



iMOtion

iMOtion - Framing Informal Moments (IM) in Trainings

Input: “The DRAMMA Model” – What is it and how can it benefit adult education?

English Input on the iMOtion podcast episode on the DRAMMA model recorded in German language in Denmark, March 2023.

Authors: Julia Keil, Jan Schröder

This article:

- **Introduces you to the so-called DRAMMA model (Detachment, Relaxation, Autonomy, Mastery, Meaning, Affiliation) that derives from the field of Work and Organizational Psychology.**
- **Explores which discoveries adult educators can draw from the model.**
- **Recommends further readings.**

Both during our project meetings in Wiener Neustadt and during a podcast episode, recorded by the adult educators Julia Keil and Jan Schröder, we had the opportunity to explore the DRAMMA model. The so-called DRAMMA model derives from the (academic) field of Work and Organizational Psychology and it is an examination of the importance of psychological needs in the choice and conduct of leisure activities. During our project we practiced an interdisciplinary approach and used our reading of the DRAMMA model as an offset point to reflect on the importance of recreation during trainings. The original Model applies to breaks from and free time after work, which also includes weekends and holidays. It is centred around the question how recovery experiences and activities during off-the-clock time matter for the restoration of both



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productivity and especially creativity of employees. Further it encompasses in which way the employees experience of their leisure time is closely related to their subjective wellbeing. One concluding point in DRAMMA-related studies is, that recovery is needed and that recovery processes often do not happen by themselves but that a person has to actively reflect upon them. Another key conclusion is, that those processes can be facilitated/initiated. DRAMMA is an acronym and identifies the following six psychological needs:

- Detachment
- Relaxation
- Autonomy
- Mastery
- Meaning
- Affiliation

“D” as in Detachment:

Detachment from work in the DRAMMA model refers to mental disengagement. If you want to “switch off”, you must mentally distance yourself from work! It is therefore more than being physically away from work. But it helps if you have the possibility to change the location during breaks, after work and during holidays. Introverted people might even choose places of nearly total isolation, where nobody else finds and disturbs them. In situations where leaving or separating is not an option, headphones with music can be a strategy and support the individuals thoughts and mind to drift off.

As mobile devices and the world wide web have significantly impacted many peoples lives, the detachment need is difficult to fulfil. It can be quite complicated to work from home, while reduced psychological detachment from work can lead to emotional exhaustion. Tidying up or completely clearing away the workplace at home, including the laptop is a strategy. Easier said than done, in particular if you are self-employed and do not have the means to possess two laptops – e.g. one for work and one for leisure and other non-work-related activities. A suggestion is to tuck away your devices for the night, starting an hour or two before bedtime. That includes not just smartphones but also other electric devices. Another strategy, to detach from your thoughts on and about



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work, can be a hobby that demands your full bodily attention, e.g. climbing, salsa dancing or roller-skating.

Related to adult educational training we harvest the insight that inhouse trainings, held at a customer's/client's company, often are disadvantageous when it comes to detachment. When clients hire experts to perform as inhouse trainers, those clients often prefer setups at their own company premises – for the simple reasons of practical organization and cost reduction. This makes it significantly harder for the trainer to create an atmosphere of detachment from the workplace. Being close to their work desk the learners will tend to deal with business-tasks during the breaks instead of enhancing their potential detachment. However, within the context of adult education, we have a more positive view on electric devices, such as smartphones. We have observed that learners use them as tools to reach strong levels of the envisaged mental disengagement and they work particularly well if spatial detachment is not a possibility. For instance on your mobile phone you can take your favourite music with you, engage in games of patience or conduct language practice with respective applications. Those types of activities often serve e.g. introverted people to create an informal moment of detachment for themselves. The DRAMMA model supports us to remember that disengagement is a healthy thing, and some learners are obviously in stronger need of it than others during their breaks – it should not be misunderstood as lack of interest.

