what the model is based upon—dialogue.

Consider creating full trust in a management team, and getting the full potential out of your team. When I say this to CEOs, then they realize that their management team is



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90% a debriefing forum. They also realize that they need the experience and competence of others. They have recruited top people and can see how everyone is positioning him- or herself, while we move towards a future that is very uncertain. They are all co-creators of a culture that makes them not get what they need, what they really should get out of their management team.

*Is this another form of knowledge: the knowledge of how we actually get clear about what we do? Some form of decision knowledge and understanding the processes? Is it the wisdom, and art of being authentic?*

GÖRAN: I sometimes work with something we call learning canvasses. By starting with an exercise, you can build the security of those who seek order and structure, those who think that visionaries are too far away. If you look at what you already do today, it usually reveals that those who are a little resistant to the visionary dare to take the next step. This is my lesson. If you go out to the visionary too soon, you get resistance from those who feel that “Hell! We have a lot of basic things we do not take care of.”

In times like these, handling the many different perspectives on the unpredictable future is one of the big challenges in leadership.

The so called U Theory has a phase called “presencing”, where you focus on what is being created. In this part, we do not benefit from looking at history. Otto Scharmer usually talks about the notion of self with a small s, and this is what has been built up until now. The question is how can we create

space for what wants to emerge and evolve? It is when you work with people and, as they begin to access it, you can see that spark in their eyes. It is great fun.

**What is an IFL program really for?**

GÖRAN: It is definitely one of the greatest gifts you can get. I get the time to do what I know I should deal with a lot more but do not do (for example, I am given the time to reflect). I think about things that concern the future and how I work as an individual and in my various roles. It is a catalyst for what needs to be done. You truly develop regardless of what program you are involved in.

**What do managers or specialists need to know?**

GÖRAN: It is to re-learn learning itself, and understand the principles of it. I call it “sensing” since it relies on you to consciously rediscover your senses by actually listening and consciously thinking. Once you have had contact with the senses, you regain a kind of basic knowledge regarding how we, as humans, work. You get more out of life; it is exactly the same thing with learning. There are certain basic components that we forget in this (age of) information overload.

One component is the need to understand how you, yourself function. Personal development and awareness are really important, I think. Another component is the learning and dialogue in a conversation, for example. In my job as a consultant, I can get a lot out of talking to the receptionist. If you have reached this position as many of our participants do, they have run such a tough race and have been so focused on some specific areas, that these basic skills have not been fully trained.

*GÖRAN GENNVI*

**WHAT**

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Then, it is also specific areas of knowledge that they need to learn, for example funding.

A third area is to know how we get the most out of our organization in relation to our common goal. And then we mix these. The interesting thing is to know when to use these tools.

**What does a learning journey look like? The U Theory is, in fact, an idea for a learning journey.**

GÖRAN: That is for certain. I have a good example: I help a municipality to adjust their organization according to the climate issue. The first part of the “U” focuses insight through observing, observing, observing.” A participant’s learning journey may use the tools related to The U Theory and, through different scenarios, look at what they already do and what will happen in order to get another perspective. I coach, and the client builds up a sense of security over time. Suddenly, a whole new world opens up, and you realize that the great asset has been standing right in front of you all along. Sometimes, it truly is low hanging fruit. So, I think the learning journey is partly about the subject and partly about the learning process itself.

I have worked with a woman who is an environmental strategist in the municipality. We have done interviews together. Afterward, we sat and reflected together. Then we have climbed to the bottom of the U in the U Theory. I said: “with all this stuff we have collected, can you not go away for a while, ponder, and let things brew, so that we will see what you see. Come back with a few sketches of what is the next step”.



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When she called Monday morning, she was so excited. “*When I was raking the leaves out on the countryside, I suddenly realized that ‘of course...’*” Then, we have designed workshops based on what she has created and based on what came up in the observing phase, right down to the heart of the U. My question was: “What are you going to do this weekend?” “*I love to garden, then I feel connected, and feel the smell of the earth*”. “Are you thinking of work there?” “*No, not really.*” “Do you have any ideas?” Then she begins to realize that “*yes, it’s true! Sometimes it does come up.*” I help her to create her own space and go on a retreat where she can reflect and feel comfortable and natural.

