## 7.2 Theoretical and historical background of the qualitative T-Groups

In the professional literature we can find different kinds of definitions concerning the concept of **training**. In the Hungarian Encyclopaedia of Adult Education the self-directed character of learning is emphasized: *"Training is a learning form done in a given, usually narrow topic, under the direct guidance of a skilled leader. It is based on directed practice until the participant possibly reaches the level of the skill that is an ability to carry on independent work."* (Kiszter, 2002, p. 550). According to Aronson trainings have an important role in exploring personality, defining the relation to the world. *"I learn how to behave, how others perceive me, I can see how my behaviour influences them and how I am influenced by others."* (Aronson, 2007, p. 251). Others lay an emphasis on skill development: *"... trainings develop self-knowledge, knowledge of human nature, social and leadership skills, cooperation, communication and problem-solving skills."* (Gazdag, 1991, p. 12-23) Légrádiné Lakner Szilvia considers trainings as *"a method of development in a team, aiming basically at improving skills, in which participants gain personal experiences, they get new knowledge about themselves, others and their attitude in different situations through learning by experience. To achieve this, trainers apply various games, situational and role plays, which are processed and the participants can give feedback to each other, the laws of group dynamics start working and thus the social and interpersonal skills of the participants will develop."* (Légrádiné, 2006, p. 61) The point of trainings is that the participants acquire new knowledge rather by mainly working in groups through experience, under real, lifelike circumstances instead of traditional frontal classroom teaching framework.

**Brief historical outline of trainings**
When we want to find **the antecedents of the training method** and the **historical roots of its emergence** we must go back as far as the ancient Greeks. Even in those times we can talk about a sort of **"ancient** T-group" in connection with the peripatetic school of Aristotle. Also, Socrates was often surrounded by youngsters, who were studying the art of debating and rhetoric with a peculiar method. The sophists declared that the thoughts slumbering in humans must be brought to the surface. This could be the foundation of today's training method too. However the history of training groups of scholarly character specialized in altering behaviour only dates back to sixty years ago. In the establishment of the training method sociology, social psychology, the early attempts of group psychotherapy did a great job. The predecessors of today's self-recognition groups must be searched for in the **twentieth century**. Among the early concepts of group psychotherapy we can mention the methods applied in healing pulmonary patients by *Joseph H. Pratt*, and the study group of Sigmund Fraud. The participants of the study group assembled in 1906 shared their thoughts, fantasies and life experiences. Between the two world wars several procedures and **theories of**

group psychotherapy appeared, such as the group analysis of *T. Burrow*, who put the group in the centre of the work or the opposite of this, the therapy group of *S. Slavson*, who emphasised the importance of the individual. Sigmund Freud is considered to have been the creator of psychoanalysis and Jakob Levy Moreno, the maker of the method of psycho drama and sociometry. It was them who realized that human relations are primarily based on emotions and sympathy. *Kurt Hahn*, the father of the experiential learning which is a basis for the training method laid emphasis on learning through gaining active experience in the process of personality development instead of acquiring theoretical knowledge. *Elton Mayo* with his colleagues – in the course of his experiments – came to the conclusion that increasing productivity can also be achieved by the special influence on the human factor. Interpersonal relations have a determining role in performance. Yet, taking the above mentioned things into consideration we can say the formation of the training movement is linked to the work of **Kurt Lewin** (Forintos, 2006, p. 56-57). The **first important stage** of the birth of T-group (training group) was the establishment of the Center for Group Dynamics in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1944 created by Lewin. Another important event in the birth of training groups is the conference organized in the state of **Connecticut** in **1946** under the leadership of Lewin with the purpose of preparing the leaders for the effective methods of fighting against racial and religious prejudice. At the conference there were mainly pedagogues, social workers, businessmen and top managers. The participants worked in groups, the work consisted of group debates and role plays. We regard this as the beginning of the groups of self-knowledge and personality development. As a result of the conference the *National Training Laboratories* was established in Bethel in the state of Main, which became the centre for researching the T-group method after the death of Lewin. Few such people could make so remarkable an impact on the development of modern social sciences as Lewin with his researches, theories and his whole life-work. His work built the foundation for the today's human resource-development trainings, leader training and organization developer T-groups. To sum it up it can be stated that Lewin was the person who lined up the processes of group dynamics for developing individual and social skills. During his experiments he revealed that feedback has an indispensable role in developing human relations. The endeavours started in the **sixties** were aiming at exploring personal resources, general personality development and at increasing human potential. The teams were set up mainly to make community gathering and meeting possible. The demand for these meetings created the so-called **encounter-groups**, which are linked with the name of *Carl Rogers, Benjamin Bloom* and *Maslow*. The main point of encounter-groups is to help disclosing themselves based on the emotions and interactions of the participants without a defined syllabus. These groups spread at a rapid pace, in which approximately ten million people are estimated to have taken part between the beginning of the sixties and the end of the seventies in America. Meanwhile the traditional psychotherapy was also going in the same direction. The therapists gathered the patients needing help into groups and developed and