“R” as in Relaxation:

Activities that relax the body are going for a walk, a massage, stretching, a bath or swimming. Generally speaking, also activities that require little physical or mental effort and do not pose any social challenges seem to have a relaxing effect. These are often activities that are familiar and routine and that take place in known places, as some people are stressed by new experiences and people. Listening to music, reading or committing to household chores can be experienced as relaxing (to some) and support their recovery process. The important point is that we should be subjectively happy when carrying out those activities. For some people preparing a meal is relaxing for others it might be



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stressful. Following the DRAMMA model, whether or not something is relaxing, depends less on the activities themselves and more on how they are perceived psychologically. Fruitful for the recovery process is when leisure activities do not draw on the same cognitive or physical resources you already used during work. Therefore, tax consultants helping their friend with the tax declaration in the evenings will not reach the same level of recovery during their work break as tax consultants helping their friend gardening.

Related to adult educational trainings we have harvested the insight, that the activities should not draw on the same cognitive or physical resources one already used during the content-related training units, in order to beneficially frame breaks and informal moments. After a phase of high activity and group activities a calmer and more meditative offer makes sense, respectively after a more lecture-type unit a break and informal moment offer should contain movement and activity. An important take away is, that it is imperative to offer as much choice of varieties as possible, in order to cater to different needs among the learners. This builds a bridge to the third psychological need of “autonomy”.

“A” as in Autonomy:

Autonomy in the original model refers to a sense of choice and agency. It is here defined as the degree to which an individual freely chooses to participate in a leisure activity. If an employee is complaining about the circumstance that the employer should not offer a yoga course, but make sure that the person can go home on time to choose their own sport they refer to the concept of autonomy. This implies that persistent enquiring or otherwise singling out a participant is contra productive, especially if said participant has already made it clear that they do not wish to participate in an offered leisure activity. The person will not be happy doing those activities and thus will not be able to recover during the activities. On the other hand, a rather difficult activity chosen by your own and driven by intrinsic motivation – as for example learning a foreign language – can contribute to satisfaction and “recharge your batteries”. To satisfy the need for autonomy is difficult, as most people live complex lives, where they have to relate to the needs of others, e.g. family members or class/training mates. Some people



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prefer active and engaging leisure activities, others might have a mental need to be alone.

Related to adult educational trainings reflecting on “autonomy” has the potential to open discussions about something that is often not discussed or reflected openly. It can challenge a certain built in discrepancy between theory and practice in adult education. Some trainings in adult education are not freely chosen by the participant (or by the trainer). Specific language courses, technical or software trainings are often mandatory for employees in order to maintain their position, status and job. People are sent or talked into courses they might have not chosen by their own. At least in some European countries classes for the unemployed are “semi-free choice” as unemployment assistance and allowance are interlinked with a “duty to cooperate” regarding further education. Those classes – despite of being part of adult education and long-life learning – will be perceived as “work” and offer less added value with regards to recreate from work and day-to-day life. In fact, they might drain a person even further.

Furthermore, one basic idea of our project was that *informal moments* that occur before the training starts, during breaks, during training units and after training should be recognized as having a significant role within courses or programs aimed at adult education. We agreed that the use of and engagement in these *informal moments* depends on the **participant's free choice**, which may or may not coincide with the trainer's intention. They are framed spaces & time for *informal learning, group dynamics, recreation & well-being* to happen, in order to respond to the different learners' needs. The DRAMMA model reminds us that we as trainers must keep an eye on the fact that the frame “freedom of choice” is clearly communicated over and over, and that this mantra is not undermined by the group dynamics of the learners. Our experience is that some members of a group feel that enforced participation – via any imaginable way of peer pressure – in an *informal moment* is legitimate and preferable over individual/divided experiences. An example of this being participants asking other participants to explain why they do not intend to join a joint, yet optional, dinner. In those moments we as trainers have a duty to intervene, to secure autonomy on the learner's side. We conclude that at least we as trainers are



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“M” as in Mastery:

The need of mastery might seem a bit confusing at first glance, when we envision a model about leisure activities. In the DRAMMA model, however, learning opportunities and challenges do not contradict relaxing leisure time. The fact that activities that demand some efforts contribute to recovery only seems surprising at first glance. Many learners intuitively seek to explore new places and horizons during their off-job time, especially on vacation. Mastery is a term to describe the degree to which a leisure activity challenges and provides learning opportunities for individuals to improve their skills and achieve a new level of success. Those mastery experiences must not be as extreme as e.g. ballet or getting a pilot license. Mastery experiences challenge an individual without overextending their capabilities. It could be trying a new cooking recipe or painting. Important is that you enter a state of total absorption and concentration that leads to the optimal experience. A phenomenon often described as „flow“ by psychologists and authors. It is however interesting to note that a significant number of people who achieve extraordinary results in their job were as well rather advanced in some of their leisure time activities. Inversely this means of course, that they must have been very conscious of taking breaks to elaborate those skills. The development of new resources and skills in the recovery time increases self-confidence.