## HOW

**How about the learning journey in terms of design?**

GÖRAN: When designing a program, I think we should look at things that we do not normally look at. For example, allowing participants to conduct interviews with colleagues. IFL has done this for a long time and been very good at experimenting: precisely the observing phase. We allow participants to be influenced by that which is sometimes difficult to digest, but is actually the reality.

Then the next phase happens: the bottom of the U which can be difficult to package and sell. Sitting by oneself and reflecting? In the Tällberg Forum we design the process and introduce the concept of “the stump”. Each participant receives a stump in the woods: a place where they can sit and reflect each day. This is a great way to absorb the information and process it somehow.

Then when one designs the next part “bringing it home”, insights can go a bit awry. It does not mean to crawl into tight

spaces in the traditional structure, then you lose that one should think “outside the box”. To truly ensure that you are building this kind of “ideo lab”, where you can be creative in a structured way. And, then take it home and try to implement it into a system that already exists.

It becomes a balancing act because if you are a group that will work, I think it is extremely important to provide tools for involving the organization at home.

Consider a program, which really brings in the challenge. Where the challenge is the true participant. It is a good idea, but it is still a question of how to bring in the organization. In some way, we would really like to bring in the whole system somehow.

Given the way the world looks today, I would like to develop those ideas. I think that many organizations are sufficiently “soft” now, but are able to work in a different way. There are so many structures that collapse, and it’s not as easy to fall back into old patterns.

**Do you mean that there is a readiness and an openness now?**

Göran: Yes, and that means we have to obtain intellectual acceptance at home. “It would be just wonderful if you had something that could help us in this situation.” I like the *EDGE Leading complex change program* because it has a significantly higher degree of integration processes. I think that is a must. The earlier we start working with change and adapt to new conditions, the better we will perform.



We've touched on the learning environment before: that it is important WHERE you do things. How does that affect things?

GÖRAN: I usually use the term “supporting infrastructure”, which is simply based on how the environment consciously and subconsciously affects us. Design, everything that human hands have created, has an effect. I think that IFL has been very good achieving this. You have taken people to different places, on study trips and so on.

If you want to break old patterns, then you need to create a safe container: in other words, a safe environment for learning, which means that I will be more authentic and do not need to attach myself to a title. For me, nature has been a way to quickly create a safe container. Most Swedes have a relationship with nature that enables them to immediately start to feel good. Then, I think that learning becomes completely different; it is much quicker to come up with the questions with which you need to work.

Who fits into IFL's programs? Which actors are important in learning and what roles they play?

**WHO**

GÖRAN: One criticism I have is that IFL programs can easily be monocultures. Let me take the example from the course on Lidingö (Society for Organizational Learning, 1999). We had a big tent and we had beautifully arranged autumn leaves on the dining room table and a large fire in the middle. It was really nice and then we had a flutist that played and everyone became silent and sat down. And there stood the Indian chief Oren Lyons and we all sat there mesmerized; it was almost

a sacred atmosphere. And so, there was this small child who started to cry, and several participants became irritated several. Then Oren says: “Oh, I am blessed” and then there is a long pause. “I am so glad that we have participants from the younger generations here. It is a privilege to have the children here with us for it is actually for them we do most things”. What an eye-opener!

It is very important that the programs do not become monocultures. What we talked about earlier—diversity—the many perspectives must be welcomed. I think that segregated structures of society, segregated business, and a patriarchal environment do not belong to the future. The environment and the participants are connected; and, we must find ways to involve other groups of people, instead of just keeping to ourselves.

**So the answer is that many more people are suited to the IFL program than we might imagine?**

GÖRAN: Yes, and the increasing complexity will require substantially more in the program’s design. You should see this as an opportunity.

**What is the role of various actors in the learning process?**

GÖRAN: I believe in inviting reality: inviting representatives from different perspectives and creating a real space in the design. For example, inviting a young person, between 16—18 years old, who may have exciting ideas that belong to the future. People might think: how sweet.

You have to frame it so that people listen as though it were Anders Borg, Minister of Finance, who was standing up there.

It requires more of us when we design for the participants to seize the opportunity that is given to them.

**What happens to the program manager role?**

GÖRAN: That role is yet more important to be innovative when it comes to finding other, new knowledge brokers, and providing perspective intermediaries. That's what I think we are extremely adept at doing in the Tällberg Forum. There is an incredible range of art, intellectual intermediary, and process. The voice from the developing world may almost have more space and power than Professor This or That. Participants have easier access to the professor's voice than to the person who works with entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe. Then, you have to highlight and reinforce in a way, so that people are on edge and open up.