mastered themselves in the new methods. At the same time **alternative methods**, such as Synanon groups, Gestalt therapy and marathons quickly spread all over the country (Rudas, 2007, p. 16-18). The training method reached the top of its **popularity** in the **80´s**, when nationwide training movements got started in the USA meant for various target groups. **In our country** there was state-maintained **leader training**, but foreign experts, advisor firms and organization development companies also appeared. In the eighties Gordon's efficiency development trainings, Bern's effective personality theory, transaction analysis and NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), which meant system of concrete psychological, psychotherapeutic and communication techniques based on experience – all of these were very much liked training forms (Takács, 2006). The primary **target groups** of the **first trainings** were sales representatives and customer service assistants. The reason was on one hand that the concurrent firms of the market, front men of the corporations came to the fore and played an important role in achieving the economic success of companies. The organizations realized that they could utilize their resources in the most optimal way if they try to get their employees to do their best with the help of suitable trainings. Today the review of the Hungarian training market would be a big and impossible challenge since trainings are held by advisor firms and organization development companies, university lecturers, pedagogues and even head hunters. However the quantitative features of the **tendency of the development** of training market have been replaced by qualitative characteristics: the customer has a demand for refined aims, professional training programs, qualified trainers (Forintos, 2006, p. 57).

## Main features of trainings

*Weiss*, in his research studying the extent of memory found the following outcome: after three days adults will remember *10 % of what they have read, 20 % of what they have listened, 30 % of what they have seen, 50 % of what they have listened and seen, 70 % of what they have said* and **90 % of what they have experienced and done** (cited by Légrádiné, 2006). Consequently the more of our organs of sense take part in acquiring knowledge, the more efficient learning and training will be. If our activity is part of the knowledge acquisition process, the level of expertise can be higher. Thus training, as a primary tool of skill development is one of the most effective learning methods. Training makes it possible to model processes, behaviours happening in everyday situations under circumstances free from risks.

Experiential learning is the main characteristic of the training method. The flow chart of the four stages of experiential learning was created by *David Kolb*. This serves as a model to develop skills, change behaviours and habits on trainings even today. The process consists of **four stages**, the first of which is the concrete experience and acting. This is followed by observation and reflecting, abstract conceptualization. The last phase is applying what has been learnt. Experiential learning is achieved by somebody if they realize in what situations they can make use of the learnt behaviours, acts (Légrádiné, 2006, p. 62).
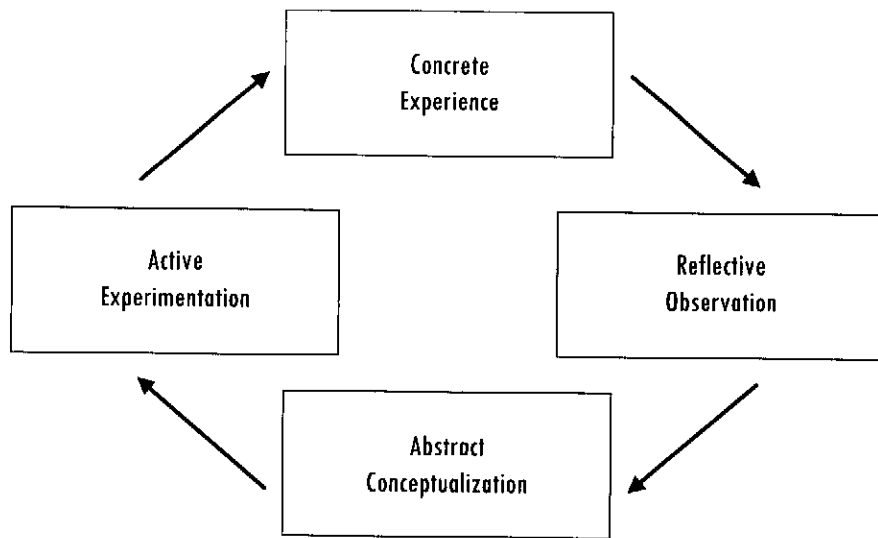
Figure 1 The model of experiential learning
Source: Kolb, 1984

In the **concrete experiential phase** (acting) the individual performs practices based on joint work in small groups. During going through the given situations and processing the information individually they acquire knowledge which is a kind of more permanent and deeper knowledge. The experiences that the participants go through will last longer and are more useful than the ready-made ones.