Related to adult educational trainings the concept of “mastery” supports us to value the interests and aptitudes of our learners aside from our specific training aims. Observing how learners use their *informal moments* according to their personal needs can offer us a way of understanding our learners better. We as well cannot stress out enough that the object of your mastery is not as decisive as the joy you have being occupied with it. To regain your energy and creativity it doesn't matter at all if you master the flute, know every Italo-Western-Soundtrack, or create a raspberry cake. The model as well offers us an opportunity to reflect more closely on the activities we personally feel drawn to and if we can implement them in our training routine. As for instance going for a swim in the morning during a workshop week or practice sewing works on a long train-ride. As the occupation with these activities can contribute to our



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overall well-being. This might require preparations and awareness from our side for instance to travel with the right equipment.

“M” as in Meaning:

Activities that enrich your life und make your life more meaningful. For example, activities that support other people. Activities within the family or the neighbourhood – helping children with their homework, supporting the elderly neighbour. The feeling of benefiting or contributing to society by being an active member of social organisations: commitment to development aid, helping the homeless, spiritual journeys or activities that advocate wildlife and the environment are examples of activities people gain positive emotions from. The unplanned spontaneous help or the friendly gesture in everyday life can generate positive emotions as meaning can be developed through having a powerful experience or interaction. Activities that have a purpose and achieve a personal or societal goal.

Related to adult educational trainings we have observed that participants tend quite naturally to help each other during training and/or during breaktime. We should be sensible to offer enough informal space and time to allow *informal moments* of this mutual assistance. Obviously, it is not always the trainer who can contribute with the best explanation or practical relevance of the topic. The direct peers often have a better understanding how to impart the practical value of the learning content. The model encourages you as well to withdraw yourself from the agitating role and to educate yourself on simple and more complex methods of **cooperative learning** to offer an overall better learning experience for the participants.

“A” as in Affiliation:

The need to belong. Refers to the fact that we are a social “animal”. Being together with a partner, family, friends or people that share joint interests with you and support your activities and thoughts help you to recover.



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Related to adult educational trainings we as trainers should always remember that some learners might have some serious tasks to master “aside” the on-going qualification/training, e.g. caring for an elderly relative or a child. Particularly women, as the traditional emotional labourers, often have a “second agenda” that might affect their learning experience and performance. Of course, serious events with people close to us will always affect us and our learning. But schedules should not be as packed that an occasional call/videoconference to beloved ones, a little task related to volunteer work or a not so serious but nevertheless sudden event at home prevents participants to join a joint dinner or leisure activity. We should as well not judge, make fun or get annoyed of events we see during online-training when for instance a child calls for attention.

Further Readings:

“Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less” by Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, Penguin Random House, 2018 is an entertaining book about the necessity of recreation and rest. It covers not only many examples how people – successful in their field - took their rest (e.g. Marie Curie, Nils Bohr, J.R.R Tolkien or Dwight Eisenhower) but as well explains the function of and research on the brain in a very intelligible fashion. The book is a bestseller and has been translated to many European languages. The author is a holder of a doctorate degree in the history and sociology of science of the University of Pennsylvania. Among others, the Silicon Valley based visionary Soojung-Kim Pang is a promoter of the 4-day workweek.

Scientific Readings:

The Drama model integrates existing needs and recovery models. Among others the Drama model is based on initial studies by the psychologists Sabine Sonnentag und Charlotte Fritz as “The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: Development and Validation of a Measure for Assessing Recuperation and Unwinding from Work“, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007 or „*Recovery from job stress: „The Stressor-Detachment Model as an Integrative Framework“*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Sonnentag and Fritz 2015. The Akronym DRAMMA was coined by the article “Leisure and



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Subjective Well-Being: A Model of Psychological Mechanisms as Mediating Factor“ in Journal of Happiness Studies 2014 by David Newman, Louis Tay and Ed Wiener. Under the Acronym DRAMMA their article is proposing the above-mentioned core psychological mechanisms that leisure potentially triggers to promote subjective well-being.

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