

INTROVISION: INTROSPECTION WITH A WIDE VISION

By Norbert Distler
(published in German at "Training aktuell" 04/2020)



Introvision in Coaching

The dissolution of inner blockages and limiting beliefs has always been part of many coaching sessions. In our dynamic world, where one's own thought patterns are being questioned more and more often, this work will become even more important, says coach Norbert Distler - and explains how the Introvision method can help.

Everybody has inner beliefs or expectations: for example, we know exactly how colleagues, employees or superiors should be, or we have very specific expectations of ourselves. Unfortunately, these ideas are often not fulfilled by reality, and our own ideas create pressure that tends to block us directly or indirectly.

This problem is exacerbated by digitalization, disruption and COVID-19. Thanks to the high dynamics, unpredictability and disruptive changes, we have to challenge, change and adapt our previous patterns of thinking and behavior more and more quickly.

When the world outside is rapidly and unpredictably changing, it is all the more important to look inward with a focus

As these complex times put greater demands on our ability to cope, our feelings of competence decrease in direct proportion to the increase in uncertainty in the world.

Therefore, we must learn more and more urgently to deal constructively with the conflicts that arise from disappointed expectations and unfulfilled inner demands.

Introvision as reality coaching

The often-observed impulse to do more of the same, in the sense of Paul Watzlawick, is not very helpful: Because when the world does not meet one's expectations or the perceived insecurity is high, one clings even more to what has provided security up to now.

But like all other conflict avoidance strategies like ignoring or trivializing for example, this strategy falls short, limits one's own perception and costs a lot of energy. Because it does not change the corresponding emotional schema that permeates thinking, feeling and acting, it cannot permanently close the discrepancy between one's own expectations (imperatives) and the reality that contradicts them.

The Introvision method developed by Prof. Angelika C. Wagner at the University of Hamburg, on the other hand, aims to achieve precisely this. Its goal is to dissolve the inner conflicts, i.e. the imperatives and the associated automatisms, or at least to weaken their daily impact. For this purpose, it provides a guide that helps to "get to the core" of an inner conflict, and in a second step helps to face it more calmly. Introvision has two elements for this:

- ▶ Acknowledging attentive perception (AAP)
- ▶ The identification and approaching of the core imperative (= core of the inner conflict)

First of all: Learning to perceive, acknowledging, and attentive

Acknowledging attentive perception (AAP) in its various degrees of challenge is a non-judgmental form of perception. It is initially trained with exercises similar to those practiced

in Mindful-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) by Jon Kabat-Zinn. In the beginning, it is about widening one's perception and observing one's own hearing, seeing or other body sensations or one's own thoughts without focus for one to two minutes.

In the next step AAP is practiced with a focus - for example, on a certain sound or a situation of success or joy, in later stages also a stressful situation: It is important to maintain the widened perception despite the focus. This is called bifocality. It can be difficult at the beginning, especially with emotionally charged issues, and it is normal to oscillate between focus and wideness. The aim of AAP practice is to maintain a wide, non-judgmental perception without getting lost in the focus. AAP is introduced successively in coaching and training. A coachee can also practice the preliminary stages on his or her own and integrate them into self-management.

Only when she - or he - has mastered the technique can the actual intro- vision process be started. Then coach and coachee can approach the most challenging aspect of introvision: being in this wide mode of perception and at the same time focusing attention on emotionally unpleasant aspects of her experience.



Introvision in coaching can also be used to dissolve deep-seated blockages in clients - such as the fear of rejection or failure: In an iterative process, after clarifying the issue, the obstructive imperatives are gradually identified by thinking aloud, the subcognition (i.e. the thoughts to be avoided behind them) are discovered and named by constant questioning, and the associated feelings at the center of the unpleasantness are consciously confronted - until all imperatives are successively dissolved.

The process of Introvision

These worlds are now identified in the rather circular, chained process of introvision (see previous diagram): It begins with the description of the coaching topics, where sometimes beliefs, imperatives and imperative violations already show up directly. If this is not the case, the coach can also invite the coachee to describe a typical situation as concretely as possible, this is called "Thinking aloud afterwards". In doing so, she can help the coachee track down the imperatives by asking more in-depth questions. Manager Jane, for example, reports at the beginning of the coaching about her difficulties in delegating tasks. She has already recognized that the reason for this is that her idea of the target is getting in the way: The expectation that employees complete tasks with exactly the same precision and the same understanding is not compatible with reality. Nevertheless, she was always upset when tasks were not done exactly her way and had conflicts with unreliable colleagues. As often as possible, she therefore refrained from delegation and preferred to do the tasks herself or to control them extremely closely, which of course led to an increased workload and various symptoms of stress.