In the **reflective observation stage** *(evaluation)* the experiences acquired during the practices are processed. In the course of reflection the subject of the learning process draws the adequate conclusions from the experiences and he or she sees how these experiences can be adapted into the everyday life and workplace environment. In this phase the participants can talk about their experiences and listen to the feedback and observations of the others. The practices used on trainings reflect real situations, thus the experiences gained during plays in principle can be utilized in our everyday situations and workplace environment as well.

In the course of **generalization, abstract conceptualization** (searching for reasons) the participants have an opportunity to apply the knowledge, skills which are attained in the training situation, and which later on they can use in a real situation too. At this stage the trainer has an essential role, since it is he/she who has to lead the conversations and support the participants so that everybody draw the relevant conclusions instead of giving a hint to the participant what conclusions they should draw.

The experiences acquired during **active experimentation/re-experience** (planning) can be utilized in a later phase of the training. Besides, one can try out the learnt skills

outside the training when they get back in their everyday life. In this phase the person tests his or her newly attained or developed skill, makes certain that it works in practice and improves it if necessary.

Trainings basically develop through experiential learning, during which the participants take part in different situation practices simulating the interpersonal situations of their jobs and they go through experiences which move their whole personality and then they process these with the guidance of an expert turning them into experiences. The method provides deep and durable knowledge which can be easily built into behaviour, the participants receive a greater interpersonal efficiency through a deeper self-knowledge (Jakab, 2001, p. 109).

**Self-knowledge**, that is acquiring knowledge about our personality is another important element related to trainings. Two thousand years ago people were also curious about their future when asking for advice from the Delphic oracle, who replied the following: "Know thyself and thou shalt know the universe and god!" The basis of acquiring self-knowledge is feedback and the receiving and understanding of it, which is the method of self-help training groups in the first place. The well-known **Johari window model** symbolizes its functioning well. The creators of the method were two psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham. The Johari window is actually a two-dimensional diagram, the first dimension of which represents the individual and others, while the second one is made up of the knowledge of individuals (known or not known).
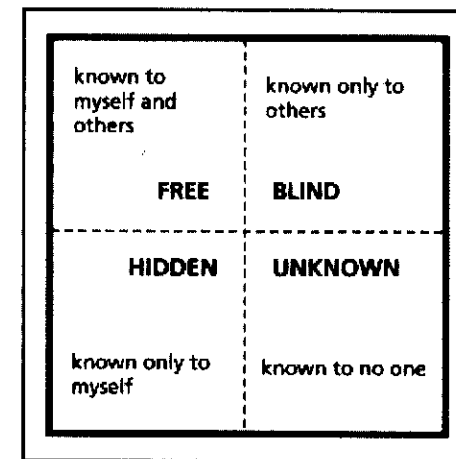


Figure 2 Johari window
Source: Luft, 1969

The Johari window shows that our personality can be divided into four quadrants:
1. **Free/Open** – traits, behaviours that others are aware of.
2. **Hidden** – emotions, behaviours, traits that are hidden from others on purpose
3. **Blind Spot** – it represents behaviours, character traits, acts that we are not aware of

4.  **Unknown** – it can be equivalent with subconscious and the information is put here that neither us nor others are aware of.

In the training group, the process of self-knowledge consists of the shifting of the boundaries of these territories, that is the open area increases and at the same time the hidden area and blind spot decrease (Rudas, 2007, p. 28-30).

The aim of the training is to **develop** some kind of **competence** besides experiential knowledge acquisition. Competence is a word of Latin origin meaning aptitude, skillfulness. As Zsuzsanna Vajda defines: *"competence is basically an intellectual attribute, but motivational elements, skills and other emotional factors also play an important role in it."* (Vajda, 2002, p. 301) In the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of Europe eight key competences are defined (European Parliament, 2006):

1.  **communication in the mother tongue,**
2.  **communication in foreign languages,**
3.  **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology,**
4.  **digital competence,**
5.  **learning to learn,**
6.  **social and civic competences,**
7.  **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship,**
8.  **cultural awareness and expression.**

All of these can be developed by training methods, but they are more common in case of developing **communication skills and learning to learn competences.**