The design is really important. You at IFL are strong today; however, you could be even more exciting and innovative.

**What then is the effect of a program? For the individual and also for the organization?**

GÖRAN: It may have the effect that participants quit. Still programs are filled! I think that you can release the creativity and energy and get more secure individuals who actually make contact with their full potential because they have gone to a program and if they choose to remain and forge ahead, that's fine. But, it is also good if they say "Okay, I make a settlement plan, and make sure they get the best out of me during these two years that I have left."

I prefer a person who really stands out in the crowd and does things for the organization's best interests. The effect is

**IMPACT**

“If we don’t learn, someone else will.”



## FUTURE

to become better at the thing one already does. This is a basic requirement, but its real potential in one’s ability to become more innovative, creative, and energized. These are the people who come to work with a real spark in their eyes.

It is desirable to have groups of five from each organization. Then islands start to support each other. I use the word enzyme: the enzymes are also affected by the process. If one can make a commitment to finding a business model that is attractive for both the IFL and the client, then the probability is greater that there will be an effect that the organization / customer wants.

**What do you think about the future of learning?**

GÖRAN: I think that the institutions we have today are ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that we actually face. I think that climate and environmental issues and the world’s financial restructuring will affect so much. Structures will be reviewed and redesigned; it is part of evolution. For me, sustainability is the same as adaptation and resilience.

Sustainability easily becomes an add-word; i.e. a word that you can add to anything. But, what is really at stake is that we have been blown off course. We’ve lost what is the foundation of evolution—all of the organisms’ ability to adapt to new realities.

If we don’t learn, someone else will. When learning is “key”, it’s really hard for those who strive to maintain systems. There must be a balance between controller and innovator. More and more people are beginning to understand on an intellectual level that “Oops! Now it’s tough shit.” For





example, the Copenhagen meeting that we all are awaiting. How do we agree? When we have the common global problems such as climate change, then we have no institutional framework to handle them.

From big to small, this affects us all; therefore, it will also require certain components in the programs. Sustainability becomes a basic requirement. There are two driving forces: regulatory requirements and market demands. You can either adapt and do exactly what you need to or you can surpass the requirements and go forward.

*Can you see that this has implications for teaching and learning?*

GÖRAN: Yes. We are entering a new territory, where we begin to seek knowledge in other areas and become open to the many perspectives and creativity. I've been thinking about going to IFL and seeing if we could do something about that in some way. We need an institution with a traditional position to deal with what is new.

*You mean that IFL has many ears, while shouldering the large responsibility of dealing with both the old and new at the same time?*

GÖRAN: Absolutely. We need to lovingly embrace our conventions. There is value in a position that allows those who are most vulnerable and afraid of change to actually start looking at it in another way. This is where I think IFL could play a role.

I've been playing with the idea of designing a program that takes people on this trip that we've talked about: formulating a program that actually works to visualize the traditional ways of organizing and leading.

By default, it is how we think and how businesses are organized, how we seek knowledge, and how we lead. You shift the focus and try to look at the new. Then we can, in fact, also understand that there are two paradigms.

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

GÖRAN: What I absolutely want to stress is that sustainability is the same as adaptation that, in turn, is the same as learning. It is so amazingly exciting, but it can sometimes be painful. “It worked so well and we earned money, and then the carpet was pulled out from underneath us.”

Around 1990, I began looking for other ways of thinking. We were so linear in terms of strategy and processes, that my understanding was that people are afraid of change. So, I started thinking about the question: Is there a place in the world where there are people or cultures that do not fear but, in fact, embrace change and see it as a way of life? I found the North American Indians’ teaching wheel: the Medicine Wheel, which is based on the notion that everything goes in cycles. Things are constantly changing, and it is all about having a dynamic balance. Dynamic balance is the movement that creates balance.

**Is it like cycling?**

GÖRAN: Exactly. Riding a bike is a good example.

**When I think back to our conversation—what is it that I would like individuals who have gone through an IFL program to take with them? It is to experience the dynamic balance in a positive way.**

GÖRAN: When I meet with participants and clients, people



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automatically say that they are prone to change; they have learned that it must be said. And we see the fear in their eyes. And then I say: “Let us take away the concept of change; can we not say development instead? And so, I draw up this development cycle, and we can receive new impressions, new lessons, new skills, and new encounters from which we can learn. ☞