Tracking down and identifying imperatives

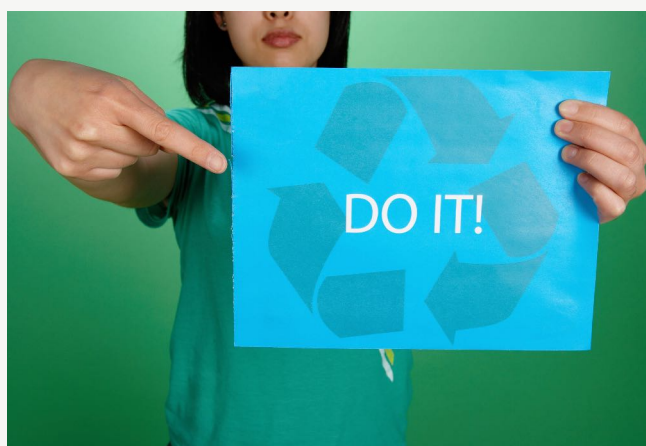
In order to identify the inner conflict and the imperatives (imperative violations responsible for it more precisely), the core imperatives are now approached. This is done in several iterations:

The coachee is first asked to think of a specific situation that is difficult for him or her. Manager Jane, for example, thinks about what it is like when the person to whom she has delegated does not deliver the expected results. Her counselor asks, "What thoughts go through your mind then?" She encourages the manager to externalize her inner dialogue in this situation

by thinking aloud afterwards. In doing so, she looks at Jane's thoughts through the lens of imperatives, so to speak - that is, she pays attention to phrases like:

- ▶ I always, never ("Never can I rely on someone")
- ▶ I/he/... has to/need(s) to/ must or should („I have to make the right decision“)
- ▶ I/ it/ she/ he mustn't... („I mustn't disappoint my manager“)

In the case of manager Jane, for example, the coach detects the phrases: "I'm not allowed to make any mistakes, that's why I have to check all the results".



Subcognitions - The thoughts behind the inner commands

Once an imperative has been identified by the coach during the exploration of critical situations, he names the subcognition, i.e. the thought to be avoided behind the imperative. To do this, he reformulates the statement "I must" to a "It may be that ...". Elke's statement can be rephrased by the consultant in two ways: "It may be that I make a mistake." Or, "It is possible that I am not checking all the results." For example, she confronts Jane with the first imperative and asks her, "If you think this thought and perceive this in a wide acknowledging way, what emerges ... ?"

It is quite important here to emphasize that by verbalizing the subcognition only a possibility is addressed. It is not a fixed assumption in the

sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy. But neither is it about ignoring the situation. For Jane, it is specifically about acknowledging the aspect of reality that lies between "I will definitely not make mistakes" and "I always make mistakes." To allow possibilities back into her thinking. This acceptance is crucial.

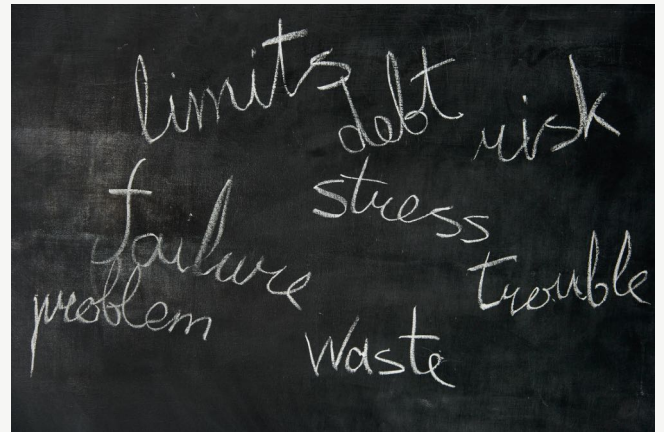
Revealing chains of imperatives

If Jane now thinks "It may be that I can't control all the outcomes," she again notices in an acknowledging attentive way which thoughts and feelings emerge, what is particularly unpleasant and where the center of the unpleasantness lies. During the process the coach is giving her time to immerse herself in the situation and to hold the search process until reactions emerge - possibly also in her facial expressions and gestures. This often happens after 20 to 30 seconds.

From the thoughts she verbalizes, the coach again identifies imperatives and offers them - each as a subcognition with the new rephrasing: "It may be that ..." - . For coaches, this may be a challenge. The challenge is to restrain one's own variety of formulations and to remain very close to the client's words and direct one's attention to the caring, accepting support of her inner processes.

In Janes case, for example, the following imperative chain is revealed:

- ▶ I must not trust my colleagues.
- ▶ I have to control everything.
- ▶ I must not disappoint my customers.
- ▶ I must not appear incompetent.



In the center of the unpleasant

The last sentence, rephrased, triggers particularly strong emotional reactions in Jane: "I may appear incompetent." It is one of her core imperatives that is violated. These core imperatives - even if they are very individual in their choice of words - are usually very closely related to the categories described by psychologist Aaron Beck. "Helpless, Worthless, Loveless" is how the founder of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy named them: It is almost always about the feeling of being helpless, worthless or unloved. These feelings we want to avoid at all costs.

While thinking "I may appear incompetent" (the sub-cognition), Jane now approaches with AAP the emerging unpleasant emotions and acknowledges them without falling into paralysis or overactivity. She focuses her attention on exactly those points where the most unpleasant feelings arise. At the same time she also stays wide in her perception noticing all the sensations of the present moment.



This is not easy, but with the help of the previously practiced AAP, she can manage it and balance between the perceptions in the present moment and facing the difficult emotions. If it is possible to maintain space and focus in the face of the difficult at the same time, a deep feeling of peace, acceptance and serenity can also arise from time to time: It is what it is.

Through the serenity, which grows in the repeated approach to the core imperative(s), the emotional system can reorganize itself, the automatic reaction pattern can be decoupled. The coachees gain better access to all their resources and new behaviors become accessible.

In the future, Jane can face the possibility that she may appear incompetent. This reduces the amount of control she has to exert externally, increases her ability to deal constructively with conflicts in her work together, and improves her work-life balance in the further course of coaching.

Introvision in Coaching

In coaching, it is particularly useful when the following situations arise:

- ▶ internal conflicts that need to be resolved;
- ▶ external conflicts and the associated inner experience are to be dealt with or anxiety and stressful states are to be treated;
- ▶ internal and external change processes trigger uncertainty, e.g. changes of roles in the course of agile transformation processes and a manager suddenly has to adapt his or her own mindset;
- ▶ a difficult entrepreneurial decision-making process has to be made in the face of external disruption.

In order for Introvision to be successful, coaches should have a lot of confidence in the process and have gone through introvision processes of their own. They should guide their coachees clearly, compassionate and, especially when looking at difficult situations, even prepare them that not everything will be pleasant.



Serenity and calm

As both coachee and coach experience the effects of Introvision it can be surprising and beautiful for both what new possibilities to act arise. Often, as the coachee's inner attitudes and conflicts reduce, there is a natural tendency toward fewer conflicts in their daily environments. Introvision does not merely have an impact on singular issues, but leads toward a more peaceful approach in one's broader life experiences.

As a result of these direct changes in the coachee's inner world, the method has an impact on the organization. Not only can these individuals deal with challenges more agilely, because their personal ability to change has increased, but they will also produce fewer conflicts, resolve new conflicts more constructively, as they are now more relaxed, and less driven by perfectionism and/or fear.

(First published in German in "Training aktuell" 04/2020, p. 20 – 24)



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Tips for Coaches to apply Introvision

1. **Practice acknowledging attentive perception (AAP):** e.g. with this guide by Norbert Distler on InsightTimer: [insig.ht/ gm_87711](https://insig.ht/gm_87711)
2. **Attunement to arrive:** To clarify the intention, ask the coachee or coachees, "Take a wide inner posture and look at the question: when would this session be helpful for you?"
3. **Practicing AAP as a coach yourself:** Acknowledging attentive perception supports you to go along well with the process - and to better put aside your own preoccupations and expectations, as well as to be open to the signals of the other person
4. **Give time and space:** Allow your coachee plenty of time for the AAP and observe gestures and facial expressions carefully. Often you can tell from a change that new thoughts are emerging.
5. **Integrate the feeling of being stuck:** "It may be that we are not getting anywhere right now If you apply AAP to this, where is the center of unpleasantness?"
6. **Integrate body sensations directly into the process:** e.g. "It may be that you now feel pressure in your stomach / that an inner fog appears / If you perceive this in a wide mode, where is the center of unpleasantness?"
7. **Start quickly:** A quick diving into the introvision process is helpful so that the coachee can experience the method swiftly.
8. **Get permission:** Clarify with the coachee in advance that you will interrupt conflict avoidance strategies (CAS) like ignoring, glossing over, trivializing, rationalizing, theorizing
9. **Repeat literally:** To activate the individual memory areas, it is extremely important to integrate exactly the coachee's words. They function like a key to his memories. This is a challenge for those who are used to summarizing in their own words.
10. **Formulate briefly:** It is best to name sub-cognitions in just one sentence: "It may be that you seem incompetent in this situation."
11. **Postpone finding solutions:** The search for solutions comes after the Introvision process. Drifting away during it distracts from the emotional experience